Chitra and Savitri-the Power of Feminine

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I.   Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore's lyrical drama, the character of Chitra remains the ultimate truth by physical base but in the steady evolution of the self. The illumination of a young princess' mind lies in the recognition and realization that it is in Truth alone that true happiness resides. Similarly Aurobindo's epic Savitri narrates the story of a young princess who saves the life of her husband from Death and thereby suggests the ulitmate liberation of man from universal Death. Chitra and Savitri are Upanishadic works in the sense that their principal theme is search for knowledge, that liberates man from ignorance, and that their main stylistic device is the conversation between the human and divine characters. Evolution thus becomes the watchword of both Aurobindo and Tagore. The awakening of the self or raising the life and existence to a higher level of consciousness is one of the parallel themes observed in Chitra and Savitri. Further, the integral transformation of Chitra and Savitri and their inner intuitive development has a much wider connotation to mankind at large.

Chitra, The Evolution Of Human Love

Tagore's Chitra is based on the Mahabharata. Chitra is based on the Mahabharata legend of Chitrangada and Arjuna. It is a dramatic sermon on the theme of true love. Arjuna, the Pandava prince spurns the princess Chitra, the daughter of the King of Manipur. Later when transformed into a beautiful damsel by a boon from the god of Love and god of Spring she approaches Arjuna again. He is infatuated. But Chitra conquers her unease by boldly revealing the truth about her. The false woman redeems herself as the true mother-to-be. The sensual is transcended in the spiritual, and the union is consecrated at last. Thus, Tagore's Chitra has a compact and neat structure. But much complexity and richness has been lost in the process of translation. His principal characters tend to be symbolic. His setting is invariably non-realistic.

Savitri, The Evolution Of Human Soul

The deviations that are observed in the text of Aurobindo from the Mahabharata the legend, the character of Ashwapathy is described only in seven verses. He is said to have resorted to austerities for the personal gain of getting a child. But in Savitri, Aurobindo elaborates the character of Ashwapathy in about twenty-three Cantos. He practices yoga not only for his own self-perfection but also for finding a way for man's liberation. As a legend, the whole period of Aswapathy's tapasya as reported has been transformed by the poet into an epic climb of the human soul in its journey from the inconscient to the very gates of the Superconscient. Savitri is said to be a gift of Goddess Savitri. But in the epic, the Divine Mother accepts the prayer of Ashwapathy and incarnates herself as Savitri to vanquish Death. The Legend does not describe the growth of Savitri. But the epic narrates it in a Wordsworthian mode. It is said that Savitri grows imbibing the forces of Nature. The legend just mentions the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan. But the epic describes their meetings in two ways. First, it gives the poet an opportunity to sing the glory of love. Secondly, the poet can highlight the virtues of Satyavan. The meeting between Savitri and Satyavan is said to be the unique example of spiritual love.

The Bond Between Chitra And Savitri

Both the works are inspired from the Mahabharata. Chitra forms a part of the Chitrangada-Arjuna episode in the Adi Parva of the Mahabaharata whereas Savitri forms a part of the Savitri-Satyavan episode in the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. Both the works have been titled on the names of their heroines-Chitra and Savitri. Both Chitra and Savitri are not puppets in the hands of the destiny. They are the creators and moulders of their own destiny. In both the works the action takes place in the forest. Both Chitra and Savitri are very unhappy and sad at the end of the year. In both the works, the heroines pray to God. In both the works, Time is an important factor i.e., Chitra enjoys a year's union with Arjuna and Savitri is destined to lead a happy married life for a year only. Both the works deal with a grand subject that is philosophical in nature. In both the works, we find 'woman in action'. Both the texts conclude that love is the main source of life, it leads to self-knowledge and immortality. The points revolving around the names of the heroines; as moulders of their own

destiny; self-knowledge all go hand-in-hand with the idea Individuality, self-hood and self-knowledge in the discourse of Women-Empowerment.

The Disparity Between Chitra And Savitri:

Chitra longs only for happiness, which is temporary while Savitri longs for wholeness, completeness and perfect-permanent union. Chitra is a plain and an unattractive princess in man's attire whereas Savitri is a radiant, bright, calm, dignified and beautiful princess. In Chitra, Chitra finds Arjuna and is enamoured by him. In order to marry him she requests the god of Love and the god of Spring to grant her only a day's perfect beauty. She marries him in complete knowledge about the impermanence of her relationship with Arjuna whereas in Savitri, Savitri searches out Satyavan on her own without making any request to any god. She marries him in complete knowledge about the short span of Satyavan's life. Chitra accepts her fate whereas Savitri changes her fate with the assistance of her strong will. Both are brought up in different environments. Chitravahana brings Chitra up as a son and therefore she does not know anything about feminine delicacy and grace whereas Savitri has grown up in the lap of nature. She is wiser and much more mature than Chitra.

