CHAPTER III.

THE POETIC DRAMA.

Tagore's experiment in this new genre illustrates that dramatic inspiration, freed from a set pattern of construction, assumes a variety of forms, not always fulfilling the conditions of orthodox dramaturgy. As one follows his dramatic career after 'Visarjan', one is confronted with a perplexing problem. Why did he not pursue further the orthodox pattern of play-making, when it was well-nigh within his grip? Caprice of creative mood apart, there should be some deeper reason for this departure from a position of advantage. 'Visarjan', which to this day remains the only example of regular verse-drama in Bengali, worth its name, follows a form of play-making where he was not wholly in his element. Tagore's success with 'Visarjan' is a case of a marriage of convenience, without the spiritual harmony, between his native genius and the orthodox dramaturgy. The orthodox form of the five-Act drama required an extensive plot with diversified motives, whereas Tagore's natural propensity was in the direction of a single movement plot, with emphasis on the 'activity of the souls of the characters.' This turn in his creative mood signified an instinctive recoil from the prevalent theatrical ideal.

1. 'Drama has been many things to many people'- Dr. Ronald Peacock, The Art of Drama, p.158.

2. 'The Irish Dramatic Movement' - W.B.Yeats.
Hence his creative urge took him to more congenial experiments. It is but natural that Tagore's essentially poetic genius, which has been asserting itself in a relationship of drama and poetry, where it has to move in terms of equality, should devise a form of drama where his inherent poetic disposition finds free play. The result is a genre of dramatic expression where he found a medium for reconciling drama and poetry in a new alliance. The plays that follow are a variety of drama in which emotions, in essence dramatic, are given a poetic representation.

Conceived for a purely imaginative theatre, without any obligation to meet the requirement of a theatre for the general public, a play of this type, when acted or recited, presupposes a select audience interested in the subtle interplay of human motives, presented in a poetic language. Its effect can be felt only in a private performance where the players are "surrounded by the audience."

These are drama by means of poetry, and as in drama by means of music, character and issues, all too far removed from actual life, are idealized. This tendency to 'poeticize drama' by casting the material in the 'formal, patterned metrical speech' restricts the scope of the drama, the sole support of which is, the concentrated emotion of 'persons in a relation of crisis to each other.' This leads to the use

1. A note in the English Translation of Chitrangada states, "The dramatic poem 'Chitra' has been performed in India without scenery - the actors being 'surrounded by the audience." - Chitra, p.xi.

of a legendary frame as its structure, for the story being more or less familiar, the dramatist can concentrate on delineating the movement of soul and ignore the outer course. "Since myths are naturally poetic the plays based on them tend to be poetic too." The situation in each is an intensely emotional moment with a dramatic thrust, its essentially vertical movement demanding the intensity of poetic speech. Narrative and lyrical elements are natural here, for the emotional reaction of characters is of greater importance than action as such. The drama in the shorter pieces is the climax itself, the peak-point of interest. In the longer pieces, Chitrangada and Malini, there is no relaxation in the intense pitch of the dramatic movement. Poetry, the most intense speech, is the natural medium of these pieces which could not have been conceived in terms of prose medium. But it is poetry that has the most authentic accent of Tagore's own poetic style, not the declamatory or theatrical tone of his poetry as used in his verse dramas.

2(a) "Verse, when appropriate, is the most powerful single instrument of poetic intensification because it adds to language decisive rhythms, and cultivating more carefully the sound of language, exploits the expressiveness of the voice. Rhythm and vocal sound are profoundly rooted in our physical nature and therefore intimately linked with feeling." The Art of Drama, by Ronald Peacock. p.222.
2(b) 'In poetic drama the language is action'. 'Drama from Ibsen to Eliot', Raymond Williams. p.165.
Each of these plays presents a distinct moral crisis in man's life, bringing to play the eternal dualism within him. In each we see man involved in a conflict, struggling to be true to his inner ideal. The theme of all these pieces is the glorification of the higher in man, the victory of his spirit over the other force in his life which tries to pull him down to the lower plane of success and comfort, and to blind conformity to values that go against universal human morality, the true religion of man.

1. Chitrangada.

'Chitrangada' marks the beginning and 'Visarjan' the end of two distinct forms of dramatic inspiration. It is an experiment in dramatic expression in an altogether different key. The quality of verse has changed. The diction of the lines in Chitrangada is wholly free from all stage associations. A lyrical fluidity with the personal Tagore rhythm replaces the sharply declamatory accent of the earlier dramatic dialogue. The diction of the soliloquy of Arjun echoes more the lyrical diction of 'Bijoyini' than that of Jai Singh's soliloquy.

Chitrangada is a genre of dramatic expression where some of the characteristic elements of Tagore's imagination

1(a). 'Ke ashi daralo saigvar-sopaner asti silapate. Kee spurba rup. komal charan tale daratal kemene nischal haye chilo.....' 'Chitrangada' (Sc. II)

(b) 'Sorakir pranatadeshe, bakuler ghanachhayatale asti silapate, abaksha dabe jale basia sundari, kampaman chhayakani prasaria swachha nire.....' 'Rabindra Rachanabali' (Bijoyini) Vol.IV. p 95.
found a perfect medium. It is wholly a drama of inner life. 

External action is reduced to its barest minimum here. The 
loss in outwardness is made up by human souls, in a state 
of ferment, speaking out in poetry.

