

Buddhist Narrative *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* to Dance Drama *Chandalika* (*The Untouchable Girl*): Anti-caste Dialogue to Tagore's Perception of 'MĀNAVA'*

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore regarded Gautama Buddha as “the greatest man ever born on this earth” (Tagore, *Buddhadeb*), who acknowledged *śraddhā* (respect) as the best *dāna* (offering/gift). Among Tagore's writings, inspired by the humanitarian approaches of the Buddhist literature, dance drama *Chandalika* (*The Untouchable Girl*) (1938) is a famous one where the central character is a *chaṇḍāla* girl named Prakriti. In the socio-cultural and political context of Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against untouchability in 1930s, Tagore's *Chandalika* carries an immense importance.

The source of *Chandalika* is the introductory story of a famous Buddhist *Avadāna* text entitled *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* (circa 1st/ 2nd Century CE.) Tagore took the outline of the narrative from *The Buddhist Sanskrit Literature of Nepal* (1882) by Rajendralala Mitra which is a Descriptive Catalogue of the manuscripts collected by B.H. Hodgson from Nepal and repositied in the Asiatic Society of Bengal between 1825 and 1845.

The *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* contains a double layered narrative structure portraying the rebirth of Buddha and his disciples. It challenges the hegemonical status of the Brahmins, and asserts some very pungent logic countering the caste discrimination and social imbalance. Tagore did not directly entre the anti-caste debate, he rather focused on the sufferings and the pain caused by the social curse ‘untouchability’ and eventually determined Prakriti's journey towards a complete self-revelation surpassing different stages of inner conflict.

The current paper would sketch the journey of the transformation of a Sanskrit Buddhist Narrative to a Bengali Dance Drama that diffuses the message of equality integrating Tagore's concept of *MĀNAVA* (human). The political scenario of the British India of 1930s, the caste-distribution by the Hindu Dhramaśāstric tradition, and the Buddhist ideology of equality would also be discussed in the paper to decode the two analogous axioms - “*ekamidaṃ sarvamidam eka*” [This is one, all are this one] (*Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*) and “*ye mānava ami, sei mānava tumi*” [As I am human being, so you are] (*Chandalika*).

Key words: Buddhism, *Avadāna* literature, Rabindranath Tagore, Drama, Caste, humanity, *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, *Chandalika*, untouchability

* The Paper was presented at IAS, Shima, on 26.06.2023

Introduction

In 1935, on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, Rabindranath Tagore delivered a lecture in Kolkata where he said: “*Today in this hapless land poisoned by fratricidal malice, we yearn for a word from him who proclaimed love and compassion for all creature as the path of salvation. May that best of men appear again to save what is best in man from destruction.*” (Essay: Buddhadeva) (Tagore [1985] 2016: 28). The current paper tries to explore two specific expressions of Tagore’s yearning – viz., ‘poisoned by fratricidal malice’, and ‘save what is best in man’.

Tagore regarded Gautama Buddha as “*sarvasreṣṭha mānava*” or “the greatest man ever born on this earth” (Tagore [1985] 2016: 28) – one whose philanthropic thoughts transcended the boundaries of the time and territories, one who designated *śraddhā* (respect) as the greatest *dāna* (offering/gift), and one who made the land of Bharatabarsha a pilgrimage. Tagore was fascinated with Buddha’s teaching of humanity, albeit he was not very much concerned about the ritualistic accuracies and the scripture-based philosophical theories of Buddhism. E. J. Thompson stated: “...he [Tagore] has added the teaching of Buddha, for whom he has a boundless reverence. Buddha’s compassion for all living things, and the wonder of his renunciation, have cast a golden splendour about man’s history; and in Rabindranath’s thought they have shone again, making his speech glow.” (Thompson 1928: 103). The deep influence of Buddhism on Tagore is clearly visible in the architectural pattern of Visva-Bharati, the University established by Tagore where he endeavored to shape his own understanding of education and knowledge. *Pujarini*, *Natir puja*, *Abhisar*, *Mulyaprapti*, *Raja*, *Achalayatan*, *Chandalika* etc. are some famous poems and dramas of Tagore that are inspired by the ancient Buddhist narratives. An undercurrent flow of Buddhist concepts of *karuṇā* (compassion), *dayā* (gentleness), and *maitrī* (brotherhood/ companionship) continues in most of his fictional works, even if the sources are not any Buddhist literary piece.

