

Glimpses of Buddhism in Tagore's *Mukta-dhara*

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Abstract. Buddhism believes in the principle of equality, liberty, and fraternity. According to Buddhism, all human beings are equal, for they have been created by the same Father. There is no difference between man and man in His eyes. Therefore, everyone should have his own right in the society. In *Mukta-Dhara*, a play by Rabindranath Tagore, Abhijit, a prince, sacrifices his life for the freedom of the Mukta-Dhara, a spring on which a dam is constructed. When Abhijit realizes that stopping the water of the spring is adversely affecting the economic welfare of Shiv-tarayans, low-caste people, he breaks the dam risking his life and eventually drowns in the river. Buddhism always talks of non-violence. Even Gandhi has been the worshipper of this principle throughout his life. In this way, we may say that Buddhism has a great impact on Tagore, and it is reflected in his writings. The present paper aims at exploring *Mukta-Dhara* from the perspective of Buddhism.

Keywords : Buddhism; *Mukta-Dhara*; racial discrimination; equality; liberation.

Buddhism is a religion founded by the Buddha. It came as a challenge to the orthodox Hindu religion. Hinduism has been in existence for a long time. It believes in caste system. It has created divisions between man and man. There are some people in the society who have the feelings of superiority and they are known as upper class people. There are other persons who have inferior feelings and they are known as lower class people. They are called *Sudras*. They are known as *Chandals*. They are called untouchables though Gandhi has pointed out that untouchability is a crime against humanity. Buddhism believes in the principle of equality, liberty, and fraternity. According to Buddhism, all human beings are equal, for they have been created by the same Father. There is no difference between man and man in His eyes. Therefore, everyone should have his own right in the society. All persons should enjoy their freedom in their own way. Their participation should be equal in all the spheres of life whether it is social, political or economic. They must be given due respect. They should not remain deprived of any benefit. Thus it is apparent that Buddhism raises its voice against the oppressed ones of the society. If we oppress the weaker section of the society, it is violence though Buddhism is in the favour of non-violence. Buddhism always talks of non-violence. Even Gandhi has been the worshipper of this principle throughout his life. In this way, we may say that Buddhism has a great impact on Tagore, and it is reflected in his writings. Tagore saw Buddha as a model because, like Buddha, he wanted to liberate humanity from the hypnotic hold of money and matter. Thus he wanted to “bring them back to a moral fold that would help them to overcome their narrow prejudices based on language, race, [and] religion” (Quayum, 9). Rabindranath

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Tagore holds an outstanding place in Indian writing in English. He has achieved eminence in all the literary genres. Therefore, he is a great poet, a novelist and a short story-writer. Besides, he has also written many dramas. In this arena too, he has achieved a high degree of excellence. Therefore, he is regarded as one of the pioneers of drama in Indo-Anglian literature. Tagore has written many plays. Among them, one is *Mukta-Dhara*. The present paper aims at exploring the glimpses of Buddhism in Tagore's *Mukta-Dhara*.

The drama, *Mukta-Dhara* narrates the story of Ranjit Singh who is the King of the mountain kingdom of Uttarakut. He is a good king for the people of Uttarakut, but he is callous towards the people of Shiv-tarai. Shiv-tarai is a country which is situated on the plains below the mountainous kingdom of Uttarakut. A spring rises from the mountain and its water flows on the plain. Its water is used by the Shiv-tarayans for domestic work. They also irrigate their crops with this water. Bibhuti is a royal engineer who has been trying to stop the water of the Mukta-dhara by building a dam. Numberless persons have lost their life working as labourers in constructing the dam. After a long endeavour, Bibhuti has succeeded in his mission. King Ranjit Singh as well as his subjects is proud of this achievement. It is a great triumph for Uttarakut. Now the fate of the Shiv-tarayans is in the hand of the King. If he wants to release the water, he will do and if he does not want, he will not do the same. The people of Uttarakut are very happy when they see the dam ready. Therefore, they express their feelings of admiration for Bibhuti. This idea is reflected in the following lines :

We bow to thee, we honour thee, O Lord, O Lord
Machine! (*Three Plays*, 16)