In Chitrangada, Tagore dramatizes the elevation of 
love from the physical to the spiritual plane. The drama 
has become 'an allegory of love's meaning', of the true nature 
of the lovers' union, of the relative importance of beauty 
and character. It certainly called for a poet to handle a 
theme where the joy and sorrow of the senses and the bliss 
born of the fulfilment of love are dramatically depicted. In 
his well-known preface to the play he says that the drama 
began as an idea and the legend followed as a vehicle of that 
moral vision of life. The dramatization of a theme of moral 
import is effected here through 'the sensuous presence' of 
persons taken from a legend. The episode of Chitrangada in 
the Mahabharata has a heroic-romantic interest. He takes 
only the outer framework of the story into which he breathe 
beauties and motives.

The play begins with action already in progress, in the 
true manner of a poetic drama, at a peak moment of emotional 
tension. In order to beg a boon of them, Chitrangada has 
invoked with her penance two gods, Madan and Vasanta. The

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1. 'Ai bhaktake natya skare prakas-ichha takhuni gone elo, 
sai sangei gone parlo Mahabharater Chitrangadar kahini. 
Ai kahiniti kichhu rupantor niya asek din amar moner 
madhye prochhanno chhilo'. Suchona, Chitrangada, 
Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.III.
whole of her past history is poetically narrated by Chitrangada herself, frequently interrupted by significant comments and questions from her divine listeners, an old device for maintaining dramatic interest. This retrospective method is used for concentration, fulfilling, however, the function of a true exposition by supplying necessary information to the audience. Later when he recast the play into the form of a dance-drama (Krityanatya-Chitrangada) he externalised this through a short scene, for the form of a dance-drama required visual representation rather than poetic stimulation. But in a drama, poetically conceived, Tagore makes poetry help us to visualise the scene imaginatively.

The foundation of the drama, which grows out of a moral idea, is an intriguing situation involving a woman who is forced to offer her body to her beloved, who does not know her, and is oblivious of the worth of her character. The conflict of their love-life begins and the process of fulfilment of their love is developed through eleven short scenes. Chitrangada has got her desire fulfilled, but this victory does not make her happy. She feels tormented by an inner

1 'Keno jani hatat amar mone holo sundari yuboti yadi anubhab kare je se ter jamboner maya diye premiker hridaya bhulichte tsole se ter surupkai apan sambhagar sukhya angshe bheg basbar abhijoge satin bole dhikkar dite pare. Eje ter bairer jinis, a jano rituraj Basanter kasbh theke pava bor, khanik moha bistaror darja jaibo uddeshya siddha karbar janye. Yadi ter antarer madhye yatharta charittroshkoti thake tabe sai mohamukta shaktir danai ter premiker pakhe mahat labh, yugol jiboner jayatrer sahai. Sai dahi atmer am sthayee parichaya, er parinase klanti nai, abasad nai, abhyaser dhuliprolepo ujjalatar malinya nai. Ai charittra shakti jiboner dhruba sambal, nirman praktir ashu pryojoner prati tar nibhbar nai. Arthat er mulya manobik, a nai prakritik.' - Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.III. Suchana.
sorrow, for it is not her real self that has won her beloved, but her false, borrowed, beautified exterior. She is mortified to find Arjun, her idol, 'blind to the light of the deathless spirit' within her and succumbing to the frail and false appeal of outer charm. The situation is intensely dramatic, because the very purpose of the transformation of her body is defeated, for, the transformed body, ironically enough, turns into a rival of her soul, causing a great inner conflict. Similarly, Arjun, too, feels that it is not the union with an ideal partner, who is at once the 'playmate of the night' and the 'helpmeet of the day.' Chitrangada and Arjun both gain partially, what they sought, and are smitten by an inner discontent. Their union till now is on the outer plane, not on the inner. The constant twists and turns in the emotional life of the two characters shape the dramatic course. If drama is involvement of characters in cross-purpose, emotional tension and resulting in a reversal of order in moral values, the play is rich in dramatic quality.

1. 'Antare Bahire mor hoyechhe sateen/Ar taha naribo bhulite. Sapatnire/Swahaste sajaye sajatme, pratidin/Pathite hobe, aar sanksha-tirtha/Basar-shajjai; abishram sange rehi/Pratikshan dekhite holbe chaksha meli tahar adar. Ogo deher sohage/Antar jwelibe hinsanale, heno shap/Neraloke ke payechhhey ar/ke stamu, bar tebo phire i.e.' Sc.III.

2. 'Jaminir narma-sahachari jadi hay dibaser karma-sahachari' Sc.IX.
Though torn by an inner remorse, Chitrangada as yet cannot disclose her identity lest, too soon disillusioned, he should leave her. Their love faces a crisis, for love isolated from life cannot sustain itself. The appearance of 'Banacharagan', (Sc.IX) who apprise Arjun of their helplessness owing to Chitrangada's absence, their heroic queen, is a turning point. He finds in Chitrangada his ideal. It complicates their relation, for he wants to know from Chitrangada about Chitrangada herself. This pleases her greatly. The complication, as is natural in such plays, is carried literally up to the very last moment. Suspense is maintained all through for we follow through a maze of complex interaction, the fortune of the two lovers' affairs. The final action, the dramatic revelation of Chitrangada's true identity to Arjun, who sees that the woman he loves and is tired of, is the woman of his ideal, crowns the drama, for it resolves the complication of their love-life on a note of glorification of their ideal union.