Dance drama *Chandalika* acquires a substantial position in the context of the socio-political conflict of 1930’s regarding so-called untouchability and other social divisions in British India. In 1933 Rabindranath wrote the drama *Chandalika* that was first staged in the month of September of the same year in Kolkata. After some additions and alterations, in 1938, the drama was redesigned as dance drama *Chandalika*. The basic storyline of *Chandalika* is taken from a Buddhist Narrative entitled *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, a renowned text of *Avadāna* literature, probably dated 1st/2nd century CE. Both in *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* and *Chandalika* the central character is a caṇḍāla girl named Prakriti. Both texts portray the socio-cultural suppression of the so-called low born caṇḍāla community in the Hindu society. But *Chandalika* could not be designated as the exact rendering of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, or a mere retelling of a Buddhist legend, rather Tagore infused some different perceptions to address the contemporaneity of the issue of untouchability. On the other hand, *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, as a religious text that is technically supposed to defuse the teaching of Buddha, bears a theological and spiritual wrap

with intensified śāstric discussion. The famous axiom of Chandalika, i.e., “*ye mānava āmi sei mānava tumi*” invokes Tagore’s perception of *mānava*. The word *mānava* comes from the Sanskrit origin ‘*manorapatyaṃ pumān*’ means the male offspring of Manu, but in Tagore’s version *mānava* neither indicates the lineage of Manu nor the gender, it simply denotes the human being or what he should be. Furthermore, it has a wider connotation that exceeds every day’s weal and woe -- it is the “invocation of the Universal personality in the mind of the individual person” (Essay: Man) (Tagore 1996: 193). This conception of *mānava* kept recurring in the lectures and essays of Tagore throughout last thirty years of his life.

The drama *Chandalika* was first translated into English by Krishna Kripalani and got published in the *Viśva-Bharati Quarterly* (New series) in 1938. In 1950 another translation by Major Sykes was printed from the Oxford University Press. Krishna Kripalani briefly discussed the implication of the drama in his *Rabindranth Tagore -A Biography*, where she particularly focused on the transformation of a “popular Buddhist legend, showing the power of the Buddha saved his devotee from the lust of a chandal girl” (Kripalani [1962] 2012: 363-366) into “a psychological drama of intense spiritual conflict”. (Kripalani [1962] 2012: 363-366). A few writings, like Bhabatosh Datta’s *Rabindranth O Bouddhasanskriti* (1965), Kalyani Sankar Ghatak’s *Avadana Sahitya O Rabindranth* (1995), Prafull D. Kulkarni’s “Marginality Vs Spirituality: A Thematic Review of Tagore’s Play *Chandalika*” (2011), though have traced the link between *Chandalika* and its Buddhist source, but they have hardly discoursed on the contextual and historical significance of the drama, even some information regarding the source of *Chandalika* has been fabricated. Moreover, none of them have explored in details how Tagore’s narration differs from the textual structure of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, and how Tagore’s version of humanity exceeds the limitation of time and place. On the other hand, the essay “Rabindranath Tagore and Humanism” by Saranindranath Tagore, published in the anthology *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, although presents an inspiring discourse, but does not include the theme of *Chandalika*.

The current paper would discuss the conversion of the Buddhist narrative *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* into the dance drama *Chandalika* and sketch the journey of an anti-caste śāstric conversation to an extensive perception of humanity. Tagore’s concept of ‘*Mānava*’ encompassing the eternal values of life would be the focus of the paper. Furthermore, it would include the historical events that are significantly related to both *Chandalika* and its Buddhist ur-text, Tagore’s association with the socio-cultural and political issue in the colonised India of 1930s, the caste-distribution by the Hindu Dhramaśāstric tradition, and the Buddhist ideology of equality.

Tagore’s perception of humanity is invoked in his several essays, fictions, and lectures, furnished by overlapping thoughts throughout his poetical journey. I limit my paper to the discussion of *Chandalika* to ground his conception of *Mānava*, though some intertextual references would expectedly come to the discourse.

Tagore and the socio-political context of untouchability in 1932

Though untouchability remains as a recurring issue in the socio-cultural framework of India since long past, but in 1930s, centering the context of separate electorate it surfaced as a serious political conflict in British governed India. It was September, 1932, Mahatma Gandhi restored to a fast unto death in Yeravda Jail, against the decision of the British Administration of giving the so-called untouchable community its own electorate, which appeared as a threat of permanent vivisection of the Hindus. Tagore passionately became associated with the movement of Gandhi for social integration. On 19th September he wrote to Gandhi:

It is well worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. Though we cannot anticipate what effect it may have upon our rulers who may not understand its immense importance for our people, we feel certain that the supreme appeal of such self-offering to the conscience of our countrymen will not be in vain. I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. (Tagore 1932: 1).