In the case of Chitra there is no direct divine working hand whereas a divine hand works directly in the case of Savitri. Chitra is hasty to win the heart of Arjuna whereas Savitri takes her time and does not practice any falsehood anywhere or at anytime to win Satyavan. Chitra wins the love of Arjuna temporarily from the gods whereas Savitri wins the love and life of Satyavan permanently from Yama. The theme of Chitra is the evolution of human love while the theme of Savitri is the evolution of human soul. Chitra fights against Illusion whereas Savitri fights against Ignorance.

II. Gender Equality

Tagore was one of the earliest writers to work on the Chitra episode. The story of Chitra revolves around Chitra, a Manipuri princess, who longs to possess Arjuna at all costs. It is a powerful work on the psychological tension of a woman caught between her patience and realization of the importance of physical charm. The most dominant feature of the play, however, is the assertion of equality of women. Tagore has made Chitra an extremely poignant drama. When Arjuna develops a liking for Chitra, the huntress, Chitra expresses her knowledge of male psyche and reveals the social discrimination in our society. She asks Arjuna in sarcasm whether a woman is merely a woman when she winds herself round men's hearts with her smiles, sobs, services and caressing endearments or when a woman exhibits her learning and achievement. This question of Chitra is very significant as it throws light on our social attitudes towards women. It is taken for granted that a woman is supposed to take care of the man and her primary duty is to entertain him. A man's responsibilities as such do not ever equal that of a woman. The man may do whatever he desires to do. Neither is he supposed to take care of a woman's emotions and nor does he hold dependability in the rearing up of a child. The woman has to behave according to his whims and prejudices. But the man may behave according to his likes and dislikes. Moreover, the man has a tendency of not being very appreciative of a woman's accomplishments apart from the wealth of her physical details.

Social And Spiritual Empowerment

The aim of Tagore and Aurobindo is to attain victory over one's false-self and death, in Chitra and Savitri respectively. The outer world, the society, philosophy, science, art, music reminds them that the ultimate truth in man is in the illumination of the mind, in the extension of consciousness, in the steady evolution of the self, in the recognition of the one Truth, in the recognition for the harmony of contrary forces, in the realization that all things are spiritually one and in acquiring self-knowledge and self-transcendence. Both the artists intend to awaken the self, to raise the life and existence to a higher level of consciousness. Their works show us how an individual begins with himself, by raising his consciousness, purifying himself and realizing a wider meaning of life. They primarily aim at the unfolding of the self and the world in their works. Both the legends of Chitra and Savitri are recreated to recover the human wholeness. They are spiritual in their theme, conception and execution. They believe in the implicit following of one's cultural heritage and familiarity with tradition. In adapting the legends of Chitra and Savitri to contemporary times, both Tagore and Aurobindo were already in an activity of tradition and cultural analysis. The mythical framework of the works highlights the Indian tradition more competently than any other text. The legends have been explored to understand the deepest mysteries of life, love and death and answer some essential existential questions. They depersonalize and become archetypes of the quest theme of the human spirit, which refuses to accept even the limitations of borrowed beauty and death. Thus, the source text – the Mahabharata, the impact of the Indian Renaissance on Tagore and Aurobindo, the grounding of the poets in the contemporary Bengal tradition, and the purpose behind the creation of these two works logically lead us to the reasons behind their choice of the two female characters – Chitra and Savitri.

III. Conclusion

Empowerments are all found in both Chitra and Savitri. Both are the only children of their parents. They carry a background story of divine birth. They do not come from conservative families but from respectable royal families which give them freedom to think, to decide and to execute deeds according to their wish and will. Chitra and Savitri in choosing Arjuna and Satyavan repectively, go on to exhibit their feminine right, will power and confidence. Their decision to select their life partners is essentially a continuation of the tradition established by Shakuntala, Ganga, and Sharmistha. Both are the recipients of Divine Grace. Chitra becomes a perfect beautiful damsel like Shruchavati and Sulabha and Savitri defeats the god of Death like Odhavati. Both encounter barriers in the path of love and finally succeed in winning back their life-mates. Chitra displays growth in understanding and realization, while Savitri exhibits growth in consciousness. They realize their 'self' and embody in themselves the qualities of female psyche and unusual female achievement. Both reject the two negations - the ascetic's denial of life and the sensualist's denial of the spirit. Both are concerned with the welfare of humanity in general. They are not self-centered. Rather both see salvation in depersonalization. They successfully actualize their potential by manifesting their real self through self-upliftment. Chitra discards her borrowed beauty to face Truth as it is and Savitri defeats death by raising herself to a higher plane of consciousness. Both live life as the precious gift of God. They care for the body as the temple of God and think the soul as the ultimate reality. Both reflect Indian culture, Indian women and the way of living life. They assert women's valuable and meaningful place in society and public life.

References

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