The disguise motif, which makes her body the rival of her spirit is woven organically into the plot. Action is enlivened by her inner conflict. It is her tense and poignant

1. "Yadi porsha rakho/Hare sonkoter patho, duruho chintar/Chintar/Yadi angho dao, yadi smasati karo/Kathin brater tabo sahe halte/Yadi sukhe dukkha more karo sahochari,/Amar paibo tabo parichaya". - Chitrangada. (Sc. III)

2. Arjun- 'Matai poria/Akhai anandhar griha phire jabo/Chitrangada- A premer griha achhe?
Arjun- Griha nai?
Chitrangada- Nej/Griha nia jabe! Bolona griha katha/ Griha chire baraser; nitya jaha tai grihe nia jee. (Sc.IV).
soul-conflict symbolizing the clash of outer beauty and inner worth of character that renders the dramatic form of Chitrangada inevitable and justifiable, for by no other means could this spectacle of life be so effectively presented.

When bitterly aggrieved on account of her imperfect union with Arjun, Chitrangada seeks to hurry their ideal union, Vasanta, one of the two divine characters of the drama, pleads with her to be patient by reminding her of the great law of life — that the 'triumph of fruitage' comes only after the 'flowering season is over.' Tagore enriches the human drama of the two lovers by relating it with the cosmic drama of the God of Beauty and Lord of Love, who bind 'in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and women.'

Chitrangada is not only a legend of heroic love, but a grand symbol, a symbol of the eternal duality of flesh and spirit.

2. Biday-Abhishap.

Tagore's next play, Biday-Abhishap, carries on further the experiment with poetic drama started in Chitrangada. Blank-verse, his staple dramatic medium in the foregoing plays, gives place to rhymed verse. This is obviously done

1. "Pramoder/Pratham aswaduku dia, mukh hote/Sudhapattra kere nia churna karo yadi/Shumitale, aakshmat se aghatbhare/Chamakin, ki achrose heribe tomai." - Chitrangada.
with a view to perfecting his 'instrument' for the free
expression of the high emotions of human souls, and render-
ing it 'more suitable for emotional dramatic dialogue. As
a result, Biday-Abhishap is so pervasively suffused with
the spirit of poetry, that people are disinclined to view
it as a drama at all. The language is poetically enriched,
figures and images springing forth with a sparkling profu-
sion. In Biday-Abhishap the structural pattern of the
regular drama has been abandoned. There is no division
into scenes. Tagore is our only poet-dramatist in whose
plays, the integrity of verse rhythm is rigidly maintained.
Biday-Abhishap is not a narration in dialogue but a drama-
ic dialogue cast in verse. His aim here has been to present
a dramatic moment of tremendous intensity, all the more so
because that dramatic moment is not allowed to lose its force
by elaborate development.

The drama is a situation presenting two lovers poised
against each other in a tense moment of leave-taking. It is
the story of a great yearning and a firm rejection against


2. In this connection it is worth quoting a remark of Abercro-
mble, who lays his finger on the very soul of the poetic
drama: 'For this kind of drama,' says he, 'uses for its
texture a verbal process which, with its numerous provo-
cative and evocative devices, such as imagery and delibe-
rate metaphor, and consistent metre, is inescapably re-
cognizable as symbolic of the emotional reality of life.'
'The Function of Poetry in Drama' — English Critical
Essays, p. 261.
the background of a review of an idyllic past. Kacha, after a thousand-year long stay, is about to leave for Paradise after mastering the secret of immortality, 'that rare knowledge coveted by the gods' to learn which he came to the land of the Titans. Devayani, the daughter of his Master, is in love with him and she passionately pleads with him not to leave her. Kacha remains resolute and acknowledging his love for Devayani, he says that, bound as he is by a solemn vow to carry the secret of 'deathless life' to the gods who are eagerly awaiting his return, he must take leave of her. Deeply chagrined at her unrequited love, Devayani utters a bitter curse against Kacha, who, on the contrary, blesses her so that she may be happy by rising above her sorrow and despair.

In Biday-Abhishap it is man's self-immolating devotion to duty, which rises above attractions of love. The drama here rests on a conflict between love and duty. Everything is converted into emotion. The dramatic 'action' consists in building up the crescendo of emotion. Biday-Abhishap is essentially statuesque. Though, an exiguous piece with only two characters talking, Biday-Abhishap is not bereft of true dramatic emotion.

In a play conceived for a purely imaginative theatre, stimulation of imagination by suggestion is a more effective

1. 'Tome pare/Ai mor avisep - je bidyar fare/Mere karo abahela, se bidya tomar/Sampurna hobe na besh.'
2. 'Ami bar dinu Devi, tumi sukhi hobe bhule jabe sarbagkani bipul gaurabe.'
dramatic instrument than actual representation. The drama poetically unfolds, with a reminiscent suggestiveness the thousand associations of their loving haunt of bliss. The dramatic action consists in Devayani's effort and failure in deflecting Kacha from his avowed mission of life. The true crisis of the drama comes when Devayani asks Kacha to choose between her and knowledge. Kacha's moral dilemma, if at all existing, is short-lived. He resolves the problem by answering that he is pledged to the gods. His life's mission is fulfilled. He cannot think of his own selfish desires. He, she accuses, has used her as a tool; and he, like an opportunist, after winning her heart, gained access but to her father's heart. Kacha admits his love for her, says that he cannot place his own happiness above the great ideal that is his life's purpose to serve.

