

The Longing for Freedom and the Reality of Bonding in the Plays of Tagore

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The life of a play is its conflict which is abundantly present in the drama of Tagore. It exists primarily in the desire for freedom and the reality of bonding, for example, in the difference between *Achalayatan* and *Muktodhra*. In both plays the bonding exists along with a strong yearning for release. In the end the longing for freedom wins over the bonding. The plays of Tagore do not end in separation but in bonding; although suffering, pain, death, suicide and many other painful events are plentiful in his dramatic works. Tagore understood and also recognized the anguish of life but refused to accept the human condition as tragic.

Humans create binding, at times for themselves, but mostly for others. This is something inimical; but it becomes inevitable because of self-interest. Tagore is always in favour of freedom and against bonding. In his plays humans are at work for liberty, they get restive and impatient; but bonding is after all a reality difficult to break out of. However, one has to sever ties and get out of them, and the nature of bonding becomes clear through the process of getting out. A bird looks for freedom, but this liberty is related to its cage. "For truly depicting the pain of a bird the adversity and rigidity of a cage has to be reflected upon." These words are from Tagore written with reference to *Achalayatan*.

There is no dearth of plays written by Tagore; in fact, the number of his plays is next to that of his poems. However, his plays are less known and not as much popular as his poems and fiction. There are reasons behind this: although he wrote his plays about human life and the crisis of humanity, his drama contains theory and a philosophical look at life for which he uses symbols and metaphors, and the meaning is not simplistic; subtlety has made easy equations difficult. In addition, songs have been used in most of the plays. Of course music brings a poetic touch but slackens the intensity of the conflict within the plays. The fight is obviously not aimed at letting out blood; there is an absence of the horrific, and in that battle-field it cannot be said that the tune and rhythm of songs are out of place.

Among the plays of Tagore the most known, discussed and significant is *Raktokorobi* (1926) (The Red Oleanders). The aesthetic beauty of this play is extraordinary; its inherent philosophical relevance is not less either. The primary conflict in *Raktokorobi* can be marked by many labels and so have they been

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done. On the one hand, there is an all-devouring monstrous lust of humans, and on the other nature's normal and ongoing life. It would not be illogical to explain this clash as a disagreement between humanity and machine. Within this dialectic dwells a timelessness which was true of previous ages as well. However this has become acute in the present time. Tagore has himself said, "There is a severe tension between agrarian and attraction-oriented civilizations about which I often discuss with my friends. The 'Kalijug' (the contemporary era) has pulled out people from agriculture-related work to that of accumulation resulting in the destruction of farmlands. Also, the thirst, hunger, hatred, odium and delusion of exploitative civilizations are akin to a well-educated devil. That the poet has acquired this saying of mine in his bag of metaphors can be understood if comprehended fully."

Tagore has not named the highly educated monster whose exploitative character he refers to. Had he done so the matter would have turned lighter. Perhaps the naming would not have been in keeping with the practice of the poet. However, it cannot be illogical for us if we identify this timeless malady as the capitalistic mode of exploitation in the present context. In fact, it would help us to better understand the issue. *Raktokorobi* was written after the end of the first world war which was fought between the capitalistic powers of the world to establish domination. The war did not really end there, after a decade of the writing of the play the capitalists got engaged in yet another battle which Tagore had seen but he did not have to tolerate the merciless images of that destruction. He left for ever before it happened.

The play was first known as 'Jakkhapuri' which he later called 'Nandini', and finally it was named *Raktokorobi*. Tagore has written, "the entire episode of *Raktokorobi* is the picture of a woman: Nandini. She appears out of the repression all around as a fountain gushes out in smiles and tears from the oppression of contraction." He has also written, "The poet has insinuated in the play that Nandini does not belong to the earth that is excavated for hidden treasure; she belongs to the surface where life, beauty and love are at play, she exists in this simple happiness and loveliness." Nandini and *Raktokorobi* are synonymous, they are normal and lively.

In this hellish condition people have lost their normality and are losing it further. Humans are uprooted here, they are alienated and mechanical. They have lost their self-identity; the gold-miners are not known by their names, they have been reduced to numbers. The poor professor has not yet turned into a contraption, he is convincing the novice scholar of scriptures, "Our Nandini has grabbed the fulfillment and happiness of the world for herself. All these leaders, diggers, pundits like me, the undertakers have come together, but she is so different. Shouting and screaming fill the market place where she goes on playing the musical instrument." This city is totally patriarchal which exists in capitalism.

Here someone tries to nab her while others want to chase her away. But in her own characteristic way Nandini wants to destroy the condition, not with guns but with the force of her life. She has told the King, "My fight against you is with all my strength."

The King is himself a prisoner within the system he has built. He is lonely, parched, emptied and tired. He lives inside a net built of iron. The cohorts in attendance work for him and also protect him making sure that the King cannot come out of the bondage. In this existence there is absence of alliance but anger, mistrust, cruelty and conspiracy are present in plenty. Nature survives full of life outside the city where farming goes on, and from where comes the call: "'Pousha' has beckoned you, come over, come, come, come." The time of the happening is the Bengali month of 'Pausha', the month of harvest. The King is lustful; his miners have dug out loads of gold, but the human inside him has not yet turned into stone for which he gets restless to meet Nandini. Her friendship with Ranjan makes the king jealous, it shakes him up. Ranjan is also a rebel, he does not care about the mechanical regulations of the kingdom; he sings songs, puts on beautiful dresses. Ranjan will never become a miner. There is also the nutty Bishu pagla (mad) who also likes to sing songs and does not abide by the rules of the kingdom.

Ranjan has been taken to the King's palace as a prisoner. He too has been murdered along with other rebels. The King did not recognize Ranjan but definitely knew him as a revolutionary. Bishu was also taken to prison which was torn down by his workers and he was freed. On the other hand, the King himself came out hearing the call of Nandini shedding his false stance. The chief guard rushes to the place with his soldiers to capture the King. By then the King has gone beyond their reach following the footsteps of Nandini. Nandini has emerged victorious; it is the triumph of life. The song of 'Pausha' heard earlier can also be heard in the end: machine is defeated by humans.

