CHAPTER V.

The Later Prose Drama.

'Rakta-Karabi' marks the culmination of his experiment with themes necessitating the direct use of symbolism. In the plays that follow Tagore's imagination returns from its cosmic wanderings, once again, to the familiar issues of human life, presenting man not in his universal, but personal, relationship. The projection in dramatic form of an essentially subjective vision of life is replaced here by a more objective dramatic conception. The story element is more accentuated, characters and action emerging in sharper outline.

His creative expression here is marked by an aesthetic urge to give dramatic form to his own stories, poems or early dramas. The process had started with the redramatization of 'Saradotsava', 'Achalsaytan' and 'Raja', as 'Rinashodha', 'Guru' and 'Arup Ratan' respectively, all being adapted for performance. These prose plays were written to meet the demand foractable plays, for by that time theatrical representation of his plays had become a regular feature of Shantiniketan life. An increasing tendency to conceive his plays in terms of stage representation is the general feature of these plays, a tendency which culminates, later, in dance-dramas, a type of play-making inseparable from the stage art. Naturally, the theatrical technique is inherent in his post-symbolic dramatic art.
Some of the new plays, 'Sodh-bodh', 'Griha-prabesh', and 'Bansaree' represent his experiments with themes of contemporary life, a new feature in his art. 'Nair Puja, 'Tapati' and 'Chandalika', have a remote setting. But, whether realistic or legendary the setting, the treatment is marked by his characteristic moral idealism. Each of these plays is permeated by a spiritual motif which seeks its release through the inner action of the characters in the play.

Prose is used in these plays as a vigorous, sparkling medium for the free play of his rich thought and imagination.

1. Sodh-Bodh

'Sodh-bodh', his first attempt at writing a drama in prose with a realistic theme, shows his new mood. The play is the dramatization of a short story, 'Karma-Phal', written originally in the dialogue form. Action concerns a section of the Anglicized Bengali society of the time, with its shallow, superficial values. Nalini, a bright young girl, belonging to the smart set, is the centre of attraction, and is courted by Arun Nandi, a successful, well-placed young man, outwardly an eligible candidate. Nalini, however, has a feeling heart and does not value outer qualities above the intrinsic goodness of heart and sincere love. The chief interest of the piece lies in the character and fortune of Satish, a young man sound at heart, but distracted by antagonistic pulls. Thrown between a strict father (Manmatha) and an indulgent mother (Bidhutzukhee) helped by a rich aunt (Sukumaree), Satish develops into a self-willed character.
The death of his father, who has disinherited him, and the birth of a child in their old age to his aunt and uncle (Sasadhar), whose property he was to inherit, accentuate his restlessness. The moral undertone is too obvious for the action, which culminates in the triumph of true love over circumstances, shows Satish, a devoted lover, struggling desperately with a rival far above him in means and status, to prove himself worthy of Nalini with whom he is finally united. This redeems Satish's imprudently spent life. The action of the play, spread over a long period, lacks in concentration necessary for an effective plot.

2. Griha-Prabesh:

Griha-prabesh, his next play, is a much better dramatic construction. It is based on his short story, 'Sosher-Ratri', and has a striking dramatic situation, which bears the mint mark of Tagore's characteristic art. The drama, a touching spectacle of the irony of the life of a dreamer on his deathbed, desperately clinging to his ideal of a happy home-life, is developed with a delicacy of feeling. The tragedy of Jatin's life lies in the unresponsiveness of his wife, for whom he has built at an enormous cost, his new house, which he calls 'the music of his soul in wood and bricks'. The loving


2. Jatin: Amar Manisaudha tairi sess hoe galo, sai khaborta

(Continued)
kindness with which Mashi tries to sustain his fond illusion in the face of impending disaster enhances the pathos of the situation. Her constant efforts to make Jatin's unfeeling wife love him, so that he may die in peace, proving abortive, she seeks to fill up the void by pouring all the affection of her heart on Jatin, from whom she conceals the apathy of his wife.

The dramatic action is developed through alternating scenes ('Bogir ghare' and 'Pasher ghare') showing the contrast between Jatin pursuing his cherished ideal and the grim reality of his actual circumstances. The characters are sharply delineated, each with a distinct function.

