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Aesthetic Reflections: Analyzing Illusions and Truth in Tagore's Chitra

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore, a pioneer of Indian literature, skillfully explores the perplexing relationship that exists between illusion and truth within the realm of Indian aesthetics through a captivating narrative of metamorphosis and self-discovery in his celebrated play *Chitra*. The play explores the philosophical conflict between external appearance and inner truth through its protagonist Chitra, a warrior princess who is endowed by the gods with flawless beauty. Tagore uses this theatrical approach to explore how physical beauty can reveal and disguise deeper truths about identity and love. The drama questions conventional concepts of beauty, arguing that real truth is manifested in the acceptance of one's authentic self rather than in superficial perfection. This view corresponds with Keats' famous remark, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," but Tagore adds his own distinct perspective by illustrating how truth and beauty may coexist. The present research paper analyses the intricate dimensions of illusion and truth in the play *Chitra*, emphasizing how Tagore's aesthetic philosophy goes beyond material constraints to offer a comprehensive perspective on human existence in which beauty is identical with the quest of truth. It also focuses on how Tagore rejects materialistic concepts of beauty by using David Hume's perspective on beauty as a subjective experience.

Keywords: Illusions, truth, love, aesthetic, beauty

Rabindranath Tagore was a versatile genius—a poet, dramatist, novelist, essayist, and composer—and the first non-European to earn the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Born in Kolkata, India, Tagore came from an illustrious family with a strong cultural heritage. His exposure to both Indian and Western literary traditions had a great impact on him. As a pioneer of the Bengali Renaissance, Tagore dedicated his life to investigating spirituality, humanity, and nature through his writings. *Chitra*, one of his most well-known one-act plays, explores basic issues of the nature of love and sincerity by skillfully fusing Indian mythology and philosophical depth with lyrical elegance. This relationship is consistent with Indian aesthetics, which are based on the triangle of aesthetics—Satyam (truth), Shivam (goodness), and Sundaram (beautiful). Chitra, a warrior princess and the protagonist of the play, confronts gender

stereotypes and social conventions, demonstrating Tagore's dedication to examining the complexity of the human soul.

Chitra, a one-act play by Rabindranath Tagore, is a profound reflection on illusion, truth, identity, love, and self-realization. The narrative, which has its roots in the greater epic of the "Mahabharata," focuses on the princess of Manipur named Chitrangada, who was brought up to be a warrior. S. K. Desai acknowledges, "In *Chitra*, we have the well-known Mahabharata story of Arjuna and Chitrangada, which Tagore transforms into a symbol of human love and in a sense of human life itself." (Desai, 167)

Tagore begins the play with *Chitra*, the daughter of King Chitravahana, convincing Madana, the god of love, and Vasanta, the god of spring and eternal youth, about her wish. They inquire about her desire, emphasizing her conflict between warrior attire and femininity. *Chitra* discloses that she was brought up as a boy and trained in the skills of a warrior and archery, rejecting the traditional duties assigned to women since the king desires a male heir. *Chitra* reveals to God Madana, "I am dressed in man's attire and have left the seclusion of a woman's chamber. I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes." (Tagore, 3) *Chitra* believes she has never lived as a woman and is unsure of how to show her femininity despite her extraordinary skills.

Tagore depicts the complex interplay between truth and illusion that manifests most powerfully through the protagonist's supernatural transformation. *Chitra* falls in love with Arjuna when she sees him dressed as an ascetic, and he is muscular and attractive. She realizes about her femininity that "...for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me." (Tagore, 4) *Chitra* longs for beauty to win Arjuna's love after being ignored. *Chitra* believes her transformation will attract Arjuna, who has taken a vow of celibacy. The gods, of love and spring, moved by her emotions, grant her heavenly beauty for the span of one year to win his love. When *Chitra* appears before Arjuna in her changed form of divine beauty and reveals her love for Arjuna, he can't resist himself and violates his vow of celibacy and falls prey to love, even though *Chitra* is a lie and illusion. Arjuna says, "You alone are perfect: you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman!" (Tagore, 19)

Tagore explores the truth that Arjuna's beauty is an imperfect gallant who has thrived as a consequence of this attack against untruth, whereas *Chitra*'s beauty is just accomplished physical beauty. Arjuna is not pleased because he feels that something is missing, and *Chitra* is not excited or joyful because she knows that he does not truly love her. On the inside, neither of them is content. *Chitra* is neither joyful nor thrilled. However, *Chitra* is very disturbed by Arjuna's shift in adoration; she realizes that he is in love with the illusion of her beauty rather than her genuine nature. *Chitra* fears that after the year of beauty ends, Arjuna would reject her true self. Even though they spend time together, there is tension between

them as a result of Arjuna's increasing interest in Chitra's actual identity. He wants to go hunting, and Chitra fears he views her as a passing fancy rather than as a captivating warrior.

Tagore points out that the physical union is only momentary; Chitra does not deny the excitement of it, which may be described as blinding and crazy. The fact that Arjuna confesses his love for Chitra by breaking his vow of celibacy. However, the truth is that both of them are in an illusion of beauty and just adore the lies that the other one tells. During a crucial moment, she confesses to the gods that love based only on physical beauty is unsatisfying and empty.

The end of Chitra's journey makes clear Tagore's philosophical stance on the harmonious nature of truth and beauty. When Chitra finally reveals herself to Arjuna in her actual form, the drama reaches its philosophical climax and demonstrates that truth itself has a beauty that surpasses appearance.

"I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb, be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me. Today, I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king." (Tagore, 57-58)

Tagore reveals the aestheticism of the victory of truth over the illusion of physical appearance. When Chitra admits that she is the princess of Manipur and desired beauty to win his affection, Arjuna moved by her honesty, admits his unfulfilled love, which was based only on her external beauty. In a very personal moment, Chitra confesses her sentiments and discloses that she is pregnant with his son. The love that exists between a man and a woman has a physical component. When Arjuna finally sees Chitra in her actual form, with all of her physical imperfections, he shouts out in joy and declares that his life has now been fulfilled. He enjoys her affection and the idea of them being together in the future, confirming that genuine love is accepting oneself completely, including the flaws and vulnerabilities. Chitra admits wholeheartedly that "I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes." (Tagore, 65) Arjuna comes to terms with this realization of love in Chitra at the end of the play.

Tagore reflects his perspectives of illusions and truth through the characters of Chitra and Arjuna that inner beauty is more than appearance and love transcends all boundaries. When Tagore states that physical beauty is the first step on the path to love, he is getting at something really profound. Achieving ethereal beauty begins with the quest of physical beauty. The play clarifies how human love may go from the material to the spiritual, from idealism to reality, and from transience to eternal. Chitra's journey from

illusion to truth is a powerful reminder that the most profound and lasting beauty comes from being true to oneself.

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