Biday-Abhishap is a moving farewell scene. The speeches are in character. The agitation of her heart, the intensity of her desire, the frustration of her life, are revealed in the words Devayani utters, whereas every word that Kacha utters speaks of a strongly bridled emotion, and, a pure dedicated spirit. Devayani is the very embodiment of the allurement and joy of life, of the flowing emotion of a woman's heart. She is, as it were, the poetry of the earth. Kacha, on the contrary, is a hymn of heaven. Serenely tranquil and self-effacing, Kacha stands resolute like a rock to withstand the fury of her surging emotion. The foundation of the dramatic action is the tussle of restless passion and


unruffled equanimity of spirit. Devayani represents passion, Kacha the glorification of a mission. Kacha is not incapable of human feeling. He is not an ascetic. The conflict of love and ideal has been resolved in him. Biday-Abhishep is a drama of the victory of man's spirit over love that demands the sacrifice of his ideal.

3. Malini.

As a poetic drama, 'Malini' is a more ambitious experiment than 'Biday-Abhishep'. It covers a broader canvas of human action, deals with issues that are more complex and that involve a greater number of characters. Malini seems to disturb the sequence of the poetic dramas. Yet only outwardly. For in reality, it is an experiment to present the solid, substantial material fit for a regular verse-drama, in terms of the dramaturgic principle of a poetic drama. Befitting a poetic drama, there is marked concentration of action. Surplusage of all kinds is eschewed, for it is intensity more than extension that is sought. Sub-plot and over-elaboration find here no place. The compression of form is further accentuated by maintaining the strict integrity of poetical design, by the consistent employment of regular rhyme and metre, and the resources of a truly poetical language. The narrational element, the delineation of feelings, the flights of ecstasy couched in poetical language, are

1. 'Ha Abhimaninee/Satya sune ke hobe sukhi.'
deliberately exploited. The sustenance of poetry being emotion at its highest point of tension, in a poetic drama like 'Malini', poetry has to find a highly concentrated form.

There is in 'Malini' a severe concentration in plot. Most actions are narrated, and kept in the background, such as the whole history of Kshemankar in foreign land and his capture, the aim of the dramatist obviously being the delineation of the clash of passions rather than the course of actual action. The whole dramatic design of Malini appears to be carved out of the hardest granite, so tense and grim is the dramatic issue. Malini, in a way, is the most dramatic of his poetical dramas. There is a strong dramatic clash, but the course of the drama is controlled by the temper and concentration of poetry, — the outer conflict and the inner, the interaction of characters, the movement of soul in tension, enriching it dramatically. The rapidity with which the dramatic action is developed towards its final culmination is masterly.

The scene of action is laid in a distant semi-historical past so that considerations of strict verisimilitude may not crop up and disturb the note of idealization Tagore seeks to attain. Malini, like most of his plays of this period, 'Visarjan', 'Satee', 'Narak Jas', is the dramatization of a religious issue. Essentially a man of religion, Tagore has been all his life in quest of the eternal foundation of the religion of man. The theme of Malini revolves round the clash of the religious orthodoxy and spirit of tolerance,
of die-hard adherence to old order and spontaneous expression of true human morality.

There are several close links between Malini and Visarjan. Not only that each has a theme of religious conflict, but in the scheme of plot-structure too, there is close correspondence between the two. The religious motive, the duel between the bigoted orthodoxy and the spirit of liberalism in the religious plane, the conflict within the soul between two loyalties, the touching irony of death of one who is dear, are the common elements of both the plays. In both, we see emancipated religious ideology asserting itself through royal authority (King Govind Manikya and Princess Malini, the daughter of the King of Kashi)—being opposed by Brahmanical orthodoxy (represented by Raghupati and Kshemankar). In both, there is incitement to rebellion and clamour for banishment. In both, there is loyalty shaken by a girl (that of Jai Singh for Raghupati by Aparna, and that of Supriya for Kshemankar by Malini). In both, the characters standing between the two clashing forces are sacrificed (Jai Singh and Supriya). In both, the power of orthodoxy

1. 'Amar moner madhye Dharm prerana takhan Gaurisanker uttanga sikhara suvra nirval tushar_punjer mato nirval nirbikalpa hoye stebda hoye chhilo. Se bigalita hoye manab loke bichitra mangal rupe maitri rupe spanake prakash korte aramva koreche. Nirbikar tattwa noy se, murtisalor matite pathare nan advut akar niye manushke se hatabuddhi korte aseni. Rono daiba banike asroy kare ni. Satya jar swabhore, je manusher antare aparimeya karuna tar antahkaran theke ei paripurna manab-devatar abirheb anya manusher chitte pratifalita hote theke. Sakal anasthanic sekal puranic dharma jatilata bhed kore tabel er jathertha swarup prakash hote pere.' /Ei Bhaber upare Malini svetai nijke pratishthita koreche, aryo ja dukha, aryo ja mohina seistetai er kabya-rasa.' Suchana, 'Malini'; Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.IV.
is overcome in the end by the power of tolerance. The final outcome in each also concurs. As Aparna forgives Raghupati, who drives Jai Singh to his death and who interferes with their union, so Malini forgives Kshemankar responsible for the death of Supriya, who was to be married to her.

