

A QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN CHITRA BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE: A SAGA OF PSYCHOLOGICAL METAMORPHOSIS

Dr. Swati Bhise, Dr. Ramkishan Bhise

Assistant Professor
Amity University Maharashtra

Assistant Professor
SIES Graduate School of Technology, Nerul

Abstract

By interweaving themes of love, self-exploration, and cultural norms, Rabindranath Tagore portrays the complexities of identity in his play Chitra. This paper examines the quest for identity, utilizing a psychological perspective to analyze the internal conflicts and challenges in the character of Chitra.

This paper adopted a qualitative methodology. To uncover the intricate layers of identity depicted in the play, textual analysis and character examination is done. By carefully analyzing the text, this study examines how the protagonist, Chitrangada, confronts her identity in response to societal standards and gender expectations.

Moreover, it examines the complex psychological aspects of Chitrangada's journey and investigates her pursuit of genuineness and empowerment. The transforming effect of relationships in shaping an individual's identity is clarified through an analysis of Chitra's interactions with other characters, namely Arjuna, Madana, and Vasanta. Furthermore, this paper asserts that Tagore's portrayal of the identity crisis within the wider socio-cultural milieu of early 20th-century India puts emphasis on the conflicts between traditional values and modern advancements. The correlation between Chitrangada's personal struggles, transformations, and difficulties that are prominent in Indian society are explored.

In conclusion, the depiction of identity crisis in Tagore's "Chitra," revealing the timeless and cross-cultural themes of self-exploration and individual advancement, is significantly discussed. The lasting significance of Tagore's work in investigating the intricacies of human identity and the pursuit of self-actualization is emphasized.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Psychological metamorphosis, Self-exploration, Indian Society, Internal Conflict, Womanhood.

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was a prominent figure in literature, music, art, and social reform. He was known as the Bard of Bengal. Although he was born in Calcutta on May 7, 1861, he influenced people beyond borders, making a lasting impact on the worldwide cultural scene. He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. It is difficult to classify him due to his versatile talent. His poetry has an exquisite beauty that captures the core of human emotions and the magnificence of nature. His collection of poems, "Gitanjali," demonstrates a deep involvement with topics such as freedom, unity, love, and spirituality. He was a prolific novelist, playwright, and essayist. He explored the intricacies of human emotions and existence and promoted social justice, religious tolerance, and the quest for self-actualization.

The contribution of Tagore to music and the arts is equally important. He has created two thousand songs that still captivate audiences of all ages and are referred to as Rabindra Sangeet. Through paintings and sculptures, his artistic perspective and persona showcase his respect for beauty and creativity. Besides being an artist, he was a visionary thinker and a social reformer. With the objective of creating a center for holistic education and developing global citizens, he established the prestigious Vishwa-Bharati University in Shantiniketan. The influence of Tagore transcends the domain of literature and culture. He was a strong supporter and a visionary of freedom, universalism, humanism, and harmony. He was the epitome of the limitless potential of human creativity, compassion, and intellectual exploration.

An intricate and multi-dimensional element of an individual's existence or concept of self is an identity. The individual's perceptions, actions, and interactions with others are impacted by identity. Identity formation is a dynamic process that is rooted in a personal experiences and social interactions and is influenced by various factors, including genetics, family dynamics, and social and cultural norms. But when the various internal and external factors challenged and disrupted the sense of self, that led to the "Identity Crisis." This occurs when individuals experience profound uncertainty and confusion about who they are, their place in the world, and their purpose in life. It arises as a result of significant transitions in one's life in societal pressures. Individual has to deal with questions of meaning, belonging, and authenticity to resolve the conflicting aspects of their identity

and establish a comprehensible sense of self. To resolve this internal conflict, an individual needs good introspection and exploration of their internal sense of identity and external realities.