The people of Uttarakut feel proud of Bibhuti's achievement, but Abhijit who is Yuvaraja, is dead against this dam-construction. The reason is that the Yuvaraja has a great love and affection for the Mukta-dhara. It is said that Abhijit has been found as an infant below the falls of Mukta-dhara where his mother had left him as an abandoned one. Thus he is a foundling. But on the advice of his guru's guru, King Ranjit Singh has made Abhijit his successor to the throne though he has his own son, Sanjaya. Vishwajit is the Maharaja of Mohangarh. He is the uncle of King Ranjit. It is Ranjit's uncle who has exposed the reality about Abhijit. He points out that he (Abhijit) has been lying as an infant near the falls of Mukta-dhara. This information has a great impact on the mind of Abhijit, and since then a kind of affinity has developed at his heart for the Mukta dhara. He always regards it as his own nurse. Every day he goes to the falls of Mukta dhara to sleep. Here Ranjit expresses his feeling towards Abhijit:

Yes I remember.
Every night he used to go
and sleep below the falls.
When I heard about it,

I were to him there one
 night and asked him
 straight, 'What is
 the matter, Abhijit' why
 are you here?' And he
 replied, 'In the sound of
 this water, I hear my mother's
 voice'. (18)

King Ranjit has love for Abhijit. Therefore, he has appointed him the Governor of Shiv-tarai. He works there as the representative of King Ranjit. He is popular among the Shiv-tarayans, for he always takes interest in the welfare of the people of the weaker section. He proves to be their well-wisher. He always remains lenient and kind to his poor subjects. The Yuvaraja is really a kind-hearted man. He does not believe in exploiting the poor people. He always opposes his father, King Ranjit, when he collects heavy taxes from the poor people of Shiv-tarai, because they are not in a position to pay their taxes because of their poverty. Here we find the glimpse of Buddhism as Buddhism never supports exploitation. It ever raises its voice against the oppressed class.

Abhijit is the Governor of Shiv-tarai. He sees the bad condition of the Shiv-tarayans. They suffer from poverty, because they cannot send their wool products and other commodities to foreign countries. The reason is that the Nandi Pass, through which they used to go to other countries for sale, has been blocked since the time of Ranjit Singh grandfather. In other words, we may say that the King has not allowed the people of Shiv-tara to export their trade materials to foreign markets at the highest prices. Thus the Shiv-tarayans are pressurised to sell their surplus product in Uttarakut so that the people of Uttarakut may buy those materials at the lowest prices. Similar is the policy of all powerful nations in the world. Even today we see that the USA, which has a powerful economy in the world, wants to suppress the Indian Market by selling its own goods and commodities. What I mean to say is that every nation wants to promote the sale of its own materials at the highest prices and, contrary to this, it wants to purchase all sorts of commodities from the other countries at the lowest prices. Thus the economic exploitation of the weak countries has become the way of the world in the modern trade and commerce. Here the economic exploitation presents the glimpse of Buddhism. Buddhism has always been against the exploitation. It always suggests the human beings to be sympathetic towards the downtrodden of the society. This is the reason why Abhijit has opened the Nandi pass road for the welfare of the Shiv-tarayans. When he is asked by Udhava why he has opened the Nandi path road, he replies:

To save the people of Shiv-tarai from continual
 famine. (31)

Here we see how Tagore has been influenced by Buddhism. Tagore is expressing his Buddhist ideas through the personality of Abhijit. Abhijit, in fact, is a kind-hearted person. He has compassion for the Shiv-Tarayans. He always wants to help them as far as possible for him. This idea gets a vivid expression in the following lines:

When the right hand is niggardly enough to close
the road against them, men cannot be saved by the
bounty of the left. So I have opened a road by
which food may freely come and go. I cannot bear
to see the poverty that depends on charity. (32)

The people of Uttarakut have gone against the Yuvaraja. They say that Abhijit has committed heinous crime by opening the Nandi path. On their demand he has been removed from the post of Governor. But Dhananjaya who is known as Vairagi, emerges as a leader of the Shiv-tarayans. Basically, he is a spiritual leader who has started encouraging the Shiv-tarayans to raise their voices against the foreign rules. By 'foreign rule' I mean the rule of King Ranjit. Dhananjaya is like Mahatma Gandhi who has been the worshipper of non-violence throughout his life. Through the weapon of non-violence, Gandhi had made India free from the clutches of the Britishers. Like Gandhi, Dhananjaya has also adopted the weapon of *Ahimsa*. He advises the Shiv-tarayans to follow this principle and solve their problems. Buddhism always talks of *Ahimsa*. It never allows anyone to hurt. Dhananjaya is the admirer of Yuvaraja. He is much influenced by the lenient attitude of the Yuvaraja towards the Shiv-tarayans as their Governor. This is the reason why the Shiv-tarayanas want him to be reappointed as their Governor. When Ganesh says that the Shiv-tarayans have lost their Yuvaraja and they will never find him in feature, Dhananjaya gives his remark:

