

# **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S RED OLEANDERS: A THOUGHT PROVOKING PLAY**

## **Abstract**

Rabindranath Tagore was famous for his writings who was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work *Gitanjali*. Tagore was aware of the deplorable condition of human beings before Independence. Tagore talks about the foibles of human beings in his dramas as well as novels. His one-act plays are notable in the history of Indian English literature. Tagore reveals the human psyche through his characters in his works. His works are rich in symbolism and each symbol has its own significance in his works. His *Red Oleanders* is a satire on materialism but the quest for independence is notable in the play. In *Red Oleanders*, Red stands for danger in the play. Each character seems to be a victim of circumstances. Tagore's philosophy is unique in the play.

**Keywords:** Tagore, Thought, Provoking, Symbolism, quest, independence

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Rabindranath Tagore was a prolific Bengali author who received the Noble prize for his poetry collection Gitanjali. Besides poetry, Tagore produced many considerable plays, short stories as well as novels. Being a Bengali author, he produced his works in Bengali but later on, he translated many of his works into English. Some of his works were translated into English by his brother Surendranath Tagore. Tagore tried to awake the soul of people by his writings. Tagore himself lived a gloomy life so that he had a deeper understanding of man's misery. Tagore was a minute observer of human nature and he presents the different facets of man's life through the characters of his works. Tagore's one-act plays contain a single theme with a social message. Tagore's *Chira* is based on the theme of the Mahabharata and shows the conflict between Arjun and Chirangada and their love story. Tagore's plays are rich in symbolism and thought provoking. In *The King of the Dark chamber*, the dark chamber symbolizes death. Each character of the play tries to attain salvation after death.

Being a prolific author, Tagore observed man's deeds in society. Tagore presents the darkness of man's life through the characters of his works. Tagore produced *Raktakarabi* was in 1924 and it was translated in to English by the author himself under the title *Red Oleanders*. Tagore's Red oleanders presents the quest of the victims of the oppressors for independence and revolt. The play reveals inhuman attitude of the ruler and invites reformation for society. It is convincing that Tagore was aware of man's critical condition before independence so he voiced man's disgust against the tyrannous ruler through the characters of *Red Oleanders*. Like Tagore, professor tries to awake man's soul against the tyranny of the ruler in the following manners:

Professor: All the creatures fear an eclipse, not the full sun. The Yaksha town is a city under eclipse. The shadow demon, who lives in the gold caves, has eater in to it. It is not whole itself. Neither does it allow anyone else to remain whole. (Tagore, p.17)

The Yaksa town becomes popular for its strength but not for its charm. The town is totally mechanical where there is no place for feelings. It is believed that the king of the town is embodied with monstrous strength. Another character Nandini is presented as a mystery, beauty, and tenderness who admires the king's physical prowess. It is also mentioned that the Yaksa town runs on negative principles where there is little scope for real happiness for man. The government of the town does not believe in the growth of beauty and culture even ready to crush the rebellions. The government does not tolerate any rebellion in the town. The Government of the Yaksa town believes in the utilization of man till his death. The Governor of the kingdom gets the wrestler forcibly to his destination.

Tagore has created an imaginary town called Yaksa town where the ruler is self-centered and leads hopeless life. The ruler is the cause of citizen's unrest and discontent.

The story of the play moves around Nandini, Phagulal, Professor, Phagulal, and Ranjan. Phagulal asserts on the freedom in the play. As he says, "*To break the prison gate, we may lose our lives, but shan't fall back.*" (Tagore, p.171) It is mentioned that the king remains in his fort and neglects the identity of his citizens. He is also looking like a prisoner of in his administrative system and remains alone. Nobody is ready to support him. The king remains in the prison of materialism but he cannot get rid of it.

Tagore presents a voice of the blind follower in the following manners:

Today's for flag worship

Don't distract my mind. Get away from my door.(Tagore, p. 166)

The blind follower follows his idol and neglects advice of other person. Tagore satirizes modern man's obsession to have materialistic things by presenting the character of voice in the play. Gokul considers Nandini as mysterious death. Nandini advises Gokul to become brave and face all the consequences.

Nandini: That death will not be yours,

Gokul never fear! You will die digging. (Tagore, p.166)

In this connection, Tagore says that death is the ultimate reality of life and man has to accept it. Man struggles to get everything during his life time but he leaves all the materialistic things on the earth and proceeds this journey to the heaven alone. Red oleander reflects the present day society in which man is not respected and considers worthless by others. The town has become a jail for all the sensitive people. There is no difference between working day and holiday. The individual principle is not encouraged there and everyone has the same thoughts and disappointments. Truth speaking is neither tolerated nor encouraged in Yaksa town. Bishu is arrested for speaking the truth. The people of a country have no right to speak against the government.

Hence, Tagore shows man's quest for freedom through the characters of Red Oleanders. Man's obsession with materialistic things leads him nowhere. The man remains alone and depressed due to materialism. The king represents man's battle with himself. Nandini describes the common man's courage and his craving for independence. Tagore presents vices of the world with a voice behind the curtain. The message of the play is man should stay positive in adverse circumstances. Like the king, man should be aware of his limitations. The man should be free from vices. However, death is the harsh reality of life.

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