The real enemy is of course capitalism which has taken the shape of a monster capitalizing on material wealth and covetousness and wanting to snatch away the essence of humanity from human beings. The conflict between humans and machine is based on the influence of capital over labour although Tagore does not portray the event in this manner. The truth in his plays is the abnormal human desire for wealth. This lust has actually transformed into capitalism. The machine has no fault of its own; it has become the slave of capitalism. Not only the machine but science, its inventor, is also serving the purpose of capitalism: the King merely works under this system. Nandini, Ranjan and Bishu are in rebellion against the system. A section of the artisans have joined in support of Bishu, they have set fire to the prison and released him. Even Fagulal, who has by now become one of the miners, has also stood up; it is learnt that his teammates would take part in the demolition. All these would not have happened

if Nandini were alone. The triumph of Nandini is therefore the victory of the opponents of capitalism; and this feat is the inherent meaning of *Raktokarabi*. By forgetting this, we cannot comprehend the true meaning; the fights between the destructive anti-human activities of capitalism and the human desire for freedom. The King also develops the same yearning.

The King's revolt and that of the others would herald a momentary sense of freedom is what we can of course expect; but we cannot believe in the fact that the capitalistic system would wind up. Only through the social ownership of science, machine and capital, a new system can be ushered in, in effect, a new civilization. Whether this would happen or not is not for Tagore to say, and being a child of his time and situation and perspective he could not have taken up the responsibility of doing so. Remaining within all rules of aesthetics, what Tagore has done in *Raktokorobi* is to bring before us the inevitable rebellion against capitalism, for it is not any essential truth, and the result of the revolt would be a victory for humanity.

There is politics in *Raktokorobi*, and it is the politics of capitalism. The kingdom of the Cancer-King is independent; it is not a colony of any other state. In another play *Muktodhara* written in 1922 a colonial dimension of politics can be found. The existence of Uttarkoot is above that of Shibtorai; Uttarkoot exercises its authority over Shibtorai in quite a colonial manner. Abhijit, the prince of Uttarkoot, was appointed as the ruler of Shibtorai; the people of Shibtorai pay tithe to the King of Uttarkoot. The real cause of Uttarkoot's influence on Shibtorai is because the river's flow has been stopped by constructing a dam. The intention behind controlling the course of the river is to repress the dissatisfaction of the subjects of Shibtorai against colonial rule. The unwillingness of the subjects to pay tithe has taken a particular form. The people of Shibtorai have claimed that they are unable to pay because of a famine but King Ranajit sets aside the excuse claiming that a famine cannot stop payment to the King. Bibhuti is a cunning and cruel man who lives in Uttarkoot; he was born to an ironsmith's family, but due to his own 'capability' he has turned into a high statured mechanic, and the credit of stopping the flow of the river in Shibtorai goes to him. This has taken time; many people had to be put into compulsory labour some of whom have never come back. The political problem is evident in the conversation between the King and his ministers. The King tells his ministers that the subjects of Shibtorai could not be forced in any manner, the way out is to control the water of *Muktodhara* (free flow) and make them agree. The politics of controlling the natural flow of water that characterizes contemporary international politics of establishing authority over others, and the apprehension of a war breaking out, because of water as had been the case with oil earlier, was understood by Tagore way back in 1922. Apart from his many other talents, Tagore was also adept in foreseeing events.

The King accuses a minister, "You have told many times it is easy to keep those who are below under pressure by sitting on top, and politics is to keep foreign subjects under pressure. Haven't you said it?" The minister confesses that he had given this political advice of putting the pressure on, but it was meant for that time; conditions have now changed, the subjects of Shibtarai have now risen in anger for which the old policy will no longer be useful. Bishwajit is the King of neighbouring Mohongarh, his suggestion is to allow the flow of Muktdhara by removing the dam. He tells Ranajit, "Why would you stop the flow of water poured by gods and goddesses for all those who are thirsty in this world?" The people of Shibtarai, however, can never believe that humans can stop the water given to them by the gods, although Bibbhuti has exactly done this; he says with pride, "the gods have simply given them water but have given me the strength to control it." He has got this power with the King's help to turn science into a slave as did the ruling class of *Raktokorobi*. The people of Uttarkoot have also been indoctrinated by the nationalistic politics to establish hegemony on Shibtorai. Even school students know the drinking water of Shibtorai has been snatched away, and the reason for this is to suppress them. But why do they have to be repressed? The answers are also written in text books. The reasons are: people of Shibtorai are bad, their religion is also not good, and their noses are not as aquiline as those of the people of Uttorkoot.

There are also people like Dhononjoy Bairagi who live in Uttorkoot. He does not abide by this political system. He sings songs and speaks against the establishment. Dhononjoy lets the King know about his opinion on taxing the subjects, "The food I have in excess is yours, and the food that satisfies hunger doesn't belong to you." He helps the people of Shibtarai to get agitated, but of course he has no soldiers or organizations. Dhananjoy has told his companions, "How much more painful can it be than to walk on one leg? If the kingdom belongs only to the King, and not to the subjects, you may be surprised to see the joy of the crippled kingdom by watching these gods breaking into tears. We must claim the kingdom for the sake of the gods." Dhononjoy, like Nandini and Ranjan, is not only a rebel, he is almost a revolutionary. But as already said, he has no force of his own. The people of Shibtorai are lucky because they have Abhijit on their side who is the Prince of Uttorkoot. Abhijit was sent to Shibtarai to rule, but he was called back when he began to move closer to the subjects. He is determined to destroy the dam because in addition to his love for the people of Shibtorai, he can hear his 'mother-tongue' in the murmur of the water of the river Muktdhara.

The King goes about his courtly duties regarding Abhijit as dangerous wanting to imprison him but is not successful. The Prince has gone close to the dam. Shonchoy, another prince, also supports the cause. News is coming out as to what has happened finally after the interference of Abhijit : How did he know about a fault in that dam. He attacked the mechanical-monster at that place, the

monster fended off his attack. Muktheadhara took the injured body on her lap like a mother and went along." The life of the prince saved the people of Shibtorai temporarily. Otherwise there would have been bloodshed. Many people would have died because thousands of people were coming to free the Prince after hearing that he was in prison. They wouldn't have gone back without freeing the Prince; for, they wanted to make him the King of Shibtorai. The play ends with the sound of flowing water: Dhananjay has broken the dam and Muktheadhara is rushing on. Dhananjay says the people of Shibtorai have found the Prince forever by destroying the dam of Muktheadhara.