The dramatic action starts with a violent conflagration of feelings following the initiation of Malini into the new creed of Buddhist faith. The Brahmins of Kashi, the stronghold of orthodox Hinduism, are deeply agitated over the heretical faith of Malini and are clamouring for her banishment. Beffitting the concentrated form of a poetic drama, all the characters are keyed up, at the very outset, to an intense pitch of emotion. Malini and her royal parents make one set. The other set consists of the Brahmins, their leader, Kshemankar and his friend, Supriya.

The play becomes a battle-ground of different attitudes towards religion, projected through the different characters of the drama. Malini being the central character of the piece, each of these views has to be comprehended in relation to Malini's faith. It is by a rare power of dramatic construction that he sets here all the characters revolving around Malini, whose personality is the central force of the drama. Her father and mother, the Brahmins, Kshemankar and Supriya, all are grouped round her like a rim round a nave. The dramatic interest is sustained by the interaction of different characters over her. When the play begins, Malini is on the
threshold of a profound spiritual realisation, her soul quivering with an inner restlessness. She is stirred at the people’s demand for her banishment, the perception that she is born with a divine mission to serve humanity dawning more clearly on her. She implores her royal father to banish her! At this juncture the General comes to inform the King that the people, at the instigation of the Brahmins, have turned rebellious. Kshemankar, the most uncompromising of the die-hards, fans the flame of popular resentment and asks them to be firm of resolve, saying that an enemy, who is a woman, has the most fascinating way of disarming all opposition.

Supriya, his best friend, on the contrary, doubts whether it is true religion that claims the banishment of an innocent girl. He is silenced—just as Jai Singh was silenced by Raghupati in Visarjan by a piece of devastating casuistry of which he is a past master,—by Kshemankar who says that the religion of the forefathers, customs dearer than life, familiar moral and

1. ‘Mahakshan asiychhe antara chanchal...Kahare ke jane/ke
karlichhe ayojan amare ghira/Asitechhe jaitechhe firia nari
buhibare/Jagate kahara aji dakichhe amare.’ Sc.I

2. ‘Prajader purao prarthana. Mahakshan/Aseche nikate, Deo
more nirbasan. Pita...jara chahie nirbasan mor/Tara chahie
more...Sarbaloke jabo ami — Rajadware more jachiyachhe
bahir — sansar. Jani na kee kaj achhe/Asiyachhe mahakshan
...Ami swapna dekhi jege...Naukakhani teere bandha — ke
karibe par/Karnadher nai — ghiheen jatree sabe/Bose
achhe nirgasas — mone hoy take/Ami jena jete pari, ami
jena jani/Teerer sandhan, mor sparshe naukakhani/Pabe jeno
pran...Kotha hote biswas amar/Alo mone? Raj kanya ami,
dekhina/bahira sansar — bose sochi ak thani/Jamabadi —
chaturdike sukher prachir/Amare ke kore voy sharer bahir/
Ke jana go/Bandhan kete dao, Maharaj, Ogo chedo de Ha,
Kanya Ami nahi aj/Nahi Raj-Suta — je mor antarayami/
Agnimoyee Mahabanee, Sei sudhu Ami.’ Sc.I.

3. ‘Dharmadharma Satyasatya/ke kare bichar/Apan bishwase
matta kariyachho athir, sudhu dalbendhe sabe/Satyar mimaanga
habe sudhu uchharobe/Jukti kichu nahe?’ Supriya.Sc.II.

4. ‘Mul dharma ak bate, bivimma adhar...’...Pitri-dharma/
Prana-priya pratha, chira acharita karma/Chireparichita neeti...
....” — Kshemankar, Sc.II.
established mode of living, have to be preserved for the
weal of the widest commonalty against all forces threaten­
ing to disintegrate them. Supriya, ever loyal to his friend,
submits to his friend's aggressively dominating will.

The conflict of the drama which began as a clash of
opposed religious ideas, taking the form of the conservative
reaction of the old order to the challenge of the new, hence­
forth is transformed into a human conflict, the clash between
two friends, holding two contrary religious views, over a
woman who embodies in herself the spirit of the everlasting
human morality of mercy and love for all.

In the fourth and last scene all the forces of the
drama come to a head, Supriya, as the influence of Kshemankar
has been withdrawn, being drawn to Malini. From Supriya she
learns of his great friend, who has been to him his companion,
brother and master. Supriya, carried away by Malini, who
has given him 'a second birth', has disclosed to the King the
letter of Kshemankar 'in which he wrote that he was coming
with a foreign army at his back, to wash away the new faith
in blood,' and to put Malini to death. A moment's delay would
have brought dire destruction on the royal family. The grateful
King in return offers to reward him. Supriya, smitten inwardly
for the betrayal of his dearest friend, curses himself.

The last moment of the drama reaches the highest point
of intensity. Kshemankar who is brought before the King in
chains invites his friend to receive judgment at the hands of
1. Death, the ultimate Judge of virtue. Supriya, whose love for his friend has not waned in the least, readily agrees, explaining that he has betrayed his best friend to be true to his inner faith, the breath of his soul. As Supriya unsuspectingly nears his friend, Kshemankar hurla his iron chain on his head and kills Supriya. Falling on the dead body of his friend Kshemankar calls for the executioner. The King orders his sword to be brought. The curtain comes down as Malini faints with her spontaneous appeal to her father to forgive Kshemankar who has killed the person she loves. The last moment reaches the peak of concentration in four cryptic utterances by the four principal characters.

