



International Journal of Advanced Mass Communication and Journalism

E-ISSN: 2708-4469
P-ISSN: 2708-4450
IJAMCJ 2024; 5(1): 03-04
© 2024 IJAMCJ
www.masscomjournal.com
Received: 07-11-2023
Accepted: 09-12-2023

Rituparna Chakraborty
Assistant Professor and HOD,
Department of English, Swami
Vivekananda University,
Barrackpore, West Bengal,
India

Correspondence Author:
Rituparna Chakraborty
Assistant Professor and HOD,
Department of English, Swami
Vivekananda University,
Barrackpore, West Bengal,
India

Resisting patriarchy, both nationalist and colonial: A rereading of Rabindranath Tagore's story, Shasti

Rituparna Chakraborty

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27084450.2024.v5.i1a.72>

Abstract

Tagore's short stories showcase some of the most powerful women characters in literature. Chandara, the protagonist of Tagore's short story "Shashti" is a unique character. She is not docile as patriarchy expects women to be. Her husband Chidam fails to dominate her. Chidam even wished her to be dead out of frustration. After discovering Chidam's intention to prove her guilty of the crime of murder, which she had not done, appalled her. She completely withdrew herself from everything and rigidly accepted the crime done by Chidam's brother. Her decision stands out as a firm protest against the inhumanity of Chidam and at the same time, the patriarchal society which does not think twice to make a woman guilty.

Keywords: Patriarchy, identity, anguish, void, resistance

Introduction

In respect of fabric, stylistics and more importantly, in respect of their rich ideas and inspirational approaches, Tagore's short stories are unique. Tagore wrote quite a number of short stories in which women feature more prominently and significantly than the male characters. "It may be stated that Tagore's women-centric short stories represented the New woman as a significant transformed identity in a more assertive format than in his novels and therefore undoubtedly the short stories read from the gender viewpoint can be classified as resistance literature".

"Shasti" (1893), which is titled "Punishment" in its English translation, is a brilliant example of Tagore's exploration of women's predicament in the androcentric structure and their heroic rise to resistance and rebellion, absolutely characteristic of their own temperament and strategy.

The content of the story is woven around Chandara, the adolescent wife of Chidam Rui, an extremely poor farmer. His elder brother Dukhram and his family consisting of his wife Radha and their infant son lived together under the same roof with Chidam and Chandara.

The story begins in a cloudy, rain-threatened day when the two brothers returned home at dusk, tired from the labors they had rendered in the Zamindar's house, in exchange for nothing more than abuses and humiliations. That something horribly disastrous was in the offing has been strikingly signified by the description of nature given by Tagore: "The jungle around the house and the weeds had grown luxuriantly during the monsoon, and the thick, heavy smell of rotting vegetation from the water-logged jute fields stood like motionless walls around the house. A frog was croaking from the swamp behind the cowshed and the still evening sky was full with the sounds of crickets. The force of the sweeping waters had uprooted a few mango and jackfruit trees whose roots clawed the empty air like fingers desperately outspread to clutch something firm." (P1, Shawkat Hussain).

The disaster came about in the form of Radha's murder committed by Dukhram when she greeted him with ugly insults in response to his asking for food. Tagore has displayed the stark intensity of this gory tragedy by situating a strikingly contrasting picture of the world outside the Rui's house: "Outside, it was very peaceful. The shepherds were returning home their herds. The peasants who had gone to the sandbank on the other side to harvest the newly-ripened paddy, were returning home in groups of seven or eight, sitting in small boats with sheaves of paddy on their heads as payment for their labours." (Shawkat Hussain,).

The entry of Ramlochan, the village chief, intensified the complications of the crisis. He, who had appeared on the scene after the tragedy, at first advised Chidam to tell the police that Dukhiram had murdered Radha when he found that she had not cooked rice. It was what Chidam wanted to conceal on the misogynistic plea: "If I lose my wife, I can always get one, but if my brother hangs, I cannot get another brother." Ramlochan, a leading patriarch of the semi-feudal society, sensed logic in Chidam's words, and suggested to report what happened. Chidam told Chandara to take the blame upon herself, assuring to save her.