Tasher Desh (Country of Cards) (1933) also ends with the breaking of a dam. This is a different barrier though; not blocking a river, but one of rules and restrictions. As the play comes to an end we hear all people of the country singing together, "Break the dam, break the dam, break the dam / Let the prisoner vanish in mind and body." At the beginning of the play we hear the prince refusing to remain captive in the golden cage in a kingdom where there is no variety, no opportunities for any adventure. When he goes hunting, it seems the tigers have been taught the creed of non-violence. He has not yet seen a single tiger trying to leap up fiercely. The Prince, along with the trader's son, sets sail on a ship in search of freedom. The ship is destroyed in a storm, and the prince and the trader's son set foot on a new land. It is a bizarre country; all its inhabitants look like cards. They have no identity of their own, no personality and no independence whatsoever. This is a country of cards really, and not of humans. They have a song that is sung as a chorus: "Lift and get down / Front and Behind / Left and Right / Don't Want Don't Want." The cards have their King, Queen and Joker; but all of them are imprisoned in many ways like the face of a colonized India under imperial rule. Everyone goes by the rules; nothing can make them flout the system. Chains are ornaments for them, and the prison, they think, is a place to get pampered in.

The arrival of the two foreigners, two normal people, the Prince and the trader's son, has created a stir in the place. They sing and dance and say, "We are the messengers of a new youth, we are restless, we are strange." Women of the land are the first to come forward and break rules. They do not want to live as cards, they want to become humans. The King can see that he is gradually getting estranged; even the Queen is no longer with him. An angry King sends the Queen to exile. Seeing the Queen not bothered by this, the King follows the Queen to get out of the kingdom of cards. The King asks the alien Prince, "Hey foreigner, can I do it too?" The King also wants to transform into a human from a card. The first stage of becoming a human is to get free.

The second edition of the play was published in 1938 when Shubhash Chandra Bose was President of the Indian National Congress; his leadership had created a new pinning in the country. The conservatives were of course not favouring

Shubhash, and among the conservatives was Mahatma Gandhi too. The message in *Tasher Desh* is the need for a new leadership, committed and uncompromising, if freedom is to be achieved. The leadership has to be new not only in age but also in thought. The craving for freedom exists among the people: the need is for new ideas and leaders is the truth indicated by *Tasher Desh*.

Dakghor (1912) is a short play of Tagore in which we can again find a powerful desire for freedom from binding. This play is linked with a crisis in Tagore's life. He was already fifty-years old but could not complete all his desired work. He was yet to become famous, and this was when he heard a call to go somewhere. At this time, for a short period, he suffered from fear of death but Tagore could get out of the predicament. The year when he wrote *Dakghor*, Tagore went to England accompanied by his son Rathindranath and daughter-in-law Protima. He took with him the translation of *Geetanjali* that brought worldwide fame for him. The child Amal in the play, however, has no such way of getting free.

Amal can hear the sound coming from a vacant street, he has become impatient to be freed, but he has no way to get out of his captivity. The child's parents are dead, and he has been adopted by Madhab Datta who has no offspring of his own. Too much care could have caused the illness of Amal who is now being treated by the village doctor who has confined the child inside the house. There was a time when Amal would wander around but now he cannot even step into the lawn. The door of his house is closed; he sits by the window looking at scenes both near and far away as he imagines so many things. He looks at the curd seller, and the children who are on their way to the field for sport. He watches Shudha the female gardener's daughter. He speaks to all of them who are sensitive and understand his pain. Even the guard appreciates Amal's longing to go out into the open. Only the village head and the doctor cannot be moved. Madhab Datta knows that Amal is suffering but also understands that it is the child who would lose in the end if he defies the restriction of the village doctor. There is a blind and lame beggar who sits by Amal's window. He has a helper who pushes him around. Amal says he would take over the job of the helper when he gets well.

However, the period of sitting by the window also comes to an end. Madhab Datta thinks Amal's disease has aggravated because of looking out of the window day after day. Amal says, "I know nothing about my ailment but I feel better when I sit there." Madhab Datta reacts: "Sitting there you have made friends with everyone young and old of the city—as if there is a huge fair going on next to my window—but can the body resist all that." Amal has only one person who is really his own, the grandfather in the guise of a beggar. In the mean time Amal has seen the setting up of a new post office. He informs the

grandfather, "At first when I was made to sit inside the home I used to feel that the day would never end, after seeing our King's post office I feel better every day." He wishes to receive a letter from the King, and also he is so keen on becoming a post man. Finally the King's envoy arrives one night. He enters by breaking open the closed door. The King's doctor also arrives and asks to open all doors and windows. Amal feels drowsy and falls asleep. It may be assumed that Amal has died, but it would not be wrong to infer that he is in sleep. Whether in sleep or in death there is no doubt that Amal has been released from the extraordinary care of ordinary people.

Achalayatan (1912) and *Dakghar* were written in the same year. In both plays human beings have been entrapped by enemies of the people. The happenings of *Dakghar* centre around a child, and an entire human settlement is seen stuck in *Achalayatan*. Nothing moves in the land of stasis. Walls made of stone, shut doors, piles of folk-lore, the hum of prayers, and boundaries characterize this place. The environment is very dark as it was during the middle ages in Europe. Learning goes on here, but this knowledge is no better than a cobweb. Panchak is an inhabitant of this land of stillness, but he has heard a call coming from outside, an attraction that he cannot think of ignoring. One of the students asks Panchak, "Tell me if the amount of sand touches the nails of the 'Haret' bird, and if that amount...." Panchak answers, "I have not seen this bird in any of my lives." The students' question is not at all unusual given the condition of their existence. It is heard that in mediaeval Europe there would be debates on how many thousand satans could dance on the thinnest point of a needle. A young boy called Shubhadra opens a window to the north merely by mistake from where the hills outside and the grazing cows down on the valley could be seen. A window not opened for three hundred and forty-five years is unbolted by Shubhadra which makes him feel insecure and he begins to cry.