The dramatic emotion springs from Jatin's tense expectancy for his wife's love which is persistently foiled. He is half in love with death for his life is not crowned with love. With impending death, however, it dawns upon him that he has pursued all his life an illusory ideal of love,— and

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he prepares himself for death, his yearning being voiced through Himi’s song, in which his life of unrealised ideal finds solace. The climax worked up adroitly exhibits the irony of his wife’s belated appearance in his room and her repentance. She falls on his feet, but Jatin fails to recognize her.

Symbolism being a means of poetic intensification is resorted to when something beyond the scope of immediate representation has to be suggested. One such example is the ‘Door symbol which when opened signifies the liberation of spirit from bondage and confinement. It was first used in Dakghar. In Grihprabesh the opening of the door just before death, implies the right moment for the passing away of his soul.


2. Hiarti’s song – ‘Jiban-marsher seemana charae Bandhu he amar, rocho durnare.’

(a)

3. Jatin- ‘Darajata ki sab khule geche.’
Mashi: ‘Sab khuleche’ – Griha-prabesh.

(b) In Tapati on the eve of liberation, Samitra says, “Khule dao, khule dao, amansta dvar khule dao, ashbar dvar shong jebar dwer”. p.182. Tapati. Rabindra Rachanabali, XXI Vol.
In Bansharee when the heroine is awakened she asks, “De bhai sab darja khule” – p.96. Bansharee. Rabindra Rachanabali- Vol.XXIV.
3. Natir Puja:

Natir Puja, one of Tagore's successful stage plays, is typical of this new phase in his dramatic art and stagecraft. Simple in design, but moving in theme, it shows concentrated dramatic power. Its theme of religious martyrdom emphasises that true faith is the expression of pure spirit which is independent of birth and rank, the external cloak of human soul. The drama is made of a Buddhist legend exhibiting a low-born dancing-girl rising to the supreme height of her greatness when challenged to sacrifice her life for her faith.

Set against the tremendous upheaval in human spirit during a religious war, the dramatic action brings to a focus the essential history of the time, in its political, psychological and spiritual aspects. The drama is an example of his new art, in its straightforward development of action, in its psychological inter-play of motives, and in its observance of the classical unities.

Srimati, the palace dancer, (who responds to the 'call' of Upali, the Bhikshu, to sacrifice her best in the name of Lord Buddha, when the princesses are asleep,) has been chosen to place offerings at the sacred altar of Lord Buddha on the occasion of His Birthday. This starts the conflict, for this especial favour to a 'depraved' woman, causes a stir among the princesses of the royal household, who never miss an opportunity to spite and humiliate her. Princess Ratnabali, 1

1. 'Ratnabali: Keo shohi! Srimati korbe pujar udyog, tomra paricharikan dal korbe chamar beejon! Natir Puja', Act 1, P.163, Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.XVIII
of all others, her antagonist, smitten by envy, determines to prevent her from gaining the exalted honour, which should have been theirs by right. The forces of conflict, externalized in their clash, show Srimati determined to conduct worship though the service is forbidden on pain of death by the command of the King, and Ratnabali, bent upon foiling her sacred mission. Srimati's faith is subjected to a severe trial when Ratnabali obtains the King's orders that, palace dancer as she is, she will have to dance before the altar of Lord Buddha. Spiritually strengthened and elevated, for she sees in the command a divine call for self-realization, the worshipper-dancer carries out both the commands, one sacred and the other sacrilegious, through the self-same act of heroic devotion by offering worship in the form of dance. The climactic spectacle of her noble self-sacrifice is a moving dramatic action and its effect on other characters, especially Ratnabali, devoid of spiritual perception, who is converted.

1. 'Srimati: Prabhu ahban korechhen amake. Badha yabe kete. Aji jobe?
   Vadra: Rajar bishao sarate parbe?
   Ratnabali: Tumi Rajar bishao mano na, atobaro tomar sahas.
   Srimati: Pujote Rajar badha na.
   Ratnabali: Nai Rajar badha? Satyi naki? Jeyo tumi pujo korte, ami dekhbo du-chokher ash mitye.'
   Act 2, pp.171-172, Ibid.

2. 'Srimati: Prabhu kaakh theke astra payschi, chalchhe amar yuddha, Nar parasta hok, Prabhu jaya hoki!- Act 2, Ibid.

