Chapter V

Conclusion

Studying Tagore is a soul enriching experience. The plays of Tagore taken for study in the present thesis are an important part of his literary oeuvre. His plays like his novels and stories are vitally important to understand Tagore’s philosophy and ideas on humanity, man as an individual, religion, society, science and gender disparity.

Perhaps, the most important aspect of Tagore’s drama is the way tradition has been redefined in it. The present thesis takes into account his views vis-à-vis tradition and modernity in separate chapters. There seems to be no clash of ideas in Tagore in respect of abiding by the traditions of Indian culture or embracing the radicalism of modern times. His ideas are a beautiful blend of both and he always voiced his thoughts unequivocally.

While reading Tagore, the reader develops an understanding of dialectical relationship between the cultures of east and west. Tagore’s idea of the modern sensibility transcends the barriers of uniculturalism. He also seems to believe that awareness of other cultures leads to an inherent flexibility and tolerance. His drama suggests that the awareness of different cultures acquaints a person with the ultimate truth. For this reason, Tagore’s works have been popular across cultures.

Tagore’s philosophy of life combines the best of the eastern and the western values. His vision, thus, is essentially harmonious. Tagore’s faith in man and divinity was
absolute. His concern for women and for children, his sympathy for the poor and the
downtrodden, his philosophical insight and worldly wisdom are all evident in his writing.

As the world celebrates the 150th birth anniversary year of Tagore there has been a
shift in perception of several facets of his creative genius. The shifting perspective views
him as a more radical author. Tagore is viewed as an activist who protested against all
kinds of discrimination and societal taboos. Radice aptly underlines the importance of
Tagore’s ideas in the following words: “With our world now facing unprecedented
challenges from overpopulation, global warming and environmental degradation, Tagore
is likely to seem an increasingly compelling voice” (11).

As a humanitarian, Tagore was terribly distressed to see how in India social ills
and problems like illiteracy, untouchability and class and gender disparities were eating
into the vitals of the society. He viewed these problems as responsible for creating a
cultural void. Tagore always experienced deep agony when he saw the suffering of the
people. His plays Sanyasi, Chandalika, Natir-puja, Sacrifice, Karna and Kunti and
Achalayatan deal with many issues and problems of the contemporary society. The issues
taken up by Tagore during his times are still as relevant as they were almost a century
ago. Many evils that are still prevalent have always aimed at disintegrating social,
religious, political and economic fabric of society.

Tagore as a staunch optimist always believed in the eternal possibilities of human
resources and human mind. In his view: “An individual must remain an individual, and
by remaining as such, must explore and expand his priceless individuality for the
goodness of one and all” (qtd. in Chakrabarti 2). Admittedly, with all moral, social,
political, economic and intellectual awakenings a sense of hopelessness and desolation has pervaded modern society. Tagore foresaw that civilisation would be reduced to a mockery. Similarly directionless education, he knew, would lead to further degeneration. Our education, lamented Tagore, has not been successful in moulding generations of individuals to be responsible. Tagore pointedly describes in his play *Red Oleanders*, "Whither education and, for that end in view, emancipation of individuality?" (Chakrabarti 2-3).

As already observed, there is a perfect fusion of tradition and modernity in Tagore’s drama. It redefines tradition and reflects modern sensibility in so many ways. In his plays we come across not only some novel and unusual themes but also themes dealing with taboo-subjects of his times such as the intrinsically human conflict between desire, renunciation and spirituality. His characters are not perfect men and women. They have the strength of mind having clear and indomitable ideas. In the path of their life they grow by learning their lessons from their own mistakes. They also develop an impeccable capability to balance their heart’s conflict between spirituality and desire at the same time. *Sanyasi, Sacrifice, Chandalika, Natir Puja, Malini* and *Muktadhara* are the plays with the themes of desire, realisation of self and final renunciation. He brings together traditional values and modern sensibility in all these plays. This accounts for the timeless appeal of his drama. His characters are archetypal and universal at the same time. They embody traits, which make them relevant for all ages.

This quality of his drama has always added to his stature as a playwright. A many-sided genius, his awareness of social, political, religious issues was extraordinary. His innovative ideas related to education and his advocacy of the concept of one world,
are evidence of his quintessentially modern sensibility. Tagore deeply loved his nation and its people. He was genuinely concerned about the fate of country and its various issues. But his burning patriotism did not prevent him from looking upon the entire world as a ‘single nest for humanity’ (Naravane 9). More than a nationalist he was a humanist. His concern was not only about his nation but towards all human beings.