Immobility is not only an external happening, it is internal as well; there is doubt within the self too. We have seen the exuberance of Panchak. The Head Priest also says that he had hoped for a reward at the end of the perseverance, but now he feels it simply revolves around itself while the Guru goes on waiting on the other side. He would come before the monsoon, and would perhaps embarrass the people of the land of immobility by finding out the insufficiency of their knowledge.

When the Guru finally arrives, he puts to shame all conservative members of this land of immobility which was for a different reason though. He does not follow the rules of the land and its ancient mores, and instead, wants to subvert them. Those who help him in doing so are people of work: ones that are looking for work, those who know nothing but work, and become extremely fidgety in the absence of work. He is known to them as the Grandfather; he is their leader and he plays around with them. As he goes on playing, he thinks, "I am playing with

the fountain and the sea." One of the team members seems to be saying that if Grandfather enters the land of immobility, the stones there would also start dancing, a flute would start playing from inside the books. Panchak has come out; his older brother Mahapanchak becomes the leader of the chieftains who protect the land and sends Panchak to exile. He feels that he has actually survived. His realization is: "The bird born in a cage is most afraid of the sky." Panchak has lost the sense of fear and trepidation. Other than the 'Shonpangshus', there is also the 'Garvak' community comprising ordinary people who have faith in devotion. They know the Grandfather as 'Goshai' (Priest). They are willing to fight against those who would resist the breaking down of *Achalayatan*. The Grandfather's declaration about this land of immobility: "Our King has ordered—when their sin will take on the shape of a wall and rise up to cover the light of the sky, the wall has to be then razed to the ground." A highway will be built on which the King's victory chariot will travel.

News spreads out soon that followers of the Grandfather, the Shonpangshus, have drilled a hole on the wall of *Achalayatan*. This news is simply incredible to Mahapanchak who assures his supporters by saying that stones can never float on water. "Have you gone crazy that these slaves can break the wall." He still waits for the Guru who he thinks will come and put in place everything. He will come through the door but no sign of that entrance can be seen, it has been broken to smithereens. Even then, Mahapanchak would not accept defeat; he believes that inside there is a door built of iron.

The King who rules the land of immobility is Manthar Gupta. He has heard the news of the wall surrounding his kingdom being broken down by Grandfather and his followers. Later when he comes to know that the window to the north has been opened, he becomes extremely upset. The children are however very happy, they are having a good time as if they are in the midst of a sudden holiday. Light seems to be coming in from all directions, everything looks empty; the sky looks like breaking into the house. Mohapanchak is the only one who is not happy, he can see Grandfather appearing dressed as a warrior; behind him are the Shonpangshuks, in arms and ready, who he had always looked at as worthless creatures of the lowest status in society. The unbeatable Mohapanchak withdraws into his own self when everything outside gets dispossessed; shutting off all his senses he remains cocooned. The Grandfather's men are engaged in the fight; dressed like a hero Grandfather looks attractive. By this time the Darbahaks (gatemens) have also arrived for they have heard of their need in the fight which was however not necessary because the lifeless siege of the land of immobility had ended before their arrival. The sky was clouded and the sounds of thunder were being heard after which it started raining for which the parched earth was eagerly waiting. Grandfather says, "No worry, Chief Priest, the downpour of happiness has arrived...if you come out, you can see the inundation all around." The tearing down of the land of immobility is not for the sake of

destruction but is actually for creation. The Sonpangshus have become restless, they want work. The Grandfather will now involve them in work for building the free land into a vast territory where everyone can live without any restrictions. Panchakdada will provide leadership to this effort. The play begins with a song by Panchak and it ends with his commitment to be engaged in the reconstruction.

A lack of interest for the present world was one important characteristic of medieval Europe, the kind of happening we have seen in *Achalayatan*. Yet another feature of that age was a strong conflict between Church and Palace. We can see the same clash in one of Tagore's earlier plays, 'Bisharjan' (1890). The King of the kingdom of Tripura Gobindamanikya wants to avoid any conflict with the Royal Priest Raghupati. He respects the Royal Temple but the Priest Raghupati desires to transcend his power beyond the domain of the Kingdom and wants not to remain accountable to it. Raghupati is no less powerful; the people of the kingdom cling to religion during disasters and in times of danger; and going under the shelter of religion means coming to the goddess and Raghupati is present there as both protector and caretaker of mother Kali. From this perspective Raghupati's clout is stronger than that of the King. The Queen herself is eager to seek his favour for she has no children and has decided to sacrifice one hundred buffaloes and three hundred goats at the altar of the goddess. This results in the conflict between the King and the Royal priest. One of the three hundred goats procured for the sacrifice belongs to the orphan beggar girl Aparna who has raised the goat with the love of a mother. King Gobindamanikya was on his way to the temple where, at the entrance, he comes across Aparna who pleads that her goat be saved. The King is touched and he orders that henceforth no animal sacrifice will be allowed in the Kingdom of Tripura. This of course is a reason to anger Raghupati, and he feels threatened of his power being curtailed. The Queen is also annoyed thinking that her chances of becoming a mother are fading away. The King however is unmoved.

Joy Singha is the adopted prince of the Royal Priest Raghupati devoted to taking care of the Royal Temple. On top of this his responsibility is also to procure animals for the sacrifice. Aparana calls him and asks him to come out of the temple. Joysingha gets unnerved. Blinded by anger, Raghupati allures the King's brother Nakshatra Ray to murder the King and quench the blood thirst of mother Kali. Nakshatra Roy is not brave enough for which Joy Singha is ordered to collect the royal blood. Aparna once again asks Joy Singha to leave the temple. "You come out Joy Singha, let us both go away from this temple." Joy Singha is now in a dilemma. He addresses the goddess, "What new music is this / that can be heard hey beauty of the mountain... / where is the haven that lies outside this temple?" Finally he decides to offer his blood, which is also of royal lineage, instead of Govindamanikya's, to satisfy the blood lust of the goddess. When he does so, Aparna faints seeing the dead body of Joy Singha who wins in the end. After losing Joy Singha, Raghupati can see his own mother in Aparna; he throws

away the statue of Kali in the river Gomti. Aparna addresses him as father and requests him to come out of the temple which Raghupati does. In the mean time, Govinda Manikkya has also lost his kingdom. He has sent his brother to an eight-year exile for conspiracy; he had also given the same punishment to Roghupati for which he had ordered Joy Singha to collect royal blood. The exiled Nakshatra Roy gets in the way of Mughal soldiers who allure him to send a letter of exile to the King. The war was inevitable but Govindamanikkya is against bloodshed for which he prefers self-exile and is joined by Queen Gunoboti.

