Chapter VI

MUKTADHARA
The Water Fall was first published in 1922, the same year as its Bengali original Muktadhara. The voracious appetite of capitalist industrialization and imperialism had been temporarily lessened by the First World War. The war had deeply wounded the poet and revealed to him the contradiction of what he called the Machine-Civilization. Tagore was a modernist and the term Machine-Civilization certainly didn’t refer to the kind of anti-modernism that one finds in Gandhi. By this term he unknowingly referred to a particular form that modernization takes under capitalism—a form which continuously turns human civilization into an all grabbing, all consuming and all destroying machine. Tagore admittedly chose the title inspired by the Phgla-jhora or the Mad-stream, the waterfall at Darjeeling.

The Water Fall (Muktadhara, 1922) has been interpreted as a symbolic play that indicates Tagore’s admiration for Gandhi and his rejection of the machine in favour of the spirit of life. As Krishna Kripalini says, “The character of Dhananjoy Vairagi has been seen as a representation of the non-violent spirit of Gandhi and the play had been read as Tagore’s nationalist critique of colonial exploitation.”¹ Tagore wrote it immediately after his return from America where he had severely criticized the idea of the nation and the spirit of nationalism. He viewed nationalism as a diabolic force, or “the one goblin-dread with which the whole world has been trembling”² and considered it to be a highly intoxicating and addictive sentiment that breeds radicalism and passionate excitement in people.
The play *Muktadhara* in Tagore’s own words “is a representation of a concrete psychology”.\(^3\) Abhijit, after a revelation of his castaway status, develops a belief that he has a spiritual relationship with the waterfall, beside whose mouth he has discovered. He is convinced that he has a message to convey to the world—to open out paths for the adventurous spirit of man. This self-realization leads him to emancipation not only the prisoned waters of “Muktadhara” but also his own life from the shackles of the palace and its responsibilities.

*Muktadhara* the title of the play refers to a mountain spring, the water of which flows down the mountain-slopes of Uttarakut into the plains and into the country called Shiv-tarai. These waters were essential to the people of Shiv-tarai for their very existence because these waters irrigated their fields which yielded food and other products as well as to sustain the people. This country, namely Shiv-tarai, is also under the imperial sway of King Ranajit, who rules it in a dictatorial way. The King has been collecting taxes from the subject people of Shiv-tarai without showing them any mercy even in times when these people could not pay the taxes on account the failures of their crops. However, the royal engineer Bibhuti has, after a prolonged endeavour, and at the cost of many human lives, succeeded in fettering and imprisoning the waters of this Muktadhara by building a dam across its waters. The citizens of Uttarakut express their admiration for Bibhuti’s achievement in building a dam with the help of the machine and they sing a song in honour of the Machine’

We bow to thee, we honour thee,
O Lord, o Lord Machine (163)*.

The completion of this dam is a triumph of Bibhuti’s scientific genius but it also has its political advantage for the King, in order to make it possible for King Ranajit to withhold these waters from the Shiv-tarayans or to release them for their benefit just as it suits his own pleasure or his political purpose.

The construction of the dam has greatly enhanced King Ranajit’s authority over the people of Shiv-tarai, apart from being glory to Bibhuti himself and to the people of Uttarakut. The Yuvaraja, Abhijit, has been opposed to the construction of the dam on the ground that it would become an additional source of authority for King Ranajit and an additional instrument of imperialism. Abhijit strongly differs from the King Ranajit’s political views. Actually Abhijit is not King Ranajit’s own son. Abhijit had been found as an infant abandoned by his mother below the falls of Mukta-dhara. King Ranajit’s guru’s guru had found the signs of imperial destiny on the body of this child who had been adopted by King Ranajit as his son and the heir to the throne even though King Ranajit has a son of his own, named Sanjaya. On growing up and learning from King Ranajit’s uncle Maharaja Visvajit of Mohangarh, the circumstances in which he had been found as an infant Abhijit had begun to look upon Mukta-dhara as his nurse and his foster-mother. Realizing that the sounds of the waters of Mukta-dhara was the first sound which he as an infant