Erick Erikson, German psychologist, introduced the term 'Identity Crisis.' In his theory of psychological development, he highlighted the importance of resolving identity crises as a critical stage in development, shaping one's sense of self, and laying the foundation for future psychosocial growth. Identity is studied from diverse theoretical perspectives, like social identity theory, which stresses how group associations contribute to individual identity, and narrative identity theory, which highlights the role of narration in constructing a clear life narrative. The psychoanalytical study of identity includes a close examination of the complex relationship between internal processes and external influences in shaping the self-perception and behaviors of an individual throughout life.

THE PLOT OF THE PLAY CHITRA

The one-act play Chitra, written by Rabindranath Tagore, deals with the idea of self-actualization and transformation through a deep exploration of identity. The plot revolves around a female protagonist, Chitra, who embarks on a journey of self-actualization. This journey of the protagonist mirrors a complex psychological transformation within the backdrop of Indian mythology, the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic, is a treatise and a compendium to the human struggle for existence, and it portrays a colourful tapestry of love, identity, and self-actualization. This paper offers a psychoanalytical study that explores the deep insights into Chitra's quest for identity provided by Rabindranath Tagore. The play is a timeless masterpiece that highlights the excellent narrative skills of Tagore.

The play revolves around the main characters, Chitrangada and Arjuna. Chitrangada, the princess, is the daughter of Chitravahana, the king of Manipur. Chitravahana raised her as a boy and taught her all the skills required to become king. Hence, Chitrangada, after learning archery, became a warrior. But during a hunting expedition, she encounters Arjuna, a Pandava brother, and instantly falls in love with him. But Arjuna did not notice her. The next day, when she met him in a woman's clothes and expressed her desire to marry him, he was not impressed by her unattractive appearance. So, he dismisses her proposal by giving a reason of his oath to observe celibacy. To gain the attention and love of Arjuna, Chitra went to Madana, the God of Love, and Vasanta, the God of Spring, and asked for a boon for a day of flawless beauty in order to gain Arjuna's affection. These gods granted her enchanting beauty for a full year to spend with Arjuna. Later, when Arjuna is drawn to her enchanting appearance rather than her internal beauty. She was dejected by the falsehood of his reputation as a keeper of vows. She went to gods and expressed her dejection and a state of dilemma. But they persuaded her to continue spending time with Arjuna, and he would accept her later. Despite her dilemma, she continued deceiving Arjuna about her true identity. When the year comes to an end, Arjuna enquires Chitra about her identity and family. Then she said that she has no past and any identity, she just roam around. Later Arjuna became restless in his memory of past that he spent with his brothers and expressed his longings to go for hunting.

Later, he got to know from the villagers that they were in trouble as Princess Chitra was on the pilgrimage. The villagers also mentioned that Princess Chitra made all necessary arrangements for the protection of her subject. Arjuna is fascinated by the tales of Princess Chitra and contemplates her characteristics. Arjuna is eager to know more about Princess Chitra and inquired about her need to go on pilgrimage. Chitra, who has concealed her identity, said Arjuna,

"Her needs? Why, what has she ever had, the unfortunate creature? Her very qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured. She is unfulfilled. Her womanly love must content itself dressed in rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. Do not ask me other life. It will never sound sweet to man's ear. (Tagore)

When he expressed his desire to learn more about the Princess Chitra and said,

I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumberous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath. (Tagore)

After listening to this Chitra reveals her true identity as Princess Chitra to Arjuna and pleads Arjuna for his love. She accepts that she is not flawless in appearance but she desires to stay with him forever. At the end she reveals that she is expecting Arjuna's child, to which she will brought as second Arjuna, and will offer this child to Arjuna when the time comes. Arjuna said his life is full and accepted her at the end with all her blemishes.

DISCUSSION

The play Chitra is a literary masterpiece that explores and highlights the lasting impact of Tagore's everlasting wisdom and his profound vision into the eternal, mysterious human mind. The play centers on the main

character, Chitra. She is courageous, adventurous, and audacious, representing a modern woman. Her artful portrayal in a man's attire by Tagore confirms her nature. The internal conflict that Chitra is undergoing is portrayed in the play. Chitra, the princess, is torn between two internal conflicts, first her duty as a warrior and her desire to be loved by Arjuna.