The beggar Aparna is the winner; she has no wealth except for love and affection. Raghupati is not religious but he trades on religion; he is addicted to power. He drinks alcohol for excitement. He has been able to convince the general people of the kingdom that if there is any hindrance to worshipping the goddess, the Hindu kingdom will be destroyed and instead the Muslims will become rulers. Raghupati's defeat is not in the hands of Govindamanikkya who had sent him on exile for eight-years where he was in the company of Nakshatra Roy and had easily got involved in the conspiracy to capture the kingdom. The Chief Priest is actually defeated by the beggar Aparna who used to be the subject of his scorn but who is now like a mother to him. Joy Singha's suicide indicates as to why Raghupati got involved in a ruthless conspiracy because of his lust for power.

Govinda Manikkya was actually a sage inside; admitting this fact it can be asked as to from where he got the strength to take a stand against the thousand-year old tradition of animal sacrifice by proscribing it. For doing this he had to overcome his wife's request, conspiracy of the priests and dissatisfaction of his subjects. He gets this strength from Aparna. The King says, "In the shape of a lass / the mother has told me / she can't stand the blood of animals?" Joy Singha could have left the temple and joined Aparna on the road like the King in *Raktokorobi* who follows Nandini, but the young Joy Singha lacked sufficient inner strength to do that. In the ultimate analysis, goddess Kali of the temple has also lost to Aparna. The goddess is a heartless icon whereas Aparna is a full-blown human. Animal sacrifice has been banned because of Aparna, and the unforgiving statue has been thrown into the river.

It seems Aparna is the predecessor of Nandini in *Raktokorobi*. She is more successful if compared with Nandini who has freed an emperor and subverted the ascendancy of the priesthood. On the other hand Aparna has gained freedom for an entire kingdom. The difference of their success is not because of any disproportion in their moral characters; the two are really faced with different kinds of enemy. Nandini has to fight against capitalism which is well organized and firmly established. On the other hand Aparna's struggle is against the priesthood which was relatively weak. Both of them, however, find people on their sides; Aparna receives support from the King and Joy Singha while Ranjan, Bishu, and later Fagulal help Nandini.

The Emperors that we can see in the plays of Tagore are not similar. King Ranjit in *Muktodhara* is involved with colonialism in his rule while the King of *Tasher Desh* is shackled by the restrictions laid down by rules and regulations of his own country. The emperor of *Achalayatan* is not that powerful; Govindamanikya's nature is more like an ideal King. In *Dakghar*, the King remains absent while the Emperor of *Raktokorobi* is a trusted representative of capitalism. The King in *Rother Roshi* is very helpless but the King of the play named *Raja* (The King) (1910) creates problems for interpretation.

In this play the King lives in a dark house; he meets Queen Sudarshana in darkness too. The Queen tries in many ways to look at the King's face. She resorts to requests, anger, pamper; but the King refuses to come out of the darkness and meet her in day light. Surangama is the King's female slave who discovers the King by taking care of him. The King is friendly with the Grandfather who also knows the King. It is the Queen who does not know the King for she wants him all by herself and in her own way. Sudarshana is impatient and she is narcissistic about her beauty. She wants to see the King although she has no desire to understand him. The King knows the frisky Sudarshana cannot appreciate his exquisiteness. Emperors from different kingdoms have already arrived, and they want to see Sudarshana. Kanchiraj in the meantime has set fire to the Queen's palace to force her out, but she remains inside. The king is able to douse the fire, and after repeated requests from the Queen he goes and meets her. The King knew that she would only be glad with her beauty and not the lack of it: she would recognize the brutality of the King and fail to understand his love. The good looks of the King that the Queen longs for are so unexpected and dark that she gets extremely frustrated and wants to go far away. Instead of asking her to stay the King says, "You can go freely like the fast moving clouds in a storm."

The Queen leaves and puts up with her father Kannyakujjoraja. He is weak and absolutely patriarchal. He believes that Sudarshana will create a disaster because of leaving behind her position. The danger soon follows; seven Kings from the surrounding area become active and come to attack the house of Sudarshana's father. They insult the helpless Kannyakujjoraj and force Sudorshona to appear in the meeting. The King can however see everything going on; he has sent Grandfather with the responsibility of Commander-in-Chief to chase away the intruding Kings. Grandfather enters dressed as a soldier but no battle breaks out, for the noblemen are not prepared to fight for any uncertain reward. They never looked forward to a battle; rather they keep on looking at each other. Only one amongst them fights for a while before getting injured and is forced to surrender.

The King's staying away from the scene and his attraction or the lack of it can call for theoretical analysis which has been posited anyway. The King's trend of remaining physically absent and the administrative rules in the kingdom signify

state politics. A number of events signal the state policies of the Kingdom: first of all, the song of the citizens, which is more like a national anthem, through which they declare: "We are all Kings / In this Kingdom of our King/ Otherwise in what terms shall we meet with the King." They go on saying more, " We don't oppose the slave King's slavery of terror:" and " The King gives respect to everyone / He gets the respect in return / No one has shown less respect to us for the sake of any falsehood." It can be understood that there is no discrimination in the Kingdom, and there exists equality and independence. There is no fright; the King is no one's slave neither does he want to make a slave out of any one, equal respect exists for everyone. If the King becomes visible in this kind of an illusory world, there can be fear of danger because in this situation there could be allegations of nepotism and favour, and counter-allegations of being unhelpful to others. Some will expect reward while others have to be punished. There will be requests and pleas along with sycophancy. The King therefore does not like to go out on the street, although he exists everywhere like the sun does. This is also expressed in the song of the citizens, 'We will go along as we wish / And later meet in his path.'

