

Beauty of Ideas in Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra

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ABSTRACT

This research paper intends to explore all the elements and instances of the beauty of ideas in Chitra by Rabindranath Tagore in the light of aesthetic theory "Of the Standard of Taste" by David Hume. Tagore was an epitome of accentuating the internal potentialities of a person, and reaching beyond consciousness through corporation with beauty, which might direct one toward the exhilarating avenues of creative appreciation. Tagore did not worship external beauty as most poets do but he envisions only the beauty of ideas which he has depicted in his writings as the ideal human characteristic. Chitra is replete with the examples of the beauty of ideas. A reader should have a discerning eye and an aesthetic sense to perceive that real beauty which is beauty of ideas. Hume's article will help to awaken that internal sense in the reader. This research is a qualitative research. The contention of this research is to depict that beauty does not lie merely in the physical objects but the beautiful words, feelings, love, sacrifice, nature, prayer, strength etc. can also depict a kind of beauty which only those people can discern who have an aesthetic attitude. All these elements are evident in Tagore's Chitra. The superficial reading of the text reveals that there is a quest of beauty of appearance in Chitra but a closer reading with different perception, understanding, practice, comparison and with a mind free of all prejudices will realize a reader that Chitra is the perfect paradigm of beauty of ideas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was the embodiment of Indian spiritual heritage. He was considered as the pioneer of the Indian drama. For his portrayal of beauty of ideas, beauty of words, beauty of soul and beauty of wisdom in his dramas, he was crowned as the father of Indian stagecraft by many of the cities in India. He saved his fellowmen effectively and symptomatically by assuming the roles of a mediator and interpreter between the eastern and western civilizations. Tagore combined the Indian and western traditions to bring a synthesis between the east and the west. Tagore was an epitome of accentuating the internal potentialities of a person, and reaching beyond consciousness through corporation with beauty, which might direct one toward the exhilarating avenues of creative appreciation. Tagore had revered the ideal of beauty and perceived it in his heart as a dedicated devotee throughout his life. Tagore does not worship external beauty as most poets do but he envisions only the beauty of ideas which he has depicted in his writings as the ideal human characteristic. That is why this fundamental component of all of Tagore's writing makes a reader resolutely persuaded of the profound spiritual impulse that inspired Tagore in the writing of his dramas, which boosts his sense of beauty. *Chitra* by Tagore is the paramount illustration of beauty of ideas.

2. THESIS STATEMENT

The contention of this research is to depict that beauty does not lie merely in the physical objects but the beautiful words, feelings, love, nature, prayer, sacrifice, strength etc. can also depict a kind of beauty which only those people can discern who have an aesthetic attitude.

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

This research is based on qualitative methodology. The method of this research is descriptive research method which is intended to describe the analysis factually, accurately and systematically.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework of this research is David Hume's article "Of the Standard of Taste". It is related to the theory of aestheticism focuses on the subject i.e. the viewer or the reader rather than the object i.e. the painting or a book. Hume says, "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). The purpose of his essay is to unite understanding with sentiments. A person cannot perceive the quality of an object suddenly at first sight but slowly with experience, examining its each part in detail. We cannot perceive the quality of objects without comparing to each other. Finally, the standard of every work of art is judged when mind is free from all biases. Hume's article "Of the Standard of Taste" reveals that if a piece of work is looked upon optimistically, with comparisons, free from all the biases, involving understanding with sentiments, examining with details and involving experience results in the depiction of true aesthetic qualities of the work to the readers.

Discussion

According to Frances Hutcheson, the internal senses are also considered senses like external senses such as sense of sight, hearing, taste etc. because like the external senses they are immediate perceptions not needing knowledge of cause or advantage to receive the idea of beauty. Beauty of ideas can only be perceived by internal senses. Internal senses are questioned more than the external because there are no common names for them such as hearing and seeing. Any quality of a person which is related to abstraction as its name suggests and is universally known as good and sometimes moral can be known as beauty of ideas like innocence, bravery, strength, spiritual love etc. In Tagore's *Chitra* this beauty of ideas is prevailing throughout the play. To judge the aestheticism in a work, one should be free from all biases. Hume says, "But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). After that a person will be able to find all the elements of beauty of ideas in Tagore's *Chitra*.