* All the references in the parentheses are from Rabindranath Tagore. The Waterfall in The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996.
had heard, he begins to think that, whenever he hears the sound of those waters, he is listening to the voice of his mother whom he had never seen. Abhijit wants to release the waters of Mukta-dhara from the grip of the dam firstly because he does not want these waters to be denied to the Shiv-tarayans, and secondly, because the release of Mukta-dhara would mean the release of his own spirit from a bondage. The royal palace and the royal throne seem to him to be a prison, which binds his spirit. Talking to Sanjaya, Abhijit says: “Beautiful is earth, it sings. To reach the smallest thing that has sweetened my life, I offer my reverence today” (184).

Abhijit has developed a great sympathy for the people of Shiv-tarai because they are an oppressed people and because he has, for a time, worked as their governor on behalf of King Ranajit. He has already opened for the commercial benefit of the Shiv-tarayans, the Nandi Pass road which had remained blocked for three generations under the orders of the successive kings of Uttarakut. King Ranajit and the common people of Uttarakut have deeply resented the Yuvaraja’s action in opening the Nandi Pass road. Although King Ranajit still loves the Yuvaraja, most of the people of Uttarakut have become hostile to him and would like to seize him in order to punish him with their own hands. In order to protect him from mob fury, King Ranajit orders the detention of the Yuvaraja in a prison-camp guarded by the military officer and his men. The Yuvaraja escapes from the prison camp and happens to meet Maharaja Visvajit of Mohangarh, after finding himself free as a consequence of the kitchen-tent, adjacent to the prison-camp, having been set on fire. Visvajit
explains to him that he has come to take the Yuvaraja in his own custody in order to liberate him from the King’s clutches. Abhijit says:

“Nothing will be able to keep me captive today, neither anger nor affection. You think that you are the agents who set this tent on fire? No! This fire has been waiting for me! The leisure has not been granted to me to remain in captivity” (211).

The Yuvaraja gets ready to accomplish a purpose for which, he thinks, a divine call has come to him and says:

“I must pay off debt of my birthright. The current of the waterfall has been my first nurse and I must set her free” (212).

Abhijit’s task is to release Muktadhara from the imprisonment hold of Bibhuti’s dam and thus, not only to emancipate his own spirit which has been feeling suffocated, but also to benefit the people of Shiv-tarai who had been reduced to a position of an ever greater subservience to the authority of King Ranajit by the construction of the dam. When Abhijit starts to break the dam in the darkness, Visvajit says that it is getting dark and that he should postpone his purpose, Abhijit replies: “The light comes from that direction, from whence comes the call” (212) and releases Muktadhara from its thralldom. Bibhuti suddenly hears a sound as of running water. He feels alarmed on hearing this sound. It is clear to him that it is the sound of the rushing waters of Muktadhara and the dam has been breached. When this realization dawns upon him, he says; “My God! There is no doubt of it. The water of Muktadhara is freed!
Who has done it? Who has broken the embankment? He shall pay the price! There is no escape for him!"(228). Bibhuti’s whole achievement is thus nullified by the Yuvaraja’s shattering the dam and letting the waters of Mukta-dhara flow with their usual rapidity, although the Yuvaraja himself is also swept away by the swift current of the waters and is killed. The Yuvaraja has sacrificed his life for the freedom of Mukta-dhara, for the freedom of his own spirit which had become identified with Mukta-dhara itself, and for the economic welfare of the people of Shiv-tarai.

Structurally speaking, Mukta-dhara is one of Tagore’s finest plays. The structure of this play is well-nit and compact. The story of the play moves forward briskly enough and it moves forward without any digressions on the way. Although the play reveals many of the intellectual and emotional concerns of Tagore, yet the play has a single theme which is developed in a logical and continuous manner without much interruption. The various ideas, which find expression in the course of this play, issue from the central situation which relates to the main theme. Sukumar Sen points out “Technically too this play is not overburdened with any sub-plot or extraneous incidents which might break the continuity of the main theme”.