It is worth noticing the significance of the path. In this kingdom there is no indiscipline about travelling, people move around according to their wish, but all roads belong to the state; not even one is owned by any individual. A few foreigners have come to take part in the spring festival; they are searching for the road. The guard says, "Here all streets are streets, whichever you take will lead you to your destination. Just go ahead." A surprised foreigner informs, "It is enough to say that there are no roads in our country—only winding lanes like a labyrinth. Our King says it is better not to have open roads; the subjects will come out if they find any road. In this country, it is the other way round, no one is stopped while leaving, there is no restriction in coming—even then we have seen so many people—our Kingdom would have been deserted given this kind of freedom." This Kingdom is not one of immobility, everything is open and transparent here; and because of this freedom no one leaves the Kingdom. The grandfather's statement also points out the matter; he tells the citizens, "The King is absent but you are there. Everything that he possesses is for you." In this context the so-called rule of law is not very important.

The King's song aimed at Sudarshana is also applicable in the case of the citizens: "I won't enchant you with beauty, but will do so in love." The King is no fluffy doll though; he has to rule over the kingdom, and has to be ruthless in implementing the law; he has to make them afraid too. Only one person of this Kingdom has commented, "In front of the King in every country the souls of all citizens tremble in fear." The King does not want people to be afraid of him, to tremble in front of him and start passing negative comments that he is terrible and ugly—the King does not want this to happen. That the King is beautiful and unique can only be understood through practice that Sudarashana lacked for

which the King is not in favour of appearing before her. In fact at one time the King was monstrous even to Surangoma. Surangoma has explained the reasons to Queen Sudarashana. Surangoma's father was addicted to alcohol and gambling, and a horde of young men would give him company. The King had punished his father by sending him to exile. Surangoma says, "I am very angry; I had the feeling that it would be great had someone murdered the King." She was kept away from her father. In Surangoma's own words: "I was on the path of getting spoilt, my father intentionally made me stand on that path. I had no mother. For Surangoma, "It was very painful, as if needles were stuck on to me; I was burnt in fire, because I was on the way of getting spoilt. When that path was no longer ahead of me I felt that I had no protection. Like a wild animal in a cage I used to roar around and felt like tearing apart everyone. Wow, how ruthless! What unwavering cruelty!" Later on: "One day all my acts of rebellion ended when I saw the most terrible becoming the most beautiful."

Sudarashana was not supposed to have these eyes for seeing neither did she has those. The Emperor wishes to express himself gradually to the Queen. Sudarashana could not accept the delay, therefore she had to accept the shame of visiting the King unprepared. After ending all kinds of suffering and apprehension the King finally meets the Queen, not in the palace but on the street. Sudarashana reports, "today I am really meeting the real King on this real street--who knew about this happy news."

It is important to note the political significance of this play. The more indirect the ruler of a country is, in this case the King, the more fortunate is the country. The King will be there; he will oversee everything, but will not come out into the open unless required. In the ideal state the King's interference will be restricted; in this state all citizens are equal, and the system is democratic. Everyone is respected, and they would feel that the kingdom belongs to them, they are the owners. The King will be steadfast for which he would be misconstrued as being cruel; there would even be misunderstandings as to the King is dreadful, but in reality he is beautiful—unique. There will be a binding, but it will be required for no other reason than release.

Rother Roshi (1932) is a short play. However in terms of aesthetic excellence and philosophical considerations the play comes very close to *Raktokorobi*. There is no dearth of happenings in *Rother Roshi*, and its dialogues are lively and scintillating. Although the scope of creating individual characters is narrow, class characters within individuals are brilliant. There is plenty of humour in *Rother Roshi*, elements of farce also exist, but the issue is very important. We have seen the high-handedness of capitalism in *Raktokorobi* where people are uprooted, alienated, mechanical and on the verge of giving up their sense of humanity. In *Rother Roshi*, capitalism's ruthlessness has gone deeper. Here capitalism has stopped the progress of history. The play has a different name too

which is 'Kaler Jatra' (Journey of Time). The vehicle belongs to time, in other words history. Capitalism has rendered it static. The vehicle has to go on; human civilization cannot come to a stop at the present time, it has to go onwards. This forward movement has been made impossible by those who have been passengers of the vehicle all along. The King, the Priest, the soldier, the rich, all were powerful at one time; but now they have lost their might; the vehicle does not respond to their pull at all. A new power is needed today; it comes finally when the sudras (people belonging to the lowest cast) arrive. When they pull the rope attached to the vehicle, it comes alive and moves ahead in great speed. Defying the traditional and established route it moves along a new path. The pull of the sudras making the vehicle move signifies not only that without the destruction of the caste system there can be no freedom for civilization. It has a deeper meaning as well—Tagore uses the metaphor of the sudras to point out the working class. They till the land and provide food, they spin cloth out of thread and produce cloth which humans wear, and they are the ones who have also pulled the vehicle. However, all these days the sudras were placed at the lowest tier, they were destined to be crushed under the wheels of the vehicle. Now a new age has emerged, they will not be squashed in this age, they will from now on pull ahead the vehicle. The vehicle will go on to raid the depot of the merchant, from where cries to save their soles will be heard, the merchant will seek help from the soldier. The soldier's arms depot will not be safe. The vehicle is free, roaring ahead, it does not care for the high or the low; as if it wants to make everyone equal. The content of the play is something like this.

In other words the eyes moved from the vehicle to the rope. Here the rope is stronger than the vehicle; the vehicle does not move by itself; it has to be pulled for which the rope is required. The reality is that the rope has become weak, its fibres have now become loose, for which even when pulled the rope cannot move as it used to do earlier for which the rope lies motionless. *Rother Roshi* has been dedicated to Sharat Kumar Chattapadhya on his 67th birthday. In the letter of dedication Tagore has made transparent the allegorical use of the rope. "The relationship between humans that extend from country to country and from age to age is the attachment in the form of the rope that pulls the vehicle." It means, the play contains politics and economics and, of course, rules of society. In the ultimate analysis human relationship is the same as social ties. Tagore goes on to write, "in this bond many ligaments have fallen apart to make human relationship untrue and unequal for which the vehicle does not move. Those who have been hurt because of the falsehood of this relationship, have deprived them of the greatest rights of humanity, destiny has today beckoned them as passengers of the vehicle; when their insult is wiped out the vehicle will move forward after removing the inequality of their relationship." These deprived people are the workers who have been invited by history to ride the vehicle which from now on moves only with their pull. Tagore tells Sharatchandra, "Let the great mechanism

that removes barriers to the 'Rathajatra' (parade of the vehicle) be successful in front of your prolific writing; I wish you a long life along with my blessings."