Chitra was a very brave and strong girl but by nature she was very innocent. She did not have any knowledge of cheating, trickery, pretense etc. She loved Arjuna but does not know feminine ways of winning man's heart or ways of seducing a man towards her. She told gods that, "I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes" (Tagore 154). Beauty of innocence of a person is clearly depicted in these lines. Chitra is presented to be an innocent girl by Tagore which is not a physical beauty but an internal beauty or beauty of ideas. Most people don't consider such quality of Chitra as beauty. Only people with a fine genius or having a standard of taste will perceive it as a beauty of ideas. Hutcheson says, "And yet perhaps they shall find no Pleasure in Musical Compositions, in Painting, Architecture, natural Landskip; or but a very weak one in comparison of what others enjoy from the same objects. This greater capacity of receiving such pleasant Ideas we commonly call a *fine Genius or Taste*" (*Inquiry: Treatise 1*). Such fine genius is found in very less people to perceive beauty of ideas. But this fine genius is found in surplus quantity in Tagore's writing.

Beauty of love is presented in *Chitra* in its purest forms. Love is the greatest beauty of ideas. Fountain of love emerges from the core of the heart and Tagore is always in quest of that beauty which is primarily found in heart's core i.e. beauty of love. Basic theme of *Chitra* is love, care and affection and it is clearly portrayed in the dialogues of all the characters. Even the gods are seen showing their love for humans, caring for them and blessing them to end their afflictions of heart. This love is not physical but emotional which is stronger and real than the physical one. Every person has a different taste and sense of beauty. So every person looks upon an object from his own perspective. If we perceive love of play *Chitra* from a spiritual perspective, we will realize that this is not physical but a spiritual one. Hume says, "According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). Love of Chitra for Arjuna is the greatest example of beauty of ideas. When Chitra met Arjuna for the first time, only then she felt herself as a woman and expressed, "Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me" (Tagore 154). She never felt herself as a woman before meeting Arjuna because she was raised up like a boy. Only the beauty of love provoked such feelings in her. Then there is a respect of love in Chitra for her lover. Seeing her lover, she "stood petrified like a statue, and forgot to do him obeisance" (Tagore 154). Love demands respect and Tagore knows all the facets of the beauty of love and have painted them in *Chitra*.

Hume says, "Beauty is no quality in things themselves; It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). I have perceived beauty of care,