3. 'Ratnabali: Tora bhabish toder natun dharmar natun gara papke ami grahye kori....Aoi Hitri-swaddhir have tomoder saakhe laglo dekhchhi. Amake paper bhoj dekhio na, ami sishu not.' Natir Puja, Act IV.
is highly dramatic. Srimati's death, as Abhijit's (in Mukta-dhara) earlier, is not tragic in essence, for this self-dedication is the means of spiritual self-fulfilment, for which "men have willingly sacrificed their vital needs and courted death in order to express their 'dharma', which represents the truth of the Supreme Man.

Through the inner drama of Srimati's evolution to a martyr, spiritual and mystical elements flow into the play. Her inner preparation for the final dedication, motivated by the 'call' of Upali at the outset, is shown through revealing songs bringing out her inner awakening. Malati is to Srimati what Sanjay is to Abhijit in Mukta-dhara, a side-character through which the spiritual working of the chief character is unfolded. Lokeswari, the queen mother, in whom antagonistic religious forces have caused an inner turmoil, is an admirable character-study. A soul torn between conflicting urges is Tagore's favourite dramatic idea and he turns to it repeatedly.

1. The Religion of Man, p.144.
2. (a) Ar rekほna endhre omy dekhta dao
   (b) 'He Moha-jeeban, Ne Moha-marar, lainoo saran, lainoo saran', etc.
3. 'Mrityur Singha-dwar diyei jenmor jaya-yatra'—Srimati. Act 2, Ibid.
Tapati, claimed by its author to be a 'perfect' drama, is 'Raja-O-Rani' recast after four decades. The result is virtually a new drama with renovated technique and dramatic motivation. The changes effected in plot and characters demonstrate his latter-day dramatic method. In the earlier play, the young dramatist, is engaged in adapting his dramatic imagination to an alien mould. The latter play, a product of maturity, is written in the light of his distinctive stage art.

'Raja-O-Rani' is romantic, Tapati is classical in spirit and form. The verse medium is replaced by prose, developed now into a powerful dramatic medium. The style is chastened and restrained, befitting the involvements of exalted personages in a remote setting. Tapati is compact in form; the amplitude, that overloaded the dramatic structure of 'Raja-O-Rani', is eliminated. The plot concentrates on the central issue which is the drama of the conjugal dis-harmony of King Vikram and Queen Sunita. The episode of Kumarsen and Ila with its paraphernalia, which in the earlier play, distracted attention from the main course of the drama, is dropped. Kumarsen is there but as the Prince of Kashmir standing by his sister. Sankar, the old, loyal attendant of Kumarsen, is restrained and becomes a very moving character. Rebati, modelled on Lady Macbeth, is absent. The forces

2. "Rurano natak-ke natun kore jakhan lekha gele takhan purataner moho katiye tar natun parichay-ke paka korte gele avinoy kore dekhan darak. Sei chesta korte prabhita hoyechhi."
of political rebellion and rivalry are kept in the background. Of the new figures, the most important are the two supporting characters, Naresh, the step-brother of Vikram, and Dipasha, the companion of Sumitra. Shown in love with each other, they fulfil an important dramatic function by helping the delineation of the motives of the principal characters—moving close to the tumultuous course of their clash.

In 'Tapati' the complex pattern of the discord is brought out at the very outset in its emotional and political bearings. The back history of their union strengthens its psychological foundation. The conflict starts with Sumitra's insistence on having queenly rights in the interest of her subjects which Vikram consistently resists, by telling her that her rights are confined to his heart and do not go beyond it. The dramatic action starts with Sumitra's taking up the