The author efficiently employs the technique of portraying women in attire traditionally worn by men. Chitra, thus embodies modernity. Though, she is portrayed as a modern woman, she desires to be a woman, which she discovers later. The brief meeting with Arjuna, the brave warrior prince, when she went for hunting in a male attire triggered a sense of self-awareness in her. This meeting initiates a journey of profound introspection, self-discovery and empowerment. Her exploration goes into the complexities of the human psyche and lurks for the fulfillment and meaning of the soul. Chitra's struggle and profound exploration in her identity are portrayed by Tagore through poetic discourse and vivid imagery, revealing layers of her personality. Tagore explores Chitra's psyche in depth through poetic discourse and vivid imagery, revealing the layers of her personality with remarkable insight and tenderness. Chitra embodies perseverance and agency as she confronts the intricacies of love, duty, and self-realization, defying societal norms and claiming her autonomy to shape her destiny.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF "ID" IN CHITRA

This discussion will focus on the interesting interplay of "Id," "Ego," and "Superego" in context to character of Chitra. Sigmund Freud, in his theory, provides insights into human behaviour. "Id" stands for primal instincts or desires, and operates on pleasure principle. It seeks immediate gratification without a thought of repercussion. This can be seen in the character of Chitra, who is driven by emotions and impulsive actions. Chitra, a young woman with flawed appearance, experienced an intense desire for love and acceptance. This desire roots from her inherent human need for connection and companionship, according to Maslow's theory, Hierarchy of Needs are the essential aspects of Id. Her desire for love is intense and pressing, pushing herself into decisions and actions. She is unable to suppress her desire to be loved by Arjun for who she truly is. The uncontrollable nature of Id is revealed through her inclination to take chances and challenge societal norms in the pursuit of her longings. In addition to this, Chitra's desire for acceptance can be seen as an expression of her primal instincts for validation and belonging. These desires override rational thinking and force her to seek fulfillment through emotional and physical intimacy with Arjuna, as immediate gratification without a consideration for the consequences.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF "EGO" IN CHITRA

Freud described that Ego considers social norms and consequences in balancing our longings with reality. In the case of Chitra, her unattractiveness stands as a barrier in her way of finding love and acceptance. She understands the social considerations of a woman, who should be beautiful, so she navigates her impulses within the framework of social norms and consequences and not blindly driven by her desires. Her awareness of social norms and her consideration of the possible consequences of revealing herself can be seen in her decision to conceal her true self from Arjuna. This establishes a level of rationality and self-control characteristic of the ego that seeks to balance her longings with the realities of her external world.

Nevertheless, as the play proceeds, a transformative journey of Chitra can be seen where she challenges societal norms and expectations. By challenging the conventional notions of beauty and acceptance, she ultimately chooses to reveal her true self to Arjuna. This can be seen as a manifestation of her ego proclaiming itself in the expression of societal limitations, as she strives to reconcile her desire with her sense of self-worth and dignity. Chitra symbolizes the complexities of the ego in core as she pilots the pressure between her inner longings and the expectations of external world. A complex interplay between primal instincts and rational decision-making is reflected in her character, highlighting the role of ego in intermediating between the id and the realities of social existence.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF "SUPEREGO" IN CHITRA

The next important agent of human psyche is superego, and it is resonated in the character of Chitra, especially in her devotion to higher ideals, selflessness, and morality. Despite her strong desires for love and acceptance, she understands the value of dignity and sacrifice. In spite of being aware of the consequences, her choice to reveal her true appearance to Arjuna can be seen as a demonstration of moral spirit and honesty. In order to the interests of her kingdom, Chitra's readiness to forgo her personal desires exemplifies her internalization of moral responsibility and the duty of not deceiving anyone that is aligned with the moral principle of Superego. The following conversation of Chitra with God Madana reveals her close observance to the moral principle, ethics and social norms and can be interpreted as superego.