The play has an image of affliction which is especially reflected in the words of the Sannyasi (the saint). The women are very concerned seeing that the vehicle does not move; but they cannot grasp the enormity and depth of the happening as much as the Sannyasi can do. He informs that because the progress of history has stopped, "Wars will be fought, infernos will be let off, famines will break out / The earth will be infertile, water will dry out." He can see, "Today the rich have wealth / Which has no value / Starvation has nested in fields filled with crops. The Sannyasi can see and understand the different signs of devastation. Booming sounds echo from under the earth, the sky is bloodshot. He has an idea as to the reason of the disease. Keeping the women in front, he tells the citizens, "You have only borrowed / Returning nothing / Making bankrupt the wealth of the age. "His allegations directed to the soldiers are more serious: "You have made the rope frail / From wherever you have flung the arrows, they stuck on its body / Inside, it has become empty, the weight of the knot has loosened / You will go on worsening its wound / Drunk with strength, you will weaken time." The Sannyasi has diagnosed the disease but he knows no medicine for its cure. He is not a philosopher but a witness, only a sensitive one.

The King has himself put on his hands but the rope does not move. Someone has told the King that the age is one of capitalism, here "neither works religion nor works warfare, / Only gold wheels roll here." The soldiers also know that in this age the King remains in front and in the rear follows the trader which is called 'half-trader-majestic embodiment.'" Some of the soldiers however feign disappointment; they have swords, why should they obey the traders? One of the citizens warns them. "The edges of your swords decay / they are decadents because of bribery." The traders forge ahead, they want to pull the rope of the vehicle, but instead of being able to pull they cannot even hold up the rope. They have to retreat from the battlefield. The rich are ashamed; they confess having oiled the wheels but have never pulled the rope.

The King has lost; people belonging to all castes (Brahmin, Khatriya, Vaishya) are unsuccessful; what is the way out then? The solution appears on its own; news has spread out in the Sudra (labour) neighbourhood that the vehicle is not moving and they need to do something about it. No one has called them, but they have arrived willingly in groups. The soldiers crack jokes, but the minister is smart; he knows the vehicle will move with their pull. He is not afraid hearing that the working class people are arriving in groups but he does not doubt that these people will keep the vehicle going. The soldiers joke at his fear; the minister knows that he has to be afraid because a deluge cannot be stopped by building a wall of swords. He has the knowledge to realize that the working people have been today welcomed by time. To keep his reputation untainted he

knows he has to pull the rope of the vehicle together with the workers. It has to be borne in mind that *Rother Roshi* was written in 1932 before which in 1930 Rabindranath had visited the Soviet Union to see for himself how workers had transformed the society in post-revolutionary Russia. He had penned this experience in *Letters of Russia* written in 1931. Tagore understood that people belonging to the working class can take history forward, and when capitalism was on the ascendancy at that time it was only possible on their part to usher in this transformation.

The vehicle has come back to life with the pull of the workers; it is moving along an unpaved path like a wild buffalo. The rich are in despair; they are desperately looking for the soldiers to protect their wealth. The minister warns the soldier that the vehicle is also heading toward the arms repository.

The poet is seen at the end of the play. The poet understands better than the minister the reason behind the happenings and its significance. His opinion is straightforward: Those who have run the vehicle all these days had their eyes fixed on the peak. "They didn't care about the bondage that binds one human with the other / A rope used for binding moves around its tail angrily / Will crush them now. / The vehicle's rope was lying outside / It remains attached to humans in their bodies and in their lives/ Where crime has accumulated, and the bondage has weakened." The rhythm was not the one desired; one side was much higher. The priest saw it and turned aside. "The priest stood below close to the small, / From there he pulls and moves the big to one side." This does not bring equality, but balance comes about. The vehicle can now move easily because balance has been established. On the one hand the social force created by the relationship between human beings, on the other hand the vehicle's own balance; and the vehicle moves forward because of the two. The vehicle moves with the strong pull of the rope, and the vehicle is also prepared to go forward for which it speeds along vigorously.

The poet leaves behind the Sannyasi in terms of his power of seeing. An era has come to its end resulting in a conflagration. It is difficult for the priest to come to terms with this change. He asks the poet with a sense of apprehension: "Are your low-castes so intelligent? Can they go on following the rules of the rope?" The poet has the same doubt; he is afraid that these working class people could become proud one day; they could think there is no driver of the vehicle; they are the ones who are in complete control of it. "In that case the ones below and the ones above in the new age will come to an agreement." He however suggests: "From now on concentrate on the bonding / Keep the rope of the vehicle close to your heart, never throw it on the dust; / Say together today / Let the ones who were dead all these days get back to life / Those who for decade after decade stooped low stand up with their heads high."

What will then be the way to ensure the vehicle's movement in the future; in other words the progress of history? The way is to strengthen the ties between human beings, and to move on keeping the balance in place. According to the

poet this balance is not to go ahead with physical strength but with the might of rhythm. If the vehicle tilts toward any one side, it will not move and the beat will stop. It is important to keep up the rhythm to go ahead. "Those who are pulling the vehicle, will step forward in rhythms / When the foot fails to follow the beat / The small holes and ditches turn ferocious/The highway becomes difficult to travel on for the drunk."

In many ways Tagore has spoken about the infinite within the finite. The restricted yearns for the unrestricted; in his poetry the mountain has come close to the sky. At the same time, the longing for freedom, while remaining within bonding, and for which the struggle to break free from the bond is not ignored by the poet. This fight is especially found in his plays. In fiction too, the struggle between bonding and the fight to break out of it exists. However, the way it is expressed in the limited space of the play is not the case in other forms blurring away in the intensity of time.

The conflict begins because of attachment; and people have created this bond themselves. A few people have introduced it to entrap many others who have been forced to accept it because of the influence of the powerful. However there is another bond which existed before and still exists: the human relationship between people. Because of the strength of this relationship the orders of arrest have finally been overcome. On the one hand, the land of immobility is created for the interest of only a few, and on the other hand the struggle to break it is for the welfare of all. This conflict gives rise to the dramatic effect in most of Tagore's plays.