Against the grim background of the towering menace of man’s diabolical skill, symbolized in the Machine, pass and re-pass processions of men and women, tyrants and sycophants, idealists and devotees, passionate rebels against a pitiless imperialism and its survival agents and the multitude of simple folk, with heir quaint humour and unsophisticated wisdom.
The whole play centers round a mountain-stream and a dam which has been built by the royal engineer, Bibhuti of Uttarakut across its waters with the help of a scientific Machine. The stream known as Mukta-dhara (or the Free Current), the steel machine, and the dam stand out as the chief matters of interest in the play and three persons, namely the Yuvaraja Abhijit, the royal engineer Bibhuti, and the king of Uttarakut, Ranajit dominate the whole action of the play. The theme of the play lies in the supremacy of the human spirit represented by Abhijit over the artificial devices, such as the dam built by the scientific machine, which are employed by Kings like Ranajit and engineers like Bibhuti to oppress and tyrannize over the weaker sections of human society and more particularly the subject races of this world. As Edward Thompson points out:

“This play has many strands of significance and it represents a synthesis of the author’s different convictions such as his distrust of all government by machinery, his dislike of science being made to serve the ends of violence and exploitation, his hatred of a slavish system of education, his scorn of race-distinctions, and his faith in non-violence and in the existence of a benevolent God”

The Tagorean drama is more a play of symbols than of characters and incident. Most of the characters are shadowy and featureless. They are important only in so far as they stand for an idea or a feeling. They symbolistically express a philosophy. K.R.S.Iyengar remarks, “Not the logic of
careful plotting, but the music of ideas and symbols is the soul of this drama.”

Even the titles of the plays and names of characters are symbolic. Thus “Muktadharā” is not only the free flow of a river by the name but the torrential flood of “love” of the prince which has been held back by the “dam” called throne are now released self-lost in the vests of God. Tagore’s symbols and images are charged with profound intimations. In Muktadhara, the unfoldment of character and action is carried out through many symbols. Almost all the names are symbolic. “Bibhuti” stands for wealth and power. “Ranajit” is the victor in wars. “Abhijit” is a name of Lord Vishnu—the protector and life-giver of the Hindu Trinity. The “dam” itself is a mighty symbol of a wall or barrier which stops the free flow of water as well as love. The Prince considers the throne as dam.

In Muktadharā the three main characters, Ranajit, Abhijit and Bibhuti are deeply involved in matters of political and economic concepts. Ranajit symbolizes imperialism; Bibhuti symbolizes science divorced from humanity and he also symbolizes the exploitation of a subject race; and Yuvaraja Abhijit symbolizes political and economic concepts which are diametrically opposed to those held by Ranajit and Bibhuti. Tagore is certainly advocating the ideology held by the Yuvaraja; and he is undoubtedly condemning the political and economic views held by king Ranajit and the scientist Bibhuti.

Ranajit symbolizes an imperialistic attitude towards a subject people. His admiration for Bibhuti and for Bibhuti’s Machine is not due to his admiration for scientific achievement so much as due to the additional power
and authority which the dam has brought to him to govern the people of Shiv-
tarai. He is very callous towards the Shiv-tarayans; and he disapproves of
Yuvaraja’s action in having opened the Nandi Pass road because the Shiv-
tarayans would benefit by it greatly. He takes delight in the increased power
which the dam has given over them. He disapproves of the Yuvaraja’s leniency
towards the Shiv-tarayans in collecting the taxes from them for the same reason
for which he has now disapproved of the Yuvaraja’s opening of the Nandi Pass
road. He does have one or two redeeming qualities. He is a religious man as is
clear from his going on foot to the temple of Bhairava in order to worship,
though his going to the temple on foot is not truly religious act but only a
religious formality. If he had been truly religious, he would have been kind and
considerate towards the Shiv-tarayans also. His chief redeeming quality is his
love and admiration for Yuvaraja. The chief reason why Ranajit had ordered
the arrest of Yuvaraja was his anxiety to save him from the clutches of the
Uttarakut citizens who were searching for him to seize him and punish him
with their own hands for his action in opening the Nandi Pass road.
Subsequently, when it becomes clear that the dam has been breached by
Yuvaraja, Ranajit says that only Yuvaraja could possess the courage to perform
such an act, and at the same moment he also prays to the Gods to protect the
life of Yuvaraja. Thus there is certainly some human feeling in his heart.