"This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower; and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will

sit weeping day and night. Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love-all the kisses for which my heart is a thirst.” (Tagore)

This dialogue presents the internalized tension between her personal ambitions and her ethical behaviour for the greater good. This also highlights the complex relationship between Id, ego, and superego.

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN CHITRA

The play Chitra mainly centers on the theme of quest for identity and self-actualization. Chitra’s transformative journey from her quest for identity to self-actualization is apparent through her actions. Her initial situation and choice made out of unconsciousness to satisfy the pleasure principle, and then her contemplation on her taken action out of her consciousness to satisfy the moral principle, are two different instances in which her internal conflict for identity is presented. This state of confusion later leads her to a dilemma, which can be considered as “Identity Crisis”.

Chitra’s journey towards self-actualization begins with her disguise as an extraordinarily beautiful woman in place of her true self to win Arjuna’s love and attention. Chitra has to deal with the conflict between truth and deception as her relationship deepens with Arjuna, and her decision to reveal her true self to Arjuna with the awareness of consequences symbolizes a crucial step towards self-actualization. Her flawed beauty serves as a symbol for inner struggle and imperfections. Chitra learns to accept and embrace her flows through her conversations with Arjuna and realizes that true beauty lies not in physical appearance but in inner strength and character.

“the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful!”

This journey towards self-acceptance is a key in her quest for identity and self-actualization. Chitra’s rejection of societal norms and expectations is another aspect of her quest for identity and self-actualization. She chooses to reveal her true self to Arjun, challenging conventional concepts of beauty in spite of the awareness of the potential consequences. Her act of rejection to be defined by limited external standards signifies her assertion to her identity and autonomy on her own terms.

The love of Chitra for Arjuna becomes a stimulus for her self-actualization, enabling her to break free from restrains of fear and self-doubt. Chitra discovers her true strength, resilience and capacity for love, eventually realizing her full potential as a woman of substance and significance through her relationship with Arjuna. This is reflected in the following line,

“I am Chitra. No goddess, to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference.” (Tagore)

At the end of the play, highlights Chitra's quest for identity and self-actualization is a transformative journey marked by self-discovery, empowerment, and the pursuit of authenticity. Chitra emerges as a symbol of resilience, courage, and the enduring human spirit, inspiring others to embrace their true selves and strive for fulfillment and self-actualization through her struggles and triumphs.

CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore’s play "Chitra" is an exploration of central idea of human experience that stimulates reflection on beauty, identity, and the pursuit of authenticity. Tagore, through his poetic writing and a vivid portrayal of characters, has provided a timeless reflection on vitality to the legendary setting of ancient India and the profound impact it has upon love and personal growth.

This research article investigates the concept of identity and self-actualization emerging out or inner conflict resonated in the human mind, particularly with reference to the character Chitra. The theme of identity and self-actualization as a result of the resolution of one’s inner conflict is studied in this paper at length. Further, the intricate phenomena of the human psyche, which include Id, Ego, and Superego, are studied and analyzed by the psychoanalytical study of the character Chitra.

This study highlights Chitra's quest for identity, which unfolds as a multifaceted exploration of inner strength, resilience, and the enduring human spirit. Further it focuses Chitra’s initial disguise to her ultimate revelation of her true self, then her confrontation and embrace of the complexities of her identity with courage and conviction. Her journey towards self-acceptance and self-actualization is marked by moments of introspection, defiance of societal norms, and empowerment through love. Tagore illustrates the universal human desire for love, validation, and self-actualization through the struggles and triumphs of Chitra. This story of Chitra serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of self-discovery and the persistent quest for identity and meaning. Through the play, Chitra Tagore reminded the readers of the inherent beauty and resilience of human spirit, inspiring them to embrace their own unique identities and strive for self-actualization in pursuit of authenticity and gratification. Ultimately, Chitra stands as a timeless testament to the enduring power of the human spirit and the transformative journey of self-discovery and self-actualization.

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