spiritual love, respect and sincerity in play *Chitra* instead of physical love. Yearning for the love of beloved is the beautiful feeling of person who has fallen in love. Tagore has expressed this desire of Chitra for Arjuna in a very artistic way. Chitra was not beautiful that's why Arjuna was not paying heed towards her. So in almost a begging done, she requested gods that, "O Love, god Love, thou hast laid low in the dust the vain pride of my manlike strength; and all my man's training lies crushed under thy feet. Now teach me thy lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand" (Tagore 155,156). Chitra sacrificed her strength and power of body for her love, just to look beautiful to her lover. This yearning of the love of one's lover and making sacrifice in love are the purest ideas of love and Tagore, the epitome explorer of the beauty of ideas, has depicted them artistically in his play *Chitra*. Characters of Tagore's play *Chitra* are seen to be caring for each other. Even gods are caring for the humans. In response of Chitra's begging for beauty, god Madana assured her in love and care for her that, "I will be thy friend. I will bring the world-conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion sentence at thy hand" (Tagore 156). In the same way, when Madana saw Chitra in a sad mood, he inquired her in care the reason of her despondency: "Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink-yet still I hear this cry of anguish" (Tagore 162). Nothing like the care for other touches the heart. No physical beauty can compete this. Hutcheson says, "the ideas of beauty and Harmony, like other sensible ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately so; neither can any Resolution of our own, nor any Prospect of Advantage, vary the Beauty or Deformity of an Object" (*Inquiry: Treatise 1*). In the same way, Chitra expressed that instead of having beautiful, she could win Arjuna's heart solely with her extreme care. She told Madana that, "I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due" (Tagore 156). Time, care and submission of self to your beloved can win his heart instead of physical beauty. Such beauty of idea mesmerizes the reader. Then there is the beauty of getting the love of your beloved and relishing each and every word, he expressed in your praise. Chitra was also captivated by the words of Arjuna, he expressed in his love for Chitra. She shared her beautiful memories with gods in a way: "I had heard from Arjuna-drinking drop by drop the honey that I had stored during the long day. The history of my past life like that of my former existences was forgotten. I felt like a flower, which has but a few fleeting hours to listen to all the humming flatteries" (Tagore 160). Chitra was in ecstasy and delight recalling the love of Arjuna for her. The greatest beauty of ideas is the beauty of soul. Chitra seems to consider herself as a soul mate of Arjuna because she was jealous of her own body to be touched or caressed by Arjuna. She depressingly told to Madana that, "My own body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon" (Tagore 163). Beauty springs from the plenitude of human aesthetic soul. It is an inherent possessing of soul. Man loses it only when he indulges in logic and intellect. Tagore gives the perception of beautiful objects, the unique energy. He gives many names to this energy: Jivan Shakti (force of life), Jivan-Dhara (flow of breath). People who relate such beautiful ideas of love in *Chitra* merely with physical beauty then, "he must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself, and that he wants the delicacy, which is requisite to make him sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). Tagore was only the paragon of the beauty of ideas. He should not be confused of being an advocate of physical beauty by merely the surface reading of his text.

Nature is prevailing throughout the play. All the conversations and dialogues of characters with each other are done along with the references to nature. There are a lot of similes and metaphors of nature prevalent in the play. Nature is the original beauty of universe. There is nothing alternative to nature. Only a person with an understanding of aesthetic sense can perceive its beauty. The purpose of essay "Of the Standard of Taste" is to unite understanding with sentiments. A person can only judge the beauty of ideas if he has some understanding of it. Sentiments alone cannot work. Hume says, "Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). With understanding of the beauty of ideas, a person will realize that nature is the greatest beauty of ideas and Tagore, mentioning references to nature almost everywhere in his play, is making it more attractive. Characters of this play are always using similes and metaphors of nature whenever they have to talk about anything. As Arjuna says, "From the easternmost hill on whose summit the morning sun first paints his fiery foot to the end of the sunset land have I travelled. I have seen whatever is most precious, beautiful and great on the earth" (Tagore 158). Here he was actually guessing about the lover of Chitra but he mentioned nature in his discourse. Most of the dialogues of Arjuna contains similes of nature like, "Spurious fame spreads from tongue to tongue like the fog of the early dawn before the sun rises" (Tagore 158). In the same way Chitra described nature as her guardian, lover or a parent who has comforted her while sleeping. She told to Vasanta while telling about her night in the company of Arjuna that, "The southern breeze

caressed me to sleep.... On my hair, my breasts, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept” (Tagore 161). Chitra only alluded to nature while describing the beauty of the place where she made love with her lover. Only a person with an aesthetic sense can mention nature to describe the beauty of place as has done Tagore when he wrote, “The air was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake” (Tagore 161). In the same way, Chitra compared her lover with an object of nature i.e. tree when she said, “he stood tall and straight and still, like a forest tree” (Tagore 161). Even gods are describing and relating things of beauties with nature. When Chitra prayed to gods to grant her the beauty in its extreme splendor in the last hour of the year, Vasanta said, “The loveliness of your body will return tomorrow to the inexhaustible stores of the spring. The ruddy tint of thy lips freed from the memory of Arjuna’s kisses, will bud anew as a pair of fresh, *asoka* leaves, and the soft, white glow of thy skin will be born again in a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers” (Tagore 167). All the physical beauty of Chitra was described by comparing it with nature. Nature is the dynamic force of this play. This beauty will be realized after close reading of the play. On first reading, it will merely be a story of a girl who is in quest of her lover. According to Hume, the first perception of the object is always confusing. That’s why Hume says, “The relation of the parts is not discerned: The true characters of style are little distinguished: The several perfections and defects seem wrapped up in a species of confusion, and present themselves indistinctly to the imagination” (“Of the Standard of Taste”). We cannot lead to an accurate result at first sight.