Nay, you have found him. He is your forever now.
(76)

Buddhism is ever opposed to the ideas of racial superiority. It always criticises racial disparity. It believes that all human beings have been created by God. They are equal in His eyes. Therefore, there should not be any discrimination between man and man. Here we see how the conflict prevails in the mind of the people of Shiv-tarayans and those of Uttarakut. The Shiv-tarayans pass their ridiculous comment on the faces, the clothes, the culture, the scriptures, the language and the origin of the persons of Uttarakut. Just opposite to this, the people of Uttarakut mock at the kind of cap which the Shiv-tarayans put on. This idea gets a vivid expression in the following lines:

You don't know? Well, in the beginning of the
world, after the churning of the ocean, some drops
of nectar trickled down from the God's cups and
fell on the earth. From that earth our Shiv-tarayans

ancestor was created. Then the demons licked out the god's discarded cups and threw them into the gutter, and from the broken pieces was made the ancestor of Uttarakut, that is why they are so hard and fough! So unclean. (41)

One citizen of Uttarakut tells the Shiv-tartayans that Bibhuti has brought their drinking water under his control and they will dry like toads if the rains become failure. Ganesh is a leader of Shiv-tarayans. He does not agree to this view, rather he says that Bibhuti is only a blacksmith's son. He cannot stop the drinking water which has been provided to them by Bhairava. Here the racial distinction is at its worst. Even today this racial conflict is prevalent in many countries of the world. The problem of the black and the white still exists in the advanced and progressive country like the United States of America. This racial pride and prejudice is becoming stronger and stronger every day. A school teacher is teaching his students that the people of Uttarakut have got victory and they will win every day in this world. He also suggests them that they are superior to the people of Shiv-tarai. If this type of education is given to the students who are the future of the country, what result will be. Tagore forbids the students to have the type of learning. This will destroy the career of the students as well as the future of the country. Buddhism has never been in to support of this racial discrimination and education.

Bibhuti has constructed a dam to check the water of Mukta-dhara. Abhijit takes the Mukta-dhara to be her nurse or foster mother. Therefore, he feels much suffocated. He thinks that his mother has been chained, and it is his duty to set her free from the imprisonment. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

I must pay the debt of my birth *Mukta-dhara* was
my nurse. I must set her free. (57)

Abhijit is fully determined to make her mother free from the clutches of the dam, because he has no capacity to bear the unbearable suffering of his mother. Therefore, one day in the darkness of the evening, he goes and breaks the dam at the weak point. In this way, the whole achievement of Bibhuti is destroyed by the Yuvaraja and the water of Mukta-dhara begins to flow as usual. But Abhijit Yuvaraja, is also swept away by the swift currents of the Mukta-dhara and he loses his life after making his mother and his own spirit free. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

He (Yuvaraja) had somehow found a weak spot
there he struck. The master machine struck him
back. Then Mukta-dhara, like a mother, picked up
his wounded body in his arms, and carried him
away. (76)

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Thus it is quite clear that Abhijit has sacrificed his life for the noble causes. By 'noble causes' I mean the freedom of the Mukta-dhara, the liberation of his own spirit and the economic welfare of the people of Shiv-tarai and Buddhism has always been in the favour of all these points.

To sum up, we may say that the whole world is burning into the fire of pride and prejudice. It is suffering from the disease of racial discrepancy. It is a slur on the society. All these shortcomings may be removed from the society with the help of Buddhism which teaches us the lesson of equality, liberty and fraternity. It gives us the lesson that everybody has equal right in the society. Therefore, there should not be any gap between man and man, rather men should have love affection and sympathy for one another. Tagore's message in *Mukta-Dhara* can be best described in the following lines from Tagore's *Gitanjali*:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has broken up into fragments by narrow
domestic wall...
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.
(*Gitanjali*, 48)

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