4. Sate.

The plot of this short, stirring drama, as in his other poetic dramas, is derived. Befitting the exigency of a poetic drama, the characters are conceived in a state of deep emotion, heightened pitch of their emotion making 'poetry' their natural medium of expression. The plentiful poetical fare, however, is ever subdued here by the dramatic needs. The scene, a battlefield, shows Amabei and her father, Vinayak Rao, just after he has wreaked vengeance by killing his

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1. 'Mrityu jini tanharei Dharmaraj jani/Dharmar pariksha tanrī kaache.'

2. 'Bandhu ak achhe/Sresthatama, se amar atmar niswas, /Sab chhede rakhiyachi tahari biswa, /Pran-sakhé, Dharma se amar.' — Supriya, Sc.IV.

Supriya:

3. "Devi, tabo jaati (Mrityu)
Kshemankar- M bnr/Dako, dako ghotokere.
Raja- Ke acoh 6 rei/An kharga.
Malini- Maharaj, Kharm Kshemankar."
daughter's Muslim husband, by whom she was forcibly snatched away on the night of her marriage with Joevaji, to whom she was 'sacredly affianced.' In this unnatural act, by which he remorselessly inflicts the curse of widowhood on his own daughter, Vinayak Rao sees the fulfilment of his 'honour'. He is tragically blind to his daughter's point of view. He, however, cannot induce his daughter to undergo a process of prescribed expiatory rules to wash away the stain of unsanctified marriage for she yielded only when she found her infidel conqueror a worthy and honourable man, whom she married and loved, and to whom she bore a son. She says she has offended only against the narrow 'man-made laws', but not against the eternal 'heaven's ordinance.' But she has brought upon herself the wrath of the enraged community whose laws she has violated. Ramabai, her mother, with all the intensity of her orthodoxy, bursts on the scene. Ruthless in her observance of the orthodox social ethics, she insists upon her daughter being burnt with Joevaji, (and made a 'satee') now dead, whose spirit, she thinks, claims her. The conflict now takes the form of a grim battle over two ideals of womanly 'honour.' According to the mother's moral standard, the daughter is a fallen woman. The interaction of these three sharply delineated characters constitutes the dramatic action. Ramabai, though fallen in her mother's eye, claims that she is as pure as her mother. The mother and the daughter, firm in their respective unflinching stands, make up the conflict of this moving dramatic episode. The father's soul, thrown between the two, moving from the blind spirit of revenge to vindicate
his honour to the pitiful awakening within him of the true nature of morality, is a touching sight. When he sees that his daughter, though outside his fold, is still a true wife and mother, hence morally unblemished, he, his conscience so long obscured by bigoted zeal, is now convinced that her action calls for no condemnation, for the morality of her action is quite in harmony with the universal morality. In play after play, Tagore has been presenting the stirring drama of the clash of religious principles, and the dramatic change of opinion in the orthodox mind about apparent apostasy.  

Vinsyak Rao, on whom the realization has dawned, endeavours in vain to restrain his overzealous wife from executing her unrelenting resolve. Helpless to save his own daughter from a situation which is his own creation, he stands as a disabled spectator to the fanatical fury of his wife, who, ironically enough, is perpetrating her sinister act in all good faith. In her passion to raise 'a true wife's memorial over the ashes' of her daughter, she forgets that she is 'desecrating the shrine of the eternal Lord of Death.' The grim irony of the last few lines enhances the tragic effect.

1. 'Nitya-dharme karo jayee/Kshudra Dharma Hate.'  
2. The word 'Bidharmee' is used again and again in these plays.  
3. 'Samajer cheye Hridayer Nitya-dharma Satya chiradin'.
5. Gandharir Abedan:

Each of the three pieces, Gandharir Abedan, Naras Das and Karna-Kunti-Sambad is a moment taken from the national epic, the Maha-Bherata. Each represents through its limited action the concentrated essence of the vast epical background against which it is set. Each contains a moment of intense life, a strong situation, instinct with drama. The characters in each are legendary figures. Each is essentially a poetic drama. The pure, precise, classical diction in each not only suggests the grandeur of the e-ic, of which it is an element, but also recaptures the soul of an ancient age, the legendary past of India. In each the dramatic conflict is based on the clash of moral ideals.

'Gandharir - Abedan', the first of the three, presents a situation tense with moral drama. Duryodhana has gained victory by defrauding the Pandavas; Gandhari, his mother, burning with a moral indignation, begs her husband, the head of the Kauravas, to renounce their son, who represents the spirit of the most sinister unrighteousness. But Dhritarashtra, who has tried in vain to appeal to his conscience, cannot accede to her stern moral demand, saying that he cannot give up a sinful son who 'is abandoned of God.' Gandhari prepares herself to receive the remorseless divine judgment that comes in the wake of deeds that defy the laws of eternal morality.