Yuvaraja Abhijit himself is a symbolic personality. He stands not only
as a heir to the throne of Uttarakut but as a representative of the spirit of
freedom, as a champion of the political freedom and as a benefactor of
mankind. Abhijit symbolizes humanism in its widest sense. The building of the dam, which has imprisoned the waters of Mukta-dhara, is regarded by him as fettering his own spirit because Mukta-dhara is his foster-mother and also because the dam would prevent the waters of Mukta-dhara from getting into the plains of Shiv-tarai. In Abhijit, love of freedom and sympathy for the oppressed people of Shiv-tarai finds their appropriate symbolism, or their objective counterpart, in the fate of Mukta-dhara whose free current has been imprisoned by the dam. The emotional significance of this symbolism gains in intensity till it becomes a passion when Abhijit learns that he is not the son of king Ranajit but a foundling. From that moment onwards, he begins to believe in a spiritual relationship between his life and the stream called Mukta-dhara. The deliverance of Mukta-dhara and of his own spirit becomes the sole aim of his life, which is to open out the paths and roads for the adventurous spirit of man. Abhijit then forms a resolve to sacrifice his life in an attempt to liberate the imprisoned current by breaking the dam at a point which he happens to know was weakly built; and he succeeds in his purpose. The leaping current breaks free, carrying away the body of its foster-child in its turbulent rush.

Yuvaraja Abhijit symbolizes the greatness of the human spirit which can rise to enormous heights of self-sacrifice; and the Yuvaraja also symbolizes the might of Bhairava because the Gods operate through human beings. Thus Yuvaraja is regarded as a symbol of the superiority of man over the machine, and the superiority of the human spirit over the inhuman designs of scientists like Bibhuti and the imperialists like Ranajit.
Bibhuti symbolizes scientific research, scientific skill, scientific achievement and scientific progress, all divorced from human welfare and human feelings. To Bibhuti, it does not matter whether a scientific achievement or innovation benefits human beings or harm them. He feels gratified by what science is capable of doing. He comes into conflict with Yuvaraja who symbolizes humanism and a deep concern for human welfare.

Bibhuti aims at scientific achievement, no matter what its consequences, though in the present case it had been a major concern of Bibhuti to add to the imperial power of king Ranajit. Thus Bibhuti is not a dispassionate scientific researcher or selfless scientific investigator. He wants to prove the supremacy of science over the various obstacles in the way of man, yet he also wants to place in the hands of king Ranajit one more instrument by means of which the King can subdue and subjugate the people of Shiv-tarai still further, and extract from them without much difficulty the taxes which he has been imposing them. Thus Bibhuti cannot be regarded as a symbol even of scientific advance in the abstract. He symbolizes the destructive and inhuman side of science.

There is the temple of Bhairava which stands on a mountain, with its trident rising high into the sky. The temple is a symbol of the religious feelings of the people not only of Uttarakut but also of Shiv-tarai because the people of both these countries are worshippers of Bhairava, the God who destroys all evils and is described by the devotees as a Lord of Terror, as a Wreaker of Wrath and a Conqueror of Evil. Bhairava represents within his body the eternal
peace of Shiva, his spirit of renunciation and simultaneously reminds us of the
destructive powers.