The Following day addressing the staffs and students of Visva-Bharati, Tagore warned of the critical situation of the country: "A shadow is darkening to-day over India like a shadow cast by an eclipsed sun. The people of a whole country is suffering from a poignant pain of anxiety the universality of which carries in it a great dignity of consolation." (Tagore 1932: 3). After two days, on 22nd September Tagore made an appeal through Free Press and Associated Press of India to the countrymen not to delay a moment "to eradicate from their neighborhood untouchability in all its ramifications" and to made the movement "universal and immediate" (Tagore 1932: 9). Tagore visited Yeravda jail on 24th September, the day when Gandhi broke his fast after British Government had conceded the major demands and admitted to negotiate with the proposal of all parties and communities of India. Next day, which, according to the Indian Calendar, was the 64th birthday of Mahatma, Tagore paid his tribute to Gandhiji in a public meeting of Poona conveying that Gandhi had inspired all to find out the truth "which goes far beyond the limits of our self-interest" (Tagore 1932:25). Later he Published a booklet under the title *Mahatmaji and the Depressed Humanity* that includes the communication between him and Gandhi related to the issue of fasting in Yeravda Jail. He dedicated the booklet to Prafulla Chandra Ray, the famous scientist.

Krishna Kripalani proclaimed that the fast of Gandhi in Yeravda jail for the depressed untouchables and its consequences must have a deep impact on Tagore that resulted in his drama *Chandalika*, which Rabindranath composed few months later (Kripalini 364). Besides acknowledging that the impression of the socio-political scenario of India in 1932 went deep into the mind of the poet, we should admit that it was not only the decision of British Government for a separate electorate of the untouchables or the fast of Gandhi that made Tagore suddenly aware of the problem of the despised untouchables, rather he was very much concerned about the "iniquitous customs of untouchability" (Tagore, 1932: 23) since the time of his writing of *Gitanjali* (1910). In 20th September 1932, while delivering the speech to the staffs and students of Santiniketan and Sriniketan Tagore said: "Those whom we keep down inevitably drag us down and obstruct our movement in the path of progress." (Tagore 1932: 5). This is the reminiscent of the poem of *Gītānjali* that opens with '*he mora durbhāgā deśa*':

yāre tumi nīce felo se tomāre bādhibe ye nīce
paścāte rekhecho yāre se tomāre paścāte ṭāniche/

Tagore wrote the poem in 1910 where he depicted the toxicity of the untouchability with the caveat that once we have to pay high for this inequity. So, it can be said that the campaign against untouchability in 1932 acted as a stimulant to surface his thoughts of equality as well as humanity through a wider approachable medium of audio-visual performance.

Dharmaśāstric tradition, caste division and the caṇḍālas

Untouchability is a poisonous subproduct of the caste distribution of the ancient India. The *Dharmaśāstras* or the Hindu law books offer a detailed description of the social layers of Hindu society where we find the inter-caste marriage as highly prohibited. Manu, one of the oldest lawmakers, acknowledged brāhmaṇa (Brahmin, the priests), kṣatriya (warriors), vaiśya (merchant) and śūdras (servants) as four caste and admitted no other caste than these four – *nāsti pañcamah* (there is no fifth) (*Manu* 10.4). So, the offspring from the mother and father of different castes is known as ‘mixed class’ and ‘outcaste’. The further marginalization within the mixed classes comes with two hierarchical divisions. One group is regarded as the result of “hypergamous relations” (Aktor 2018: 62) between two classes or the *Anuloma-vivāha*. The other one is caused by the “hypogamous relations” (Aktor 2018: 62) or the *pratiloma-vivāha*. Again, the marriage in the inverse order is more despised and the offspring born from this kind of union are condemned as ‘delinquent-born’ (*apadhvaṃsaja*). Among them, caṇḍāla, born from the hypogamous relation of a śūdra man and brāhmaṇa woman remains in the lowest position of the social edifice, and marked as the worst of all men (*narādhama*) (*Manu* 10.10). According to *Manusmṛiti*, caṇḍālas must dwell outside the village. Only dogs and donkeys are their assets. They wear the dresses of the dead and eat in the broken vessels. They are prohibited to enter the cities and villages at night, only at day time they can go the villages, wearing a distinguishing musk to perform their duties at the command of the king. Regarding their social interaction the law book instructs:

*na taiḥ samayanvicchet puruṣo dharmamācāran/
vyavahāro mīthasteṣāṃ vivāhaḥ sadṛśaiḥ sah//* (*Manu* 10.53)

[“A man who follows the Law should never seek any dealing with them. All their transaction shall be among themselves, and they must marry their own kind.” (Olivelle 2005: 210)]

According to *Parāśarasmṛiti*, any kind of association, even touch or view of a caṇḍāla is strictly prohibited. Taking water from a pond dug by a caṇḍāla is recognized as harmful as performing any sin. It is also directed that if a caṇḍāla enters inside the house of any upper caste people, he must be turned out and the house should be purified with water and cow dung. (*Parāśarasmṛiti*, 6.23-27)

