

A study of Double-edged Faces of Cleopatra and Chitra from William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Tagore's *Chitra*

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Abstract

Feminine world is built up of both love and fortitude. Society depicts only the lovable side of the women who is known for her warmth and tenderness. But the stark reality is that women is an amalgam of love and valour. The word 'fortitude' can be equated for women when it is analysed in the works of William Shakespeare and Rabindranath Tagore. The work *Antony and Cleopatra* written in 1606 and *Chitra* published in 1913 both deals with dauntless woman's '*Cleopatra and Chitra*'. Cleopatra was noted for her beauty and charm who wins the heart of Antony and Chitra was displayed by Tagore as a woman who wins the favour of Arjuna by her feminine wiles. The truth is been unwrapped here where Cleopatra's intellectual eminence wasn't praised and Chitra's sacrifice to be raised as a boy to protect the people from robbers and looters wasn't brought under limelight. This article will travel and explore the strength of the women and it will redefine the definition of women.

Key words: *love, fortitude, society, truth, reality, deconstruction.*

Introduction

The radical English poet and playwright of the Elizabethan era, William Shakespeare has written thirty-seven plays which consisted of tragedy, comedy, romantic and historical plays. Out of which, *Antony and Cleopatra* was a historical love story, borrowed from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius*. The play begins where Mark Antony one of the triumvirs of the Roman empire is fascinated by Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Fallen under the feminine wiles of Cleopatra, Antony is least concerned about the Roman empire which was threatened by Pompey. So, the quarrel arises between Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony which leads to a series of murders and bloodsheds, thereby ending in waging war against each other. Meanwhile in order to

reconcile, Antony accepts to marry Caesar's sister which lights the fire further. The play ends where Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide and Octavius Caesar takes triumph and rules the entire Roman Empire.

Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore was also a versatile Indian poet, dramatist, novelist and a philosopher. He had written most of the works in Bengali and translated his own works to English. Tagore has adapted few details for the play *Chitra* from *Mahabharata* and the plot revolves around the central character 'Chitrangada' who falls in love with the greatest warrior 'Arjuna'. Chitra being raised as a male warrior whose women attributes are dormant tries to grab the attention of Arjuna by seeking the help of Madana (God of Love) and Vasanta (God of seasons) to endow her with woman's power. At the end of the play, Chitra reveals her original identity who has disguised before and pardons Arjuna for her deceit and also promises to serve him with love and sacrifice until her death. By analyzing these works, we shall dig into the unseen side of Cleopatra and Chitra through this paper.

The Feminine world

Chitra, the daughter of the kingly house of Manipur, was raised as a warrior princess due to the absence of the male heir and she is in charge of protecting the people of the village from the robbers and marauders. She is dressed all in male attire with armour and helmet and carries a bow and a quiver full of arrows and rides on a horse majestically. She involves herself in all the manly activities like hunting, fighting and protecting etc., proving that she is no way less to a prince, who rather forgets the woman inside her. The villagers consider Chitra to be a great terror to all the evil doers. Chitra being a woman, she lacks all the feminine tricks where she states, "My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes" (Tagore sc. 2). Chitra finds a man who was sleeping on the bed of dried leaves, while she was chasing a deer in the dense thickest forest. Chitra finds it to be Arjuna, the great Kura clan and man of her dreams. Arjuna was a Kshatriya by birth and training and was noted for his extreme valor, which Chitra has desired long ago. Through the conversation between Chitra and Arjuna in scene VIII, Chitra's physic is discussed clearly who is not beautiful with dark lovely eyes instead who has a boyish face with strong arm. Arjuna rejects Chitra's love because he has taken the vow of celibacy for twelve years. Unlike ordinary woman, Chitra was

neither devastated nor grieving, rather her manly fortitude urges her to conquer Arjuna. Chitra differs from all woman in all aspects and who has different notion of love,

CHITRA. Had I but the time needed, I could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meeting out justice where it is due. (Tagore sc.1)

Chitra wishes to lend her love to Arjuna by sharing his burden and aiding him in the duties of a Kshatriya and working along with him arm in arm. Further, she tries to evoke the spiritual love between them which is devoid of time and place. She denies living a life of domesticated woman as she utters,

CHITRA. Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten. (Tagore sc. 4)

Though she refuses to live a life of ordinary woman but she never fails to show her unending love Arjuna and care for the villagers who see Chitra as their father and mother in one.

On the other hand, in the play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra, the ruler of Egypt took up the throne at the age of 18 due to the death of her father, king PtolemyXII. Cleopatra's royal reign lasted for almost 21 years. As William Shakespeare was much inspired by the life of Cleopatra, he brings out varied faces, in the character of Cleopatra. Mark Antony, the great victor of Philippi, the senior most triumvir and the master of one-third of the world has fallen a victim to Cleopatra at his first sight which Enobarbus describes the first meeting on the river Cyndus through the lines:

ENO. Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

Her infinite variety; other women cloy

The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry

Where most she satisfies. (Shakespeare 2.2. 45)

These lines delineate that Cleopatra has a magnetic power to hold any men which does not rely on her feminine wiles, instead her boundless wit. It is much clear when we notice the scene where Antony is busy to leave to Rome where Cleopatra is in solitude, she instructs her Charmian to report her condition to Antony the way opposite of his:

CLEO. See where he is, who's with him, what he does:

I did not send you: if you find him sad,

Say I am dancing; if in mirth report

That I am sudden sick. (Shakespeare 1.3. 14)

The great soldier Antony was entangled into her trap which leads him to death, who dies out of love for Cleopatra. Even in his death bed, he seeks for last kiss where he voices, "Of many thousand kisses the poor last I lay upon thy lips" (Shakespeare 4. 15 148). As soon as Antony dies, Cleopatra also decides to die but she was interrupted by Octavius who wants to carry Cleopatra alive to Rome as a war prisoner. Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, decides to kill herself and die royally and nobly. She dresses up like a queen in royal robe and crown. She gets a basket full of figs with asps and applies those asps to her breast and dies majestically and she wishes to get united with Antony after her death.

CLEO. Give me my robe, put the crown on my head I have longings after

immortality. The juice of Egypt's grapes will no longer moisten my lips

... Husband, I come. Now, may my courage prove me worthy to be called
your wife! (Shakespeare 5.2. 172)

Therefore, both Cleopatra and Chitra are brave in their acts and tender in their moves and witty in their thoughts.

Conclusion

Since the Elizabethan period, the women are portrayed as an archetype for love and nurture they show, despite the fortitude lying behind them. Women are confined to show ceaseless love to

their husband and their children and serve as ideal model for love. Yet Cleopatra and Chitra proves us that, women are an amalgam of love and fortitude and they are capable of facing any hardships in society as well as in the battle field. Hence, now woman will represent wit and fortitude.

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