The Machine, with the help of which the royal engineer Bibhuti builds a
dam across the waters of Mukta-dhara, represents science and technology. The
dam, built with the help of scientific machine, can serve as an additional means
of suppressing and subduing the Shiv-tarayans who have always been exploited
economically by the successive Kings of Uttarakut, and would now be
subjected to even greater exploitation. Thus both the Machine and the dam,
built with its help, become the symbols of imperialism, tyranny and the
economic exploitation of a subject nation. The dam and the Machine acquire a
symbolic significance which is sinister, evil and directly opposed to the
symbolic significance of Mukta-dhara which is a benevolent force of Nature. In
this context, Srinivasa Iyenger rightly says that “Although Tagore did not share
Gandhi’s belief in the spinning wheel as the wonderful solution to India’s
economic ills, Tagore did shrink from machinery and gigantism, and that
Tagore did understand the terrible inroads which machinery was making into
the human personality.”

There is something about Bibhuti’s Machine which distresses even the
people of Uttarakut. The shape of Bibhuti’s engine-tower is ugly and hideous,
and even more troublesome is the fact that the engine-tower rises into the sky
higher than the trident which crowns Bhairava’s temple. The very shape of the
Machine, the top of which seems to touch the clouds, is monstrous and
suggests its demoniac character. In this respect the symbolic purpose of the
play acquires an even greater intensity because of certain remarks made about the Machine-tower. At the very outset a foreign pilgrim, visiting Uttarakut, speaks thus to a native citizen about the outward appearance of the Machine-tower: “What a monster! It looks like a dragon’s skull with its fleshless jaws hanging down! The constant sight of it would make the life within you withered and dead” (164). Later King Ranajit refers to the tower of Bibhuti’s Machine as: “the Machine appears like the menacing fist of a giant” (179) and the King’s minister says; “The thing appears like a spasm of agony in the heart of the sky” (179). Later in the play, Kundan, a citizen of Uttarakut says that the engine-tower looks even blacker at night when the twilight has faded away, and he then says: “It is like a ghoul. Why should Bibhuti have made it look like that? It fairly shrieks at one, the hideous thing” (224). The symbolism of Yuvaraja’s having been carried away by the swift current of Mukta-dhara after he had breached the dam is perfectly clear too. Ranajit says that, in freeing Mukta-dhara, Yuvaraja has freed his own spirit as well. And Sanjaya in this connection makes the following speech which is full of symbolic significance:

“Somehow he had come to know about a weakness in the structure, and at that point he gave his blow to the monster Machine. The monster returned that blow against him. Then Mukta-dhara, like a mother, took up his stricken body into her arms and carried him away” (229-230).
Thus the sinister significance of the Machine-tower and the dam which has been built by its means, gains greatly in emphasis by these remarks made by various persons.

Tagore’s engagement with the machine and the practices it generated was deep and philosophical. This can be observed in a letter to Kalidas Nag that outlined the play’s treatment of this issue. Tagore wrote:

The machine is an important part of the play. This machine has injured the spirit of life and it is with this spirit that Abhijit has destroyed the machine, not with another machine. Those who exploit with the help of the machine make a drastic mistake—they kill the very humanity that is within them also—their own machine destroys their inner human self. Abhijit represents these men, the afflicted among the powerful, who destroy the machine to free themselves from the machine with which they destroy. Dhananjaya On the other hand, represents the humanity which is being oppressed by the machine and his message clearly is that, “I will triumph because I will not allow the machine and its injuries to overcome my inner spirit” (205). The tragedy is really of the man who uses the machine to injure: it is he who has to look for freedom from his own machine and destroy it if necessary.8
“Mukta-dhara” the title of the play itself acts as a symbol. It represents God’s (or Nature’s) bounty of mankind and it represents something which man fetters and imprisons at his own cost. Not only would the construction of the dam across the waters of this mountain-spring prevent the free flow of those waters into Shiv-tarai, but it has already begun to suffocate the Yuvaraja who was found lying as an infant below the falls of this stream. Thus Mukta-dhara symbolizes freedom in general, besides symbolizing the freedom of force of Nature which serves useful purposes for the benefit and happiness of human beings.