Though in the ancient scriptures like *Bhagavadgītā* ensures that the caste system is introduced according to the merit and duties – *guṇakarmabibhāgaśaḥ* (*Bhagavadgītā* 4.13), but with time, the hegemonical attitude of the upper caste, specifically of the brāhmaṇas and the politics of

power distribution created an obvious imbalance in the social edifice. The awful disparity in the socio-religious practices eventually partitioned the society into two distinct groups – ‘jal-chal’ (whose water can be shared) and ‘jal-achal’ (whose water must not be shared). The upper caste people are strictly directed not to take even a drop of water from the outcaste people, on the other hand the untouchables are prohibited to touch the source of water of the upper castes. Violation of this rule causes heavy punishment, which mostly affects the lower classes. This much discrepancy in the distribution of the water signifies the cruelty of the social politics that does not even secure the basic needs of life, and water becomes the representation of the caste identity.

Dance drama *Chandalika*: the plot

Contrary to the framework of the mentioned social inequity, the central theme of *Chandalika* is based on the scene of giving water to a Buddhist monk by a caṇḍāla girl that symbolizes the equality of all human beings against the toxication of fratricidal malice of the society. The drama *Chandalika* was transmuted to dance drama *Chandalika* by Tagore in 1938 with some more songs and characters that made the pain of the caṇḍāla girl Prakriti more discernable.

The dance drama opens with the scene where some girls entre the stage to sell the flowers, but refuse to interact with Prakriti. Afterward enters a milkman, but when Prakriti wants to buy milk, other village girls warn the milkman not to touch her, as she is the daughter of candalini – ‘*o ke chūyo na chūyo nā chi, o ye caṇḍālinira jhi*’. Same happens when a seller of bangles comes, the village girls shout again – ‘*o ke chūyo na chūyo nā chi, o ye caṇḍālinira jhi*’. Prakriti then feels deep grief and resolves not to adore ‘devata’ (the deity) who has sent her to this darkness of misery. The god betrays her keeping her away from the light – ‘*devata chalanā kariyā andhāre rākhila more*’. But she gets surprised when a Buddhist monk, Ananda, disciple of Gautama Buddha asks her for some water. With the caveat that she is a caṇḍāla girl, and could not offer water to anybody other than of her own community she forbids to give water to the monk. Ananda then says that: ‘You are the same human being as I am. Any water that is given to a person when he is thirsty is like the water of a pilgrimage.’ After Prakriti gives him water he goes back, but Prakriti becomes smitten by the words and appearance of the monk. Out of deep longing for Ananda she implored her mother to bewitch Ananda by her *mantras* (charm). Proficiently, her mother practices charms and incantation. Mother starts the act of incantation reciting the *mantras* again and again. By the force of the *mantra* Ananda is dragged to the door of the house Prakriti. But the pain that he is going through due to the force of the *mantra* makes Prakriti realize that she has insulted the monk, and drawn him to the evil dust. Prakriti gets shocked at the selfish and cruel nature of her own. She pleads to forgive her. Ananda absolves her and the dance drama ends with the salutation to Buddha.

The source *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*

It is declared in the preface of the drama *Chandalika* that the plot of the *nāṭikā* or the short play is taken from the brief description of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* in the ‘Nepali Bouddha Sahitya’, edited by Rajendralala Mitra. A general notion, which is unfortunately incorrect, has often been drawn up that Rajendralala Mitra’s ‘Nepali Bouddha Sahitya’ is a collection of Buddhist narratives. But it is a descriptive catalogue of the Buddhist manuscripts. The catalogue, entitled *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* is published from the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta in 1882. The manuscripts compiled by Rajendralala Mitra are a part of the collection of Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800-1894), a civil servant of the East India Company. Hodgson came to India in 1818, and in 1920 was appointed as the assistant to the Residence of Nepal. During his sojourn in Nepal, he collected bundles of Buddhist Manuscripts written in Sanskrit that he reposit in different Indological institution of India, as well as abroad. As an ex-student of the Fort William College, he got financial assistance for his search for Buddhist manuscripts. Between 1827 to 1845, the College of Fort William and the Asiatic society, Kolkata received 66 and 94 volumes of Buddhist Sanskrit Manuscripts respectively. Other manuscripts were distributed to the Royal Asiatic Society of London, India Office Library, Bodleian Institute, Oxford, Société Asiatique of Paris etc. Some manuscripts were also given to Eugène Burnouf, the renowned French Orientalist. (Hunter 1896, 344-353). These manuscripts became the firsthand source of the literary evidence of Buddhism to the Western countries. Max Müller pointed out that “the real beginning of an historical and critical study of the doctrines of Buddha dates from the year 1824” (Müller 1868, 190) after the discovery of the manuscripts from Nepal by Hodgson.