Tagore’s drama is a vehicle of revolutionary ideas—sometimes stating things directly, at other times suggesting them in a subtle way reveals a complex, evolving mind, a versatile genius. These plays do not deal with only local issues of transitory importance. They contain critical judgments on some of the permanent problems of life and hence “their importance would grow and not diminish with the passage of time” (Chakravorty 111-12). Perhaps no other playwright incorporates the composite cultural values of the east and the west like Tagore. He drew inspiration from the Upanishads, Buddha, the rationalism of western thought, and humanism of Jesus at the same time.

He knew the value of simplicity and renunciation, but he refused to turn his back upon the joys of the world. Throughout his long life he preserved his curiosity, his sense of wonder, his fascination for the smallest details of life, his deep feeling for nature. He was wholly free from aberrations and exaggerations. Through his art and his life, he showed that ‘a man can be unusual without being abnormal’ (Naravane 9).

Tagore strongly opposed religious fanaticism, fierce nationalism, social injustice, mindless adherence to convention, the misuse of scientific knowledge, race, caste and gender prejudices. In times of divisibility, these issues assume great significance.
Tagore’s plays are about the fundamental ideas and experiences. He was liberal enough to view tradition in an altogether different way. Thus, his drama came to be appreciated a great deal by people with modern sensibility. It has been remarked that Tagore did not write plays for the public but created a public for his plays. He became immensely popular as a playwright because he could arouse the interest of public. Many of Tagore’s plays reveal his attitudes and insights on basic philosophical and social issues. It is suggested that by introducing tragic conflict in many of his important plays, Rabindranath has moved away from classical tradition towards Western models.

As noted already, Tagore was deeply influenced by the classical and religious literature. Muktadhara shows prince Abhijit following the path of truth and in Red Oleanders, Nadini makes the King to reach for the path of freedom for himself and liberate his oppressed subjects from the tyranny and greed for gold.

The theme and content of the Red Oleanders and Muktadhara are essentially modern. Both are the symbolical representation of the tragedy of modern life where technology places great power in the hands of man but he is unable to combine power with the virtue. As a result, his peace of mind and happiness are gone. The play Muktadhara has a political theme and describes how the thirst for power brings about tyranny and oppression. On the other hand Red Oleanders shows how greed of gold transforms man into a lifeless machine. In these plays Tagore condemns technology because it detaches man from religion and humanity. Both hunger for power and greed is the root causes of the misfortunes of the modern man.
Tagore’s creative genius cannot be dissociated from the warp and woof of the fabric of ancient Indian culture. So to the world he remained “the eternal embodiment of the ancient wisdom of India and the East” (Sil xv). Thus, for Tagore, writing was a creative medium of cross-cultural communication which facilitated transfer of ideas and thoughts of different races and people—that have become the common heritage of mankind and a prime necessity in our contemporary world.

Tagore has redefined the gender stereotypes and portrayed a ‘new woman’, who asserts her desires and independence alike. Women like Nandini, Malini, Chitra, Srimati, Aparna and Prakriti have exceptional qualities of mind and heart. Living on the margin, they still have the capacity to change the course of mainstream society with their power and grace.

In summing up Tagore’s position as a dramatist, it may be said that he has given us in his plays the vision of a higher life without ignoring the claims of the contemporary world. He has expressed not only ideas of a profound significance but has also created living pictures to illustrate them. ‘It is this combination of the noble values that he sets on his human life and their successful manifestation in living symbols that will assure him a place amongst the greatest dramatists of the modern age’ (Chakravorty 156).

Rabindranath Tagore revitalised modern thought in India. The Conscience of the modern man has been bewildered by the onslaught of dead and worn out traditions. Today one hardly experiences a single moment of serene blessedness. A peerless pointer to the marvels of humanity, Rabindranath redirects mankind to the inner world of conscience.
It has been said that Tagore was one of those creative geniuses who make one feel privileged to be human. For as long as there is literature, Tagore will be remembered as a great genius. With our world now facing unprecedented challenges from overpopulation, global warming and environmental degradation, Tagore’s philosophy becomes more relevant than ever before.