As in 'Satee', here too the dramatic interest centres round father-mother-child relationship, though the moral pattern of the triangular contest supporting or sustaining the two plays does not correspond on all points. For here
it is the son, who is the wrong-doer, it is the mother, who sternly voices, not the partiality expected in family relationships, but the everlasting truth, and it is the father who, in siding with his son, chooses 'to share his guilt and tread the path of destruction, his solitary companion.' All the three characters are individualized, but it is Dhritarashtra's character which has most enriched the play. Duryodhan and Gandhari stand firm and wide apart with two antagonistic moral ideals. It is Dhritarashtra, who, inwardly torn between his realization of the truth his son has so flagrantly outraged and his weakness for his son on whom he dotes, introduces into the drama the note of human wavering, the element of inner conflict.

Structurally, however, the piece is the weakest. It divides itself into three parts not organically integrated. The first stage is full of expository matter. The son, exulting over his ignoble victory, and the father trying to convince him of the enormity of his unjust deed, stand face to face. The wordy duel in which the two are engaged does not throb with much drama, though it fully reveals the relationship of the father and the son so necessary for the later development of the drama. Dr. Thompson is of opinion that

1. (a) 'Pitri-sneha mor/kichu yadi hras hoto/Sumi sukothor/ Suhrid a ninda-bakya.....hato kalyan/Adharme diyechi-yog, harayechi-gyan, /Atro-sneha. Karitechi sarbanas tor/Atro-sneha..... Andha Ami antare bahire/Chiradin/Tore, loye pralay - timire chaliyachi.....'
(b) 'Brihata, buddhi-hato/Durbal áwhhay pari, spamanakhat......Hay dharma/Haire prabritti-beg. Ke bujhibe marma Sangsarer'.
(c) 'Papi-putra tyajya bidhatar/Tai tare tyajite na pari'
here 'rhetoric wars with rhetoric.' There is more. We get the full picture of the unrighteous moral stand of Duryodhana who thinks that in kingscraft morality has no place. It is the picture of a sinister moral ideal of a mean and 'seething jealousy' towards his cousins, of a soulless ruthless policy, that the dramatist seeks to delineate through their dialogue.

The second stage of the drama shows the father and the mother warring over their son. The real drama is here. Gandhari comes with the prayer to her husband 'to renounce Duryodhana, the unrighteous.' The son, unable to face the force of his mother's uncompromising moral austerity, has already taken leave. It is a good dramatic touch, showing the contrasted relationship between the father and the son on the one hand and the mother and the son on the other. Dhritarastra's doting affection for his wicked son and Gandhari's plea for moral justice come to a moving clash. The drama reaches its highest point of intensity here.

The third stage shows us Gandhari, shining in solitary majesty, for though her prayer has been turned down, her superior moral stature is established. Duryodhana and his wife are contrasted with the Pandavas and their wife, Draupadi, chiefly through her attitude to both. She reproaches Bhramati for jubilating over her husband's ignoble and unrighteous victory and blesses the Pandavas, who have come to take leave of her on the eve of their departure for the forest.

1. 'Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist', p.161.
2. 'Lokadhanna Rajadherma ak nahe pita...Rajadherma Bhrratri-Dharma bandhurharme na/Fudhu jaya-dharma achhe.' 'Nindare karibo dhwangsha kantha-rudhha kari.....'
In the epic, where the moral motif was only implied, King Somaka had little of the inner laceration of feelings which is the chief interest of the dramatized rendering.

Somaka, the Kshattriya King of Videha, was blessed in his old age with a son. In blind infatuation for this object of his affection, he neglected the duties of a king and a kshatriya. One day, when he was seated in his court, and Ritvik, the royal priest, was standing before him to pronounce benediction, the pitiful cry of the child reached his ears. In unseemly haste, the King rushed towards the inner apartments, forgetting his dignity and duty. Soon after, as he returned shame-faced, Ritvik, with his wounded Brahmanical pride, resentfully reproved his conduct. He said to the King, "If you must be delivered from the curse of having only one child, I can show you the way. But so hard is it that I feel certain you will fail to follow it." This piqued the Kshattriya King's pride, who spiritedly replied, 'I swear by all that is sacred, as a Kshattriya and a King, I will not shrink, but perform whatever you may ask, however hard.' The priest, heartless stickler for orthodox scriptural injunction, asked him to perform 'yajna' and to sacrifice this only son, dearer to him than life, into the holy fire, so that the rising smoke may bring him progeny. The assembly stood aghast at this abominable proposal. But the dismayed King, bound by oath, agreed. On the appointed day, the sacrificial fire was
lit, and the inhuman deed of a father killing his own son was perpetrated. Long after this, 'the shade of King Somaka, faring to heaven in a chariot' is stopped by 'that of Ritvik, his former high priest' who is serving his term of punishment in the Purgatory for committing the sinful act. The King, smitten with remorse for his own sin, forgoes his 'Heaven' deserved by his expiatory repentance.