The manuscript of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, catalogued by Rajendralala Mitra does not record the date of composition. The text cannot be dated after 2nd century CE, since it was first translated into Chinese in 170 CE (Mukhopadhyaya 1954: xii). Along with the physical description of the manuscript Mitra gave a brief summary of the whole text as he did for all other manuscripts of the same catalogue. The short storyline that we find before the commencement of the drama *Chandalika*, is but the exact Bengali translation of first few lines of the summary made by Mitra. The plot of *Chandalika* does not encompass the whole narrative of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, rather it contains only the opening story of the Buddhist text. Surprisingly we find Tagore infusing the essence of the whole *Avadāna* story in his short play, as well as in the dance drama, albeit he did not narrate the story of the rebirth of Buddha and his disciples that covers the major part of the *Avadāna*.

Avadāna is recognizes one of the *dharmaprayacanas* (teaching of *dhrama*) in Buddhist literature that narrates the story of the rebirth of Gautama Buddha and his disciples, though it signifies a different genre than the Pali *Jātaka* stories. The term ‘*Avadāna*’ is denoted by Winternitz as any ‘noteworthy deed’ or ‘heroic deed’. Those texts are composed in Buddhist Sanskrit, previously known as Hybrid Sanskrit that follows a different lingual pattern unlike to the rules of Pāṇini.

For the first time a portion of the *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* is edited from a Nepalese Sanskrit manuscript by E.B.Cowell and R.A.Neil and published from Cambridge in 1886 as a part of *Divyāvadāna*. In 1954, Sujit Kumar Mukhopadhyaya edited the entire SKA consulting several manuscripts and some Chinese and Tibetan translations that is published from Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in 1954.

Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna claims to be the one of the oldest texts of Sanskrit Buddhist literature based on refutation of castes. Now a days scholars do not recognize Buddhism as a social movement aimed to erase the caste system. It is evident that at the time of Buddha the caste hierarchy was prevailing in the society, and Buddha accepted the system explaining them by the theory of *karman* (act/previous act), sorrow, and rewards (Burnouf [1844] 2010, 226). Nonetheless, concerning the attainment of annihilation or *nirvāṇa*, Buddhism embraces all human beings irrespective of castes. Hindu law books prohibit the śūdras and the out-caste people from all Vedic sacraments, and keep them far from the knowledge of the *Vedas* that leads to *mokṣa* or salvation. On the contrary, Buddha invalidated the differences among the castes and allow men and women from all strata of the society, even from the lowest community like caṇḍāla and pulkaśa to entre the sangha system and attain the *nirvāṇa*. In *Cullavagga Sutta* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Buddha explained that as various rivers lose their former identities, when they pour their water to the ocean and merge into it, the Buddhist monks approaching from different castes lose their past caste-identities and accomplish the name *śramāṇa* (medicant) (Horner 2001, 334). We find similar statements in *Madhura Sutta* and *Assalāyana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. But in most of the cases the equality of the castes in Buddhist canonical literature refers to the spiritual context, the pragmatic approach towards the imbalance of the caste hierarchy remains inattentive. We find only two Buddhist texts that directly address this toxic social problem and place some very sharp logic refuting the caste system to establish the equality of all human beings. One of those two is the *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, and the other one is a small Buddhist polemic by Aśvaghoṣa, entitled *Vajrasūcī* (1st century CE).

Anti-caste dialogue

Though the plot of *Chandalika* is taken from the opening story of *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, but the refutation of caste is predominantly existing in the second layer of the Buddhist narrative. In the latter part of the Buddhist text, we find that the caṇḍāla girl Prakṛiti meets Gautama Buddha and finally adopts Buddhism. But the transformation of a caṇḍāla girl to a Bauddha *bhikṣuṇī* (nun) causes deep annoyance in the society that forces king Prasenjit to visit Gautama Buddha being associated with the upper caste citizens of Śrāvastī. To justify the initiation of Prakṛiti into *pravrajyā* Buddha narrates a story of his previous life, where He Himself lived the life of Trīṣaṅku, the king of caṇḍālas. Trīṣaṅku, though being a caṇḍāla, was well versed in all Vedic customs and other *śāstras*. Śārdūlakarṇa, his son, was also conversant with all ancient scriptures like his father. Once Trīṣaṅku approached Puṣkarasārin, a reputed brāhmaṇa, for his daughter Prakṛiti to marry his son Śārdūlakarṇa. Puṣkarasārin became very much annoyed by this proposal which he thought as a most courageous and foolish attitude of an outcaste man.

After a long conversation and series of arguments from both the ends Puṣkarasārin accept Triśaṅku's proposal of marriage. Buddha concludes with the information that the girl Prakṛti and Śārdūlakarṇa of the previous life have taken birth as caṇḍāla girl Prakṛti and monk Ānanda.