Beauty of bravery is another beauty of ideas in this play. Hume says in his splendid aesthetic article “Of the Standard of Taste” that we cannot perceive the quality of objects without comparing to each other. He quotes in his essay that “A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him” (Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”). Arjuna did not have that aesthetic sense at the start of the play so he rejected her. But at the end, when he developed that sense and compared physical beauty with beauty of bravery and moral character, he rejected that physical beauty in favor of that beauty of bravery. Hume says, “By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign due degree of each” (“Of the Standard of Taste”). This is the real beauty of ideas described by Tagore at the end of the play. Chitra told to Arjuna that: “The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Here lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower-service is finished, my master, accept *this* as your servant for the days to come” (Tagore 172). And then her lover Arjuna realizing the real beauty of ideas, accepted her by saying, “Beloved, my life is full” (Tagore 173). Ethicus Aquinas remarks that: “The beautiful is the same as the good, but from a different point of view... that is called beautiful the mere apprehension of which is pleasing.” (*The Moral Teaching of St. Thomas* 2). But in the works of Tagore, one can find the beauty of ideas. Tagore with his budding talent has explored the beauty in its original form. This makes him the aesthete of varied quality.

There is also a beauty in the prayer in this play especially the prayers of Chitra if we notice the play with acute observation as Hume says, “It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects, and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation” (“Of the Standard of Taste”). Prayers of Chitra are very pure, honest and rise directly from her heart as she only prayed for the realization of her dreams of love. Even she was the focus of attention of gods because of the intensity of prayers and all her prayers were accepted in this play. She prayed to gods, “For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart” (Tagore 156). In the same way she told to Arjuna that, “I harbour a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfillment of which I offer daily prayers to Lord Shiva” (Tagore 158). Prayer is the beautiful idea of communication with God. Tagore has made this idea more beautiful by confining it merely for the desire of love not for any worldly longing. Tagore presents the beauty in infinity in order to show the truth and relevancy of beauty in its existence.

Tagore has also ornamented her play with the beauty of honesty; with characters having the moral sense of right or wrong. This beauty of ideas is not evident in the play and “without judgment, as well as taste and invention, a poet can never hope to succeed in so delicate an undertaking” (Hume “Of the Standard of Taste”). When Arjuna was ready to break his vow of celibacy only for the sake of her beauty then Chitra warned him, “Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk, white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man’s highest homage to woman” (Tagore 159). Chitra was repentant for not winning love of Arjuna with her true self but because of her physical beauty which was just for a year and not permanent. She did not want to win her love on the basis of dishonesty. That’s why she was depressed. She told to Madana, “Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love- all the kisses for which my heart is athirst” (Tagore 162). She was even determined on telling her reality of

her appearance to Arjuna whatever the results may be. She told god that "I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he rejects it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence" (Tagore 163). This is the beauty of her character to stay honest to her lover in all respects even in looks. Honesty is a universal and infinite beauty and there is no alternative to it. Beauty of character is seldom considered the yardstick to measure beauty. Only people with a perfect aesthetic sense can judge a beauty of idea in a person as Hume says, "The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). The common standard of beauty is mostly to have good looks or good status.