Let me now turn my attention from the narration of the incident to the enumeration of the intricacies of Chidam-Chandara marital relationship. Soft, plump and buxom, the adolescent Radha, with her fluid and rhythmic movement, was "like a newly-built boat, small and graceful." (P4, Tagore "Punishment" translated by Shawkat Hussain). She was lively, humorous and inquisitive, trim and tidy in a stark contrast with Radha, a clumsy, disorganized virago. There was a strong push and pull between these young couple. Chidam would sometimes disappear from home on the plea of work and return with no money, thereby generating suspicion in Chandara's mind. Chandara would then frequent the ghat and return with fabricated "stories about Kashi Mazumder's second son" (P5, Shawkat Hussain). It was the bright girl's strategy of enthralling her husband's attention to her. Chidam simply misread it.

Chidam bore deep in his psyche a cynical perception about his wife and unable to read through or dominate her, he would at times even wish she were dead so that he might be at peace. Radha once said: "This girl outstrips a storm I must restrain her or she will do something disastrous." (P5, Shawkat Hussain).

With his mind being continuously poisoned with unfounded jealousy and suspicion, Chidam fiercely subjected Chandara to persecution and incarceration, yet he found it impossible to fully possess this small wife of his, just as it was "impossible to hold a drop of mercury within his fist. (P6, Shawkat Hussain) Chandara was not docile and submissive as patriarchy expect women to be: she was a class by itself-brilliantly elusive, dynamic and independent in spirit like a charter of wind.

Chandara loved her husband. When she discovered in Chidam a devilish man, implicating her in the murder and asking her to take the blame on her, she was overcome with an appalling anguish and aversion: "Her entire body and soul began to shrink as she sought to escape from the clutches of her monster-husband. Every fibre of her being rose in rebellion against him." (P6, Shawkat Hussain).

Chandara marshalled herself with an insurmountable resolve to quit the world and embrace death. In her mind she told her husband "I am leaving you and embracing the scaffold with all my youthful ardour. My final bond in this world is with the gallows." (P7, Shawkat Hussain).

Conclusion

Interrogations made by the police and the lawyers elicited from an unbreakably unyielding Chandara nothing more than a laconic confession to her "crime" and her denial of any quarrel with or provocation from the victim. She foiled her husband's belated attempts to save her. By the time Chidam and Dukhiram gave in the court the true account of the incident, the Judge had developed an idea that the two brothers were desperately trying to save the woman. Thus,

we find that Chandara was inextricably wedged in the dragnet of both the native semi-feudal patriarchy and the colonial patriarchy. She deserves all our kudos and salutation because of her uniquely heroic resistance through the weapon of death. Her death signifies the victory of her unbeatable liberated spirit, her assertion of her own life and death. Having accepted the noose, Chandara actually left Chidam in an unquenchable anguish of void and repentance. Just on the eve of her hanging, a civil surgeon asked her if he would call her husband who wanted to see her. The Bengali word uttered by Chandara in response was "maran!" The single word vibrated with manifold feelings and emotions all of which combined to imply her irrevocable rejection of Chidam. Chandara's death may be celebrated in the feminist vision the grand triumph of life of a much greater dimension.

References

1. Sanjukta D, Chakravarti S, Mathew M. Radical Rabindranath. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited; 2013.
2. Dasgupta U. (Ed.). A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore 1913-1940. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; c2003.
3. Clinton S. Personality. London: Macmillan; c1917.
4. Sengupta SC. The Great Sentinel: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & Co; c1948.
5. Tagore, Rabindranath. Rabindra Rachanavali. Calcutta: Visva Bharati & Government of West Bengal Publications, 1961, 8.