To counter Puṣkarasārin's indignity towards the caṇḍālas that signifies but the negative approach of the upper caste Brahmin community towards all out-caste people, Triśaṅku presents some very rational reasoning with the reference to the ancient scriptures. The structure of arguments is embedded on the fact that nature has not drawn any discriminating line between the in-caste and out-caste people. It is but the politics of the upper castes to uphold their monopoly over the society that differentiates the human beings in terms of their birth. Cows or horses are designated as difference species owing to their divergent shapes and features, but all human beings bear the similar forms. A brāhmaṇa takes birth from the womb of his mother exactly in the same way as a caṇḍāla does. They have no difference in any respect, hence they cannot be alienated different species.

The caṇḍālas are very much disgraced because of their food habits. Due to their non-vegetarian culinary culture they are usually addressed as 'śva-pāka' (those who cook the animals). Triśaṅku proclaims that the Brahmanas remain in the same category since they also slough the animal, and consume, albeit they justify their action by naming it *yajña* or sacrifice. The priests ensure that the animal would reach the heaven after the sacrificial offerings. If so, Triśaṅku asked, then why don't they send their parents and relatives to heaven by the same expeditious process? Puṣkarasārin refers to the famous Vedic *mantra* that declares the origin of brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya and śūdra from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet of the Supreme Self *Brahman* respectively certifying the supremacy of the brāhmaṇa (*Rgveda* 10.90.12). Triśaṅku refutes the proposition of Puṣkarasārin with the argument, effectively reminiscent of the statement of *Vajrasūcī*, that the children of the same father do not carry dissimilar identity. Likewise, as all human beings are born from the Omnipotent Creator *Brahman*, there could not be any caste-disparity among them, only different names are given according to the responsibilities and duties assigned to them.

Tagore's perception of 'Mānava'

Two pertinent questions in our current discussion allude to the exclusivity of Tagore's *Chandalika* in respect of *Śārdūla* 1) Why did not Tagore comprise the narration of the rebirth of Buddha in his dance drama? The source of his inspiration, i.e., Rajendralala Mitra's *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* summaries the whole *Avadāna* text including the main points of the debate between the caṇḍāla leader and the brāhmaṇa. 2) Why are the later scenes in the dance drama of practicing incantation by Prakṛti's mother to bewitch Ananda so much intensified? This episode occupies merely a small space in *Śārdūlakarṇa-avadāna* and seems to have a little connection to the sufferings the untouchables.

Outwardly it appears that the presence of the anti-caste arguments in *Chandalika* would have brought out some strong logic reflecting the then socio-political scenario of India, but for Tagore, the conditions of equality, even if it is the caste issue, are more associated with the internal features of the human than the external stuffs. As a result, Tagore's observation about caste discrimination is not engrossed with typical scriptural debate and logic, rather it imbues the values of humanity towards the eternal truth of life. It may make us surprised, but Tagore did not directly ever refute the caste arrangements of the ancient India, rather he revered the synchronized disposition of the responsibilities and rights for a resourceful societal system. Nonetheless, he strongly condemned the inequities caused by the caste hierarchy. In the essay "Shikshabidhi" (1912) Tagore opined that in the ancient India the caste distribution might have fulfilled the then social requirements, but in course of time the prerequisites have been changed. Since, in the present days the profession or duties cannot be assigned only by births, the whole caste system becomes purposeless. Like an ornamentation to the society, it shackles men by fatuous malefic rules. Tagore always denounced the inequity in the social structure owing to the 'a-dharma' (non-virtue) in the name of 'dharma' (religion).

So, rather than the śāstric discourse on caste hierarchy, the issue of the inequities among the human beings and the sufferings of the low-caste people, particularly of the despised untouchables moved Tagore. The introductory story of the *Avadāna* does not emphasize on the miseries and social disgraces of the caṇḍālas as it is highlighted in the first scene of dance drama. The *Avadāna* text narrates the first encounter of Ananda and Prakrit very briefly where we find Prakrit saying only that she is a *mātangadārikā* (daughter of caṇḍāla). Though the restriction of the mātangas in social interface is comprehensible, but the term 'untouchable' is not mentioned there as it is clearly cited in *Chandalika*. The opening scene of *Chandalika* portraying the humiliation of Prakriti by the villagers with the caveat 'oke chīyo na chīyo na chi, o je caṇḍālīnīr jhi' is a significant insertion made by Tagore. The scorn of the villagers grounds the base of the dance drama on which the contrast liberal thought of Buddha is illustrated. Furthermore, the dialogue of Ananda 'ye mānava ami, sei mānava tumi' that invalidates the disparity among the human beings is absent in the Buddhist narrative. In reply to Prakriti's hesitation, Ananda only says that he has not queried about her family or caste identity, and once again requests her for water.