1. 'Vikram: Dekho priye, rajer hridaye tomar adhikar, rajar kartyabye nai Ae katha mane rekho.'
Sumitra: Maharaj, tomar bilashe ami saangini, tomar raj-dharme ami keu nai E katha mane rekhe amar sukhe nei.'
Vikram: Tumi jachchona keno, Kisher sei sunkha abaran. Apnake prakash karo - dekha dao dhara dao.'
Vikram: Amar rajkosh tomar payer talay sampurna fele dichobi - tumi prajader dan korte chao, karo dan joto khushi. Tomar dakhniner plabon baye jak a rajye.'
Tapati, Act 1, Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.XXI.
cause of the oppressed subjects, which is given human docu-
mentation in the episode of Ratneswar, who has come to seek
justice with a complaint against Siladitya, one of the King's
governors, responsible for the disappearance of his sister
while on her pilgrimage. Vikram treats it as an interference
in state affairs. The popular uprising and Sumitra's leaving
the country occurring simultaneously mark the turning point.
Their impact on Vikram is dramatic, for it brings out the
demoniac fury latent in his egotistic nature. He resolves
to capture her at any cost and does not turn back even when
he is told that she has taken asylum inside the sacrosant
Martanda-Mandir of Dhruva-Teertha. The course of the drama-
tic action moves in a crescendo to the natural climax repre-
senting the effect of his action recoiling on him as an
irresistible spiritual force.

Sumitra's determination to end her life by throwing her-
self into flames is perfectly motivated. She attempted it.

1. Naresh: A purush noy, a asangyam - ..... je unmatatay
stodin apnake bismrita hote lajja pai ni ao sei
unmadmar-i rupantar. Kono akare mono-madakata
chai.' - p.155. Ibid.
2. 'Vikram: Amar prem, a prapando, a prachando, ate achhe
amar scurya - amar haj-prataper cheye a chhoto
noy.' - p.147, Ibid.
3. 'Vikram: Pedanato dhuli shyea kashmirer chokher upar
diye niye asbo take bandini kore jemon kore
dase-ke niye sabe.' - p.155. Ibid.
4. 'Bipasha: A-loker dutee jara bhoger bandhane tader bandhan
rudra deb sahya korte paren na.' - p.168. Ibid.
once before when she was prevailed upon by the city elders to save Kashmir by consenting to marry victorious Vikram. Her self-immolation is not merely a means of foiling Vikram's plans, but is an instrument of his regeneration. It is a spiritual hymn of sacrifice to liberate her husband from the obsession of his Self. The climax of the drama, with Vikram standing before the flames consuming Sumitra, is so charged with emotion that speech is rendered superfluous; only the singing of scriptural hymns denoting the liberation of soul can justly express the emotion of the moment. The song and the religious note with which the play opens and ends strike the key-note of the drama and broaden the arena of its import.

5. Bansaree:

Bansaree is yet another attempt by Tagore to make drama out of contemporary life. The dramatic personæ come from the sophisticated set. But, here too, the forces working are those of eternal human morality. The plot works out a theme based on two ideals of love, the love that binds and the love that liberates.

2. 'Bayuranilamanritamathedam vashmaam sareeram. Om krato smara kritam smara. Krato smara kritam smara.'
Bansaree loves Soma-Shankar passionately. This, Purandar-Sanyasi, an idealist, feels would eclipse Soma-Shankar and hinder the completion of his mission. To free Soma-Shankar from her sterilising domination, he plans the marriage of Soma-Shankar with Sushama, his disciple who is trained by Purandar to help Soma-Shankar in the fulfilment of the sacred mission of his life.

The conflict hinges on this issue. The dramatist depicts the heart-rending anguish of Bansaree, for she is not the type of girl to yield without protest. She cannot surrender Soma-Shankar. She confronts Soma-Shankar and tells him bluntly that he is behaving like a grown-up child who has been confounded by an idealist who would not acknowledge the claim of the flesh and blood. Purandar, who meets


her next, tells her that he values only the higher urge in man. The conflict thus crystallized into a clash between the love on the physical plane as represented by Bansaree and that on the spiritual plane which Purandar wants to be realized in the union of Soma-Shankar and Sushama. In desperation Bansaree decides to marry Kshitish, a novelist, in no way a match for her. Her love for Soma-Shankar was so passionate and intense that disappointment flings her to this suicidal decision to spite Soma-Shankar in offended pride. This marks the crisis of the play, which is resolved by Soma-Shankar meeting her, in the course of which he makes an ardent confession of his sincere love for her. This is the turning point in the drama for now she knows that she has not lost him but has a secure place in his heart. Spiritually enlightened by this realization she can now release Soma-Shankar to marry Sushama. The play ends with a meeting between Purandar and Bansaree, the latter reaffirming her changed outlook.

Bansaree is an experiment in unfolding the drama of the spiritual urges motivating the actions of the characters placed

1. 'Ja bandhe rakhe pashur mato prakritir-gara prabrittir
   bandhane ba manusher gara dasatter shrinkahe dhik take.'