_Naras Bas_ is a play where the whole dramatic emotion is shaped by the brooding over past actions. It is an experiment in evoking dramatic emotion by narrative poetry. The circumstances in which King Somaka sacrificed his only son into fire at the instigation of the priest, Ritvik, are vividly recalled. The characters of the drama are not living human beings but souls after death, and, as such, the dramatic action consists of the retrospective vision of past events. It is a drama made wholly of tragic pathos, the dramatic action consisting in the crescendo of the feelings of Somaka. The tragic pathos of what King Somaka did at the instigation of his preceptor is recaptured wholly through narrative. It is the narrative that helps the dramatic artist to gather together material spread over a longer period and gain a unity of impression. Further, it is through the narrative that the past is related to the present. For, the drama consists of a moment on which is brought to bear all the force of the cumulative effect of the different phases and stages of the past events. The last moment of the drama is tense with suspense as to the nature of Somaka's reaction, when reminded of
his heinous past. It is his Judgment Day. Dharmaraj Yama has sanctioned his ascension to Heaven while condemning to hell his associate in the atrocious act of violating an eternal law of human nature. But Somaka, remorsefully made conscious of his heartless act, feels that he cannot morally claim 'heaven', the abode of the truly virtuous after death. The action reveals his twofold glory, once when in order to vindicate his Kshatriya honour he disregarded his natural affection for his son and a second time when he wants to share the punishment of Ritvik in whose sinful deed he was an accomplice.

In characteristic Tagore manner, the drama ends with a beautific action in the form of a noble selflessness to mitigate the sufferings of others and to glorify and elevate Hell. In 'Biday Abhishap' we get an idealised picture of the ancient Asram life of India, in 'Narak Bas' we get a vivid picture of Hell, the background of the dramatic action conjured before our imagination through poetry.

1. 'Natta hoye kshatriya-shankara/Nija kartabyer truti karite kshalan/Nispap siure mor korechhii arpan/Hutasune, Pita hoye. Birya apanar/Winduk-samaj-majhe korite prachar Naradharma, Rajadharma, Pitridharma, Hay anala korechhi vasma. Se tap antare ditechhii dagi nitya-atisap........ Ami-o ki yabo swarga dwore?/Debata bhalite pare se dristi tahar, Se antim abiman.'

2. 'Jay Jay Maharaj, Punya-fala-tyagee/Nispap Narak basee, he maha-bairagee.'
Karna-Kunti-Sambad, a short dramatic dialogue, is as characteristic of Tagore's genius as any other. It contains in a nutshell the quintessence of Tagore's dramatic imagination and art - a moral problem and action marked by ennobled gesture of humanity.

The scene is the night before the clash of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Kunti, the queen mother of the Pandavas, actuated by obvious self-interest, has come to reclaim her pre-nuptial son, Karna, deserted by her at his birth, but now the General of the Kaurava host. The mother has come to win back the son she once disowned. Karna meets his mother at last, but only when Karna and Arjuna, off-springs of the same womb, have become each other's hated rivals. Karna, though bound in honour to help the Kauravas, the enemy of his Pandava-brothers is deeply stirred on learning that he is the abandoned son of Kunti, the mother of Arjuna, his sworn antagonist. For a moment the heart of Karna, thirsting for the love of the mother that gave him birth, is drawn towards Kunti. But the next moment he feels that he cannot go with Kunti, for that would be an act of shameful betrayal to his foster-mother, the charioteer's wife, and to his King Duryodhana, the Chief of the Kauravas. This wavering is the drama, a moment of intense crisis for the soul in a strange dilemma.

1. 'Suta jenanire chhele/Aj yadi Raj-jenanire mata beli/Kurupati keche baddha abhi je bandhane/Chhinna kare dhali yadi rajsinghasane/Tabe dhik more.'
Karna adheres to the highest ideals of manhood and honour. Kunti offers him a life of security and success and ease, the love of a mother, the respect of brothers, and the exalted position as the head of the Pandavas. Overcoming a passing mood of wavering, Karna, true to the ideal of manly honour, rejects the glory that comes to him, preferring to cast his lot with 'those who are doomed to defeat' and 'the desperate and the forlorn.' 'I am more truly,' says he, 'the son of a charioteer, and do not covet the glory of greater parentage.' The play ends with Karna's declaration to remain true to his ideal, even though it is to bring him struggle, suffering and certain defeat.

The play is a dramatic moment, but it is not a static moment. There is complete movement of a drama within. The drama moves forward and backward, opening up, in quick succession, ever new mental prospect and retrospect.

The whole drama is born of the impact of only two characters, poised against each other with the mighty hush of an epical vista behind them. The two characters represent the concentrated experience of two souls, two long life-times. We see in Kunti the recreant mother's grim tragedy, the touching irony of her life, cursed in her happiness, unable to stop the remorseless course of her own action. The tragic character of Karna, ennobled with the grim irony of his life and the heroic grandeur of his manly character, is majestically portrayed. The miniature drama throbs with sublime poetry,
recapturing the most stirring forces of the mighty epic, the background of the war, the tragic rivalry of Arjun and Karna, the impending cataclysm and the prophetic announcement of victory of the Pandavas.

1. "Aji a raja nir timirphalake/Pratya ksha karinu path nakshatra aloe/Ghor yudhaphal, Ai shanta mub stubdha-khane/Amanta akash hote pashichhe mone/Jayhin cheshtar sangsat, ashahin/Karmer udyan, -heritechi shantimaj/ Surya parimah, Je pakher parajak/Se pakha tyajite more koro na ahabhan./Joyee kok, raja hok Pandavasatan-Aci rabo nishphaler hatasher daile./Jama-ratte phele gachhe more dharatale/Namhin grihahin. Aji tamoni/Amart nirman chitte teyago janoni,/diptihin kishthin parabhapare./Sudhu a ashirbad diye jao more,/Jyolobe yaisholobe rajyalobhe;/Sarer sadgoti hote bhrasto nahi hai." — Karna.