Although Tagore did not entre the anti-caste dialogue, yet by the axiom 'ye mānava' etc. he asserted the ethos of the counter-caste discourse of the latter part of the Buddhist narrative. The focal point of the dialogue between Triśaṅku and Puskarasārin is placed through a statement that comes out thrice. 'ekamidaṃ sarvamidameka', which means 'this is one, all are this one', is equivalent to the statement of Ananda in *Chandalika*. The concept of this oneness might emerge as the call for Tagore to address the issue of untouchables, and define 'Mānava' in a form of a drama. In his reckoning, all men in this world are sharing the same consciousness that links them with each other.

Owing to the direct association with Brahmo Samaj, Tagore spent his life under the strong influence of *Upaniṣads* and *Vedānta*. He ground his idea of *Mānava* on the Vedic and Upaniṣadic cognizance of the cosmic law that holds together all creatures, nature, and the

Universe. Under this cosmic law all human beings hold a deep connection to each other, even the non-human beings, the animals, the nature, the planets are strongly associated with them. He referred to the verse of *Iśa Upaniṣad* more than once in his essays to decode the oneness of human beings:

yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmanyevānupaśyanti/

sarvabhūteṣu cātmanaṃ tato na vijugupsate// (*Iśa Upaniṣad* 6)

[“The wise man who perspectives all beings as not distinct from his own Self at all, and his own Self as the Self of every being, - he does not, by virtue of that perception, hate anyone.”] (Sarvananda 1943: 9-10)

With reference to this verse Tagore elaborated: “Man reveals himself in truth, the truth with which the Upaniṣad speaks: He alone knows truth who knows all living creatures as himself. He is the complete man who knows the truth thus, and he shines in the glory of humanity.” (Essay: Buddhadeva) (Tagore [1985] 2016: 29).

Tagore elicited the concept of a “wide human relationship” (Tag). According to him human nature has two distinct approaches – *jīvabhāva* and *viśvabhāva*. The instinctive needs of man within the limitation of time and place, represent the *jīvabhāva* that commonly featured in all animals. But the entity that surpasses the boundaries of the *jīvabhāva*, and leads towards the *viśvabhāva* is loaded with the internal values of human beings like *śraddhā* (respect), *akrodha* (absence of anger), *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) etc. These inner qualities differentiate man from the habits of animal and makes him a man. And eventually, cultivating these internal values, *Mānava* finds himself as a part of *Viśamānava* or the Universal human. Tagore acclaimed:

The most perfect inward expression has been attained by man in his own body. But what is most important of all is the fact that man has also attain its realization in a more subtle body outside his physical system. He misses himself when isolated; he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship. His multicellular body is born and dies; his multipersonal humanity is immortal. (Tagore 1922: 15; Essay: Man’s Universe)

Tagore’s concept of *viśva* carries certain exposition of the theory of *Vedānta*. According to Vedāntic doctrine the term *viśva* signifies the Consciousness that enters into all the creatures, and thus exist in them. Sadānanda yogīndra’s *Vedāntasāra*, a foundational text of *Vedānta* philosophy thus defines the term *viśva*: *etadvyaṣṭyupahitaṃ caitanyaṃ viśva ityucyate sūkṣmaśarīrābhimānamaparityajya sthūlaśarīrādiproviṣṭatvāt*// [Consciousness associated with the individual gross body is designated as *Viśva* on account of its entering the gross body etc. without giving up its identification with the subtle body.] (Sadānanda 1933: 67, Trans Swami Nikhilananda) So, when one “realizes in his soul those of others, and in the soul of other his own” (Tagore 193), he evokes the *viśva-bhāva* of human being, which Tagore recognized as the final truth of man.

While clarifying the “inner inter-relationship” with the Universal being Tagore asserted: “This is the spirit of civilization, which in all its best endeavour invokes our supreme Being for the only bond of Unity that leads us to truth, namely, that is righteousness.” He cited the verse of *Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad*:

ya eko'varno bahudhā śaktiyogādvārṇānanekānnihitārtho dadhāti/
vi caiti cānte viśvamādaḥ sa devaḥ sa no buddhyā shubhayā saṃyunaktu//
(*Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.1)

[“May that Divine Being, who though Himself colourless, gives rise to various colours in different ways with the help of His own power, for His own intractable purpose, and who dissolves the whole world in Himself in the end, - may He endow us with good thoughts!”] (Tyagīśānanda 1949: 77-78).