Dhananjaya is one of the principal characters in the play *Mukta-dhara*, though he is not indispensable to the main action in the play. He is an ascetic, having complete faith in Bhairava, and frequently singing songs in praise of God. He is an advocate of non-violence and a firm believer in man’s inner strength which, in his belief, can be developed through determination and will-power. When he finds that the people of Shiv-tarai have begun to regard him as their God, he scolds them because he feels that he has failed in his efforts to inculcate in them the self-reliance which is absolutely essential for the development of the human personality. He scolds them, saying: “You men cling to me; the more you hold on, the fewer prospects there is of your learning to swim. And you make it so difficult for me to reach the shore” (194).

Dhananjaya symbolizes several virtues such as non-violence, self-reliance, the development of inner strength, an unshakable belief in the existence of God, and a firm belief in the triumph of good over evil. He is a
saintly kind of man, a Vairagi, or an ascetic; but he has not renounced the world and is in fact, the moving spirit behind Shiv-tarayan’s struggle for their rights and a kind of statesman with a variable and practicable political philosophy.

Dhananjaya is an ascetic and a spiritual leader of the shiv-tarayans. The political circumstances of his country and the manner in which the people of his country are being exploited and persecuted, force him to enter public life proves him to be a sagacious political leader. In this respect, he resembles Mahatma Gandhi. As Marjorie Sykes points out: “The personality and the words of Dhananjaya is a remarkable anticipation of the shape and the struggle for independence was to assume later under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.”

Actually, Dhananjaya had also figured in an earlier play written by Tagore. When Tagore started writing this play in 1922 on 6th January, he wrote to Ranu Adhikary, “I have started writing a new play. I want to perform it in Shantiniketan.” A month later he wrote to Ranu again saying: “I have finished the play in a week. . . I have called this play, “Path”. This play has an earlier character of mine, Dhananjaya Bairagi from my earlier play *The Atonement (Prayaschitto).*” In *The Atonement,* as in *Muktadhara,* Dhananjaya teaches the people to resist their ruler’s unjust claims non-violently but fearlessly. In fact, in the earlier play Dhananjaya had even led the people in a sort of pay-no-rent campaign, just as in the present play he has been asking the people not to pay the taxes imposed by King Ranajit because their abject poverty makes it impossible for them to meet any such liability. Thus, even so
far as the action of the play on its political side is concerned, Dhananjaya has a vital role to play.

*Mukta-dhara* is a play in prose but contains a large number of songs which impart to it a poetic quality. The element of poetry in this play is to be found in abundance. These songs have a musical quality and they can be sung on the stage to enhance the charm of the play. The songs are interwoven with the action and the plot of the play. A song is addressed to Bibhuti’s Machine, which is given the status of the creator and the hymn to the machine is sung out in direct imitation to the song of Bhairava:

We salute the Machine, the Machine

Loud with its rumbling of wheels,

Quick with its thunder flame,

Fastening its fangs

into the breast of the world.

Hurling against obstruction,

Its fiery defiance

That melts iron, crushes rocks,

And drives the inert from its rest.

We salute the Machine, the Machine (169).
Dhananjaya sings about a dozen songs in the course of the play. The songs stand out by virtue of the value of their ideas as well as their lyrical quality. There is a song by Dhananjaya in which he speaks of the omnipresent God whom, however, he seeks from one place to another without being able to find Him. He says that his soul desires that the Lord should be the pilot of his boat which is fragile. He also claims that his mind is fearless, but he seeks the mercy of the Lord’s feet.

Madly I wander from village to village,

What madness is this?

What witchery of music is sounding?

I seek him through forest and mountain,

Weeping my life away in a fearless fear.

In another song, Dhananjaya declares that the imprisonment of the body surely does not mean an imprisonment of the soul. When Ranajit orders a captain of the guard to take Dhananjaya into custody, Dhananjaya sings:

Yours chains will not put me into confusion,

Nor will my spirit die beneath your blows.

This is an inspiring song which infuses courage into the reader’s heart too. This song reminds us of those famous lines by an English poet:

Stone walls do not a prison make’
Nor iron bars a cage;

Minds innocent and calm

Take that for a hermitage.