There is also a beauty in the language of Tagore if a play is analyzed with "a perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention of the object" (Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste"). The way Tagore describes things and praises them is a wonderful example of beauty of ideas. The art of weaving of Chitra is also described by Tagore in a very beautiful manner through Arjuna. Arjuna praised Chitra by saying her that, "I watch how you weave that garland. Skill and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your finger-tip" (Tagore 163). This beauty of language of Tagore is superb and artistic. Similarly Tagore described thoughts of Arjuna in beautiful words when he saw Chitra as a physical beauty for the first time. Tagore describes beauty of Chitra in words of Arjuna as, "I mused over bygone years in the sloping shadows of the evening, when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage an apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman" (Tagore 157). Tagore's plays as opined by Dr. Krishnanand Joshi and Dr. B. Shymala Rao "are not plays of action but plays of feeling, plays of carnival delight and eternal identity" (79). They attempt to synthesize the rhythmic intensity of western tragedy with the mingling of Indian folk and classical drama.

Tagore's play also contain apt instances of philosophical thoughts and advices. Such words of wisdom are itself a beauty. These are also beauty of ideas elucidated by Tagore in his play. We need to use properly our internal sense to enjoy the beauty of the rational thoughts of Tagore as Hume says, "If, in the sound taste of the organ, there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). Most of the words of the wisdom are spoken by Chitra when she describes about love to Arjuna. She told him, "Joy turns into pain when the door by which it should depart is shut against it. Take it and keep it as long as it lasts" (Tagore 164). When Arjuna showed desire of hunting then Chitra advised him, "Look how the wind is chased by the mad rain that discharges a thousand arrows after it. Yet it goes free and unconquered. Our sport is like that, my love! You give chase to the fleet-footed spirit of beauty, aiming at her every dart you have in your hands. Yet this magic deer runs ever free and untouched" (Tagore 166). Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly comments on the nature of Tagore's dramas as follows:

When Tagore applied his mind to a current problem- social, political, economic-the head agreed with the heart; and the heart in its turn, beat in response to abiding intuitions, not the restrictive formulas of creed, caste or custom. The light of the soul's illumination led him, not to the will-o-wisp of agonizing dialectics. Whatever may be the problem Tagore leapt from the circumference to the center and seized it in terms of universality. The Poet sees clear than others, further than others. (26)

There is also a beauty in anger which Chitra showed for Arjuna when he ignored him for a while for that Chitra who was the paragon of valor and bravery. Anger is always considered a negative quality but if we recognize that this anger is also a part of love then it will look beautiful. Hume says, "Beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external" ("Of the Standard of Taste"). Chitra became beautiful only for Arjuna's love and when he ignored her, she became angry and said, "Go, if your thirst is quenched. But, if not, then remember that the goddess of pleasure is fickle, and waits for no man" (Tagore 169). E.M. Forster rightly holds the view as follows: "the story is told with faultless delicacy and grace; its action is no stronger than a flower and the fragrance of blossom clings round every phase" (Natwar 112). Thus Tagore has wonderfully conveyed in this drama "an endless meaning in the narrow span of a song" (Joshi 70).

5. CONCLUSION

Edward Thomson said, "Rabindranath Tagore's dramatic work is the vehicle of ideas rather than the expression of action" (41). Tagore has created a wonderfully rounded form for a play racing the passage of the human soul through the eternal cycle of innocence and experience and consummation. To sum up, Tagore's *Chitra* is a fine example of creative genius. It is the quintessence of romance. Thompson considers it "the loveliest drama

and a lyrical feast” (125) and Ernest Rhys imagines it “a piece of sculpture.” (122). Beauty of a good work like Tagore’s *Chitra* is all remaining and it is exposed at last even the temporary uncongenial circumstances or people have curbed its beauty. As Hume says, “A real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with” (“Of the Standard of Taste”). Hence the above discussion proves the contention of the research paper in the light of different arguments and theoretical framework of Hume that beauty does not lie merely in the physical objects but the beautiful words, feelings, love, nature, prayer, sacrifice, strength etc. can also depict a kind of beauty which only those people can discern who have an aesthetic attitude.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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