Thus, Tagore signified two layers of identity that formulate a true *Mānava*. The outer part or the external form is associated with the outer conflict caused by the surrounding circumstances like social conditions, rituals, ceremonies etc., while the inner one is subject to conquest over the inner evils like greed, agony, partiality, desire. Tagore said that the ultimate assessment of humanity (*manuṣyatva*) depends on how someone defeats his inner enemies. (Essay: Gandhiji, 1932). Conveying this very thought Tagore’s dance drama portrays the self-realization of Prakriti in two distinct levels. The first one comes with the dialogue of Ananda “*ye mānava ami sei mānava tumi*” that suddenly awakens the caṇḍāla girl from the ocean of sorrow and grief to the awareness of her rights as a human being. Prakriti, who previously remained under the belief that her touch pollutes the high-classes, feels that all her sins are washed away, she is free now. Ananda’s words teach her not to judge herself according to the irrational values of the society that suppresses her true identity by the accident of birth.

Unfortunately, the self-consciousness of Prakriti, which she calls as her new birth, or the “*paramā mukti*” (ultimate liberation) overreaches her entity. As a common woman she yearns to give herself to Ananda, a monk who is practicing celibacy. When Prakriti finds Ananda not paying any attention to her, being carried away by her frustration, craving, and arrogance she decides to drag down the disciple of Buddha from his renunciation. Krisha Kripalani analyses thus:

Without rights there can be no obligations, and service and virtue when forced become marks of slavery. But self-consciousness, like good wine, intoxicate, and it is not always easy to control the dose and have enough of it. Vanity and pride get upper hand and he who clings to rights very often trespasses on those of others. This is what happened to the heroin....A new-born consciousness to strength after ages of suppression is overpowering and one learns restraint and wisdom only with suffering. (Kripalani [1962] 2012: 365)

The *māyānṛtya* or the dance of *māyā* during the incantation presents the embodiment of the inner evil powers. When Prakriti finds Ananda, dragged to her door, suffering with disgrace and pain, she becomes shocked by her own selfishness and greed. She starts to curse herself and begs to Ananda to forgive her. Thus, her previous self-awareness attains the upper level of humanity. Defeating the inner evil, and paying heavy price, her self-realization explores the true meaning of *Mānava*. In the Buddhist legend Gautama Buddha himself saves his disciple from the charm of the caṇḍāla girl by a counter mantra, the scope of self-realization through inner conflicts is totally lacking there. In contrast, *Chandalika* tells the story of self-awareness, defeating both the outer and inner evil. The central character Prakriti rearranged her dimension against the natural instinct towards a wider direction – an extensive form of humanity.

Conclusion

In the process of designating *Mānava* or the “*amṛtasya putraḥ*” (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 2.5), Tagore envisioned a country that is divergent from the idea of the geo-political land-division, but the habitat of human beings in all senses. He drew out:

Animals live in the terrestrial globe, but man lives in what he calls his country. This country is not geographic, but spiritual. It is enriched with the currents of thoughts and love that have flowed through the ages....Irrespective of caste or colour, their thoughts and achievements belong to all men. Human beings live in a country which means a region where each man exists beyond the boundaries of his time and communication. (Essay: Man) (Tagore 1996: 195)

So, in the framework of the socio-political crisis in 1930s in India, *Chandalika* outwardly appears as an anti-caste writing evoking the message of equality in the societal structure, but a deep reading of the dance drama proves that this creation of Tagore goes beyond the narrow dimension of time and place, and in the trope of *Mānava* elicits the inner equality that binds the man, nature, and the Universe. On the other hand, Tagore’s message of self-awakening warns the untouchables not to be controlled by any external equalizer, but to determine own objective through own inner power. In the estimation of Tagore, *Mānava* is to be greater than his external appearance, though it does not invalidate the individual identity.

To diffuse his ideology Tagore chose a Buddhist story-structure, perhaps he was recalling the philanthropic approach of the *Mahāmānava* Gautama Buddha. In Buddhist theology, *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (proper conduct, morality), *kṣānti* (perseverance), *prajñā* (knowledge) are the inner values that are acknowledged as *Pāramitā*. These *Pāramitās* or *Paramīs* bring perfection to a man. So, to protect ‘what is best in man’ he yearned for the reinstatement of the Buddhist ideology of equality. But Tagore did not perceive Buddha as a representation of any anti-Vedic movement, rather he reserved a totalistic approach towards the munificent thoughts of the ancient India that built the harmony beyond all external disparities. We find Tagore, while submitting his reverence to Buddha, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, simultaneously employing the cognate ideas of Buddhist creed and Upaniṣadic utterances. And he concluded thus:

In these days of the world-wide indignity of man it is meet that we should say: *Buddham saranam gacchami*. He will be our refuge who manifested the ideal of Man in himself, who spoke the liberation which is not by adjuring work, but the practice of self-giving through rich action, and which consists not merely in the rejection of anger and malice but in the cultivation of immeasurable love and good-will towards all creatures. In these days, blinded as we are by motives of self-interest and by cruel, insatiate greed, we seek refuge in him who came into the world to reveal in his own person the real self of the Universal Man. (Tagore [1985] 2016: 33)

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