In another song Dhananjaya addresses God as “Master Minstrel”, and appeals to Him to play on the tuned harp which waits for the touch of His hand. Here the whole earth is regarded as a harp on which God plays to keep the world going according to a certain pattern and according to His divine laws. In another song Dhananjaya deplores the tendency of the people to undervalue a man who actually possesses the highest worth. Addressing the citizens of Uttarakut who have just left him, he says:

That which you cast away, O fool,

Will it lie fallen forever?

He who knows its worth will take it up.

All these songs, sung by Dhananjaya, express his piety, his devotion and firm faith in God and his belief in the beneficent operations of God.

That this play had been taken largely as an allegory must have disturbed Tagore. *Mukta-dhara* was never performed at Shantiniketan and later performers have noted the difficulty in organizing a rendering of the play. Tagore sought to distance himself from the merely allegorical and symbolic reading of the play in his brief note to the translation published in *The Modern Review* in May 1922, explaining that Abhijit was the representation of a
concrete psychology. One realizes now why Tagore renamed this play. The original title “Path” would have rendered this play wholly allegorical, reducing it to a mere message of uniting humanity and exploring the diversity of life. The title *Mukta-dhara* or *The Waterfall* alerts us to the deeper affinities between character and setting, releasing an additional dramatic logic for the action of the play. The symbolic and the dramatic closely interact to complement each other. The characters of Amba, the various citizens, Biswajit and others also add to this sense of the dramatic interplay of personalities around the waterfall.

Referring to Krishna Kripalini’s comment that, “the socio-political motif of the play, such there is, seems to dissolve at the end in an undefined sense of mystic exaltation.”¹² Barnik Roy criticizes *The Waterfall* to be structural failure because it neither draws out the nationalist content nor the exploitative nature of modern technology.¹³ This is explained by the fact that Tagore never intended the play to be a Gandhian play of nationalist protest, nor was he intent on merely dismissing the machine as evil in itself. The play traces the tragedy of Abhijit and through it the determination of Tagore to follow the path that leads beyond boundaries. Tagore was conscious of his alienation from the broader nationalist movement; his determination to create Visvabharati as a plural global space never wavered. In April 1922, just before *The Waterfall* had been published, Tagore wrote a small poem for *The Modern Review*:

Let the grey dust of the road be your nurse
May she take you up in her arms,

Lead you away from the clasp of clinging reluctance.14

Speaking before the play, Tagore once again suggested, “This play is not an allegory for the nationalist movement that is sweeping the country. The play is rather about opening up paths for the broader convergence of all human civilization.” 15 Taken in the context of Tagore’s disagreements with Gandhi and his writings on Nationalism, these comments clearly indicate that this play in general and Dhananjaya in particular was not based on Gandhi. In terms of the plot, Dhananjaya actually has little influence in the particular destruction of the machine. It is Abhijit who finds the weakness in the machine and destroys it at the cost of his own life. What Dhananjaya attempts is to sensitize the people for forbearance and renunciation through which a broader understanding of the self can be had. He is also critical of the boundaries between the residents of Uttarakut and Shiv-tarai and seeks to unite them. The ideal of bringing them together under the broader ideal of humanism clearly replicates the ideal of Visva-Bharati and global co-operation that Radindranath had fervently pleaded for in his trip to America and Japan. Dhananjaya is thus a mouthpiece of Tagore rather than Gandhi.

*The Waterfall (Muktadhara)* is a play that straddles the space between any simplistic creation of binaries and allegories. It is definitely not a play meant as a tribute to Gandhi. It rather articulates many of Tagore’s ideas against the spirit of nationalism and highlights the ideals of Visva- Bharati as a
space of freedom and convergence. It is neither a simplistic rejection of machine for a broader spiritual outlook; it emerges as the most profound analysis of the tragedies and contradiction of the mechanical man. It is also a tale of the formation of the self and the ways in which human affinities are shaped by nature. *The Waterfall (Muktadhara)* is a pivotal play in Tagore’s dramatic career combining dramaturgy, philosophy and symbolism.
REFERENCES