Self-interest becomes greed and in its uncivilized form creates animosity against humans. This becomes extreme in the stage of capitalism when not only the suppressed but even the suppressors are trapped in the net of their own lust. The fact that capitalism is such a big enemy of humanity and humanism was not so evident during the age of Tagore as it is at present. He could however see as to how capitalism was transforming humans into unwilling and self-defaced machines. Not only for human beings, capitalism is also a kind of monstrous enemy for nature. This two-dimensional face of enmity is present in a very lively way in *Raktokorobi*. Capitalism harms; it alienates humans from other humans. This alienation according to Tagore weakens the rope that pulls forward history giving rise to the fear of history being silenced.

For human beings there are different forms of hostility on the part of the enemy. Oppression can happen in the family as can be seen in the case of Amal in *Dakghar*. There is conflict between the monarchy and the priesthood which is evident in the play *Bishorjon*; a medieval darkness is constructed which is proven in *Achalayatan*. Autocratic exploitation can turn humans into dolls which can be seen in *Tasher Desh*. Colonial subjugation also continues as it seems to be happening in *Muktodhara*. This play is extraordinary not only for its aesthetic value but also because it forecasts today's dangerous politics of creating obstacles in the path of a river's flow. That Tagore's Golden Bengal would be

partitioned into antagonistic states of India and Pakistan was perhaps a development that a poet with his foresight and imagination could not have expected; but he could well understand that control of a river would emerge as a perilous political weapon. If he had seen East Bengal, his erstwhile work place facing a crisis being deprived of its rightful share of water, Tagore would have been hurt by thinking about the sorrow of the people while at the same time he would have been happy to see his prediction about state intervention on the flow of water coming true.

Tagore regarded the society to be more important than the state. This bias exists in his plays. State power is not helpful to the people; this fact is present in different ways in his plays. In the play *Raja*, there is a representation of state power. According to Tagore the ideal state is one which is owned collectively by the people and not by any individual. In this state everyone is a King and no one is a subject. The King will become stern if necessary but will ensure that his ruthlessness is not required for any simple reason. He will not be visible for any motive but will overlook all activities. The lesser the state interferes in human life the better for humans. This Marxist perspective has strong similarities with Tagore's ideas with regard to the state although in many other issues he takes a far distant stand from that of the Marxists.

The land of immobility is not permanent; it is destroyed by human beings. The greatest truth about Tagore is that he never lost faith in humanity; in fact he regards it as a sin to lose faith in human strength. We can see this trust in the breaking up of the land of immobility. It falls apart because of the collusion between external attack and internal reasons. The Cancer King never loses his humanity completely, he has his own human weaknesses, he speaks to Nandini, he is jealous of Nandinini's friendship with Ranjan; he becomes unsettled after murdering Ranjan—these are all there; otherwise, it would be impossible for him to leave the palace and go out into the open by avoiding the guards.

In *Achalayatan* Panchak has heard the call from outside; in *Muktodhara* Abhijit is in favour of destroying the dam and Dhananjoy sings a revolutionary song. In *Raja*, Surongoma, grandfather, and the King himself, contribute to the disillusionment of of Sudorshona. In *Bishorjon*, Gobindamanikya incorporates in him the wisdom of a Sannyasi. The girls of *Tasher Desh* look at the foreigners and get interested to become human beings. In *Rother Roshi*, the minister knows the power of the sudras and does not hesitate to join them.

It is true that Tagore believed in leaders. In his plays, however, the changes do not happen because of any singular leadership. In every sphere the presence of others can be seen. Nandini would not have succeeded if Ranjan, Bishoopagla, and Fagulal had not changed sides. In *Achalayatan*, the Shonpangshus are with grandfather; the Garvadaks are also keen to join. In *Muktodhara* the people of Shibtorai come forward in groups; there would have been a fierce fight if they were stopped. In *Raja*, the King's soldiers are in a state of readiness, they would be of help if required; this was not unknown to the foreign kings creating trouble.

In *Tasher Desh* everyone revolts one after the other; the King then goes on exile following the Queen. In *Bishorjon*, Aparna is victorious getting help from King Gobindomanikya and Joysingho. In *Rother Roshi* the vehicle moves only because of the combined participation of the sudras. Dependence on this social power is a very important issue. Without this power, change is impossible only through individual initiative; this important message is found in the plays of Tagore.

There is yet another issue which is no less important. It is not possible to bring about change in the society and state with only a change of heart. In the plays of Tagore there is no terrible bloodbath; one reason for this is the weakness of the opponent. A more important reason however is the belief of the enemy camp that those who want change could resort to violence. In *Achalayatan*, grandfather is seen in battle-dress; the grandfather of *Raja* is also clad like a general. The rebels of *Raktokorobi* destroy the prison house. When the vehicle of *Rother Roshi* begins to move a lot of arson takes place, a fire also breaks out. Tagore is not in favour of violence, but the fact that adopting non-violence against violence will never be effective is a belief that does not exist in the plays of Tagore.

The force that goes against human progress needs to be destroyed by collective resistance. However, a permanent solution cannot be achieved by the immediate fall of the enemy. Social ownership and distribution of wealth must be established to achieve this goal. It is not the responsibility of the artist to speak about this resolution directly. It cannot be said that Tagore does not give any hint of this in his plays. Bankimchandra had once stated, "We do not approve of any social revolution." Tagore has said nothing of this sort; his plays show that he is on the side of change. He knows that water cannot gush out of a fountain if dirt gets stuck in its outlets. He is against exploitation of humans by humans; however his plays do not speak about the end of class system. There will be class, but balance is required in the society. It could be dangerous if the control of society slants toward any particular class. History, of course, gives witness that a balance cannot be struck by keeping alive the class system. Tagore's plays have not gone that far to uphold this fact.

Tagore had strong faith in changing society through education. However, when education itself goes under state control a scenario is created that is evident in *Achalayatan*, *Mooktodhara*, and *Tasher Desh*. Real education has power but education must also be freed for which force has to be inevitably used and Tagore agrees with this idea.

The plays of Tagore are enjoyable and significant in many ways: their aesthetic and historical value would never diminish.

Translated from Bangla by Golam Sarwar Chowdhury