2. 'Soma-Shanker: Tomake biswas kari. Amar satya kokhondi
   dhanga pedbe na tomar hate. Sanketer mukher jaber
   pathe amake haya korte parbe na tumi.
   Bansaree: Satyi kore balo, ajo ki amake sediner maitoi
   tatekhani bhalobase!
   Soma-Shanker: 'Tato khanie'. - p.194, Ibid.

3. 'Bansaree: Ar kichha-i chai na amai. Sushamake niye purna
   hok tomar brate, take eersha karbo na....Mane kore-
   chhilom amar sab hariyeche. Fire peye anekkhani beshi
   kore peloom. Nijer hate periye dao amake.' Bansaree,
   Rabindra Rachanabali, p.194.
in the realistic set-up of familiar life. The play is sustained by a sparkling dialogue through which the social milieu against which the play is set, is depicted.

6. Chandalika:

'Chandalika', one of his last plays, displays his characteristic dramatic method, which makes its first appearance in 'Prakritir Pratishodh', his first significant drama, of presenting the conflict of two contrary forces within one soul in course of its transition from one moral plane to another. Its dramatic form is classical in its concentration, the dramatic action being heightened by the intensity of vertical movement. Though written in prose, the prose of his last days, interspersed with powerful songs constantly illuminating the complex nature of the working of the soul, 'Chandalika' is essentially a poetic drama, making its conversion, soon after, into a dance-drama, automatic. It is a two-character drama, the interest being sustained by the dialogue of Prakriti, the heroine, and her mother. The third character, that of Ananda, is kept in the background till the very last moment. Of action on the outer plane, there is hardly any.

The play is an example of building and holding a situation to the best advantage. The situation shows the impetuous heroine in a moral crisis. The play opens with Prakriti, a despised low-caste girl roused to a consciousness of her
human worth by Ananda, a Buddhist monk, who accepts water from her— an act of vast social import in a country where caste-motive is very dominant. Its effect on the drama is profoundly psychological for Prakriti falls in love with her saviour whom she passionately desires to possess. This involves her in an elemental conflict, of animal passion and ideal love. Seeing that Ananda is not responding to her love, she induces her mother, a dealer in necromancy, to work her spell on the unresponsive ascetic. There is a conflict in Ananda too, reinforcing that of Prakriti. By the happy device of the magic mirror, the inner conflict of Ananda—his tremendous struggle to resist the earthly pull—is revealed to Prakriti, and through her reactions to his condition, to the audience. Thereby, our attention is kept focussed on the spiritual ferment in Prakriti, the chief concern of the drama. Ironically enough, Prakriti becomes the cause of the mortification and degradation of her liberator and one whom she so deeply loves. The turning point, which is also the crisis of the drama, comes, when Prakriti,


realising that she has degraded her object of love, who 
succumbs to her evil sway, is stricken with remorse and 
releases Ananda from the evil grip of her sensual desire. 
This marks her transition from the ecstasy of physical 
desire to a spiritual liberation. Chandalika bows before 
Ananda, who makes his only physical appearance on the stage 

to bless her, at the end of the drama. It is the drama of 
h her two-fold liberation, first from the curse of a low birth 
and later from the grip of a debasing passion.

The handling here of the Jataka legend, the source of 
the drama, is typical of Tagore. In the original story, 
there is no trace of the inner conflict in Prakriti. In the 
drama her character is humanised and is made into a sensitive 
instrument for displaying her spiritual conversion as an act 
of the human spirit, the thrust of the evolutionary urge in 
human nature, and not of a manifestation of Lord Buddha's 
supernatural powers, as in the legend.

1. "Prakriti: Prabhu, esechho amake ud-dhay korte - tai ato 
dukkha se pele - Kharma karo, Kharma karo. Assem 
gani padaghatte door kore dno. Tena esechhi 
tomake mati-to noile kemon kore amake tuchle 
niye jabe tomar poomya-loke! Ogo Nirmal, paye 
tomar dhocio legechha, swarthak habe sei dhocio 
lega. Smar maya-abar porbe khose tomar paye, 
dhocio sab nebe moochhe. Jai hok, tomar jai 
hok, tomar jai hok." - Chandalika.