



JUSTICE AND DESIRE: A CASE STUDY OF “SHYAMA”

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ABSTRACT- Rabindranath Tagore emphasizes the on the fact that in every religion greed and falsehood are condemned . He does the same in the play ‘*Shyama*’, how a man faces terrible consequences if he becomes greedy to gain worldly desires. If he follows his whims, in pursuit of money, power, physical gratification without thinking of consequences. ‘The physical desire of Shyama’, ‘the greed of an unseen sovereign’, and ‘the falsehood of guards’ and are the three things which are responsible for all the catastrophic consequences happened in the play. Let us see how this sovereign is greedy, how the guards falsely arrest the hero of the play, and how the physical desire of Shyama leads to catastrophic result.

KEYWORDS- Catastrophic consequences, Foreign merchant, Falsehood are condemned

“Greed is the insatiable desire to have more money or Possessions for self-gratification, while ignoring God and eternity”¹

This is how ‘*Bible*’ overviews greed. In every religion greed and falsehood are condemned, and harshly criticized. It is said in all the religious books that one should not follow his whims if they are greedy. Especially in Islamic religious book ‘*Holy Quran*’ there are number of verses where it is clear that man should not become greedy as all men’s belongings, power, money and gains are for this world only. Tagore said the same thing with the help of ‘*Shyama*’ that greed of love and money both will soon come to an end. It is not spiritual gain that can stay with human soul forever, even after death. The significance of wealth and power is something that will be imperceptible soon.

In his emblematic dance-drama *Shyama*, Rabindranath Tagore conveys a powerful moral lesson that echoes deeply with the fundamental teachings of many religions — that greed, deceit, and unrestrained desire ultimately lead to destruction. Throughout the play, Tagore presents how human errors, when left unrestricted, can cause not only individual devastation but also harm to others. The drama serves as a instructive tale, showing that those who chase material wealth, political power, or sensual pleasure without moral restraint or foresight often meet with tragic ends.

The narrative unfolds through three major sources of misconduct that set the disastrous events into motion: the physical longing of Shyama, the greed of an imperceptible sovereign, and the deceitfulness of the royal guards. Each of these elements symbolizes a different form of moral failure. Shyama’s deep bodily desire for the foreign merchant Bajrasen blinds her to principled considerations. In her desperation to be with him, she becomes the catalyst for a tragic mistake — an innocent man is sacrificed in order to save her beloved. Her love, driven more by passion than wisdom, sets off a chain of irreversible consequences.

At the same time, the unseen ruler of the land represents a materialistic and immoral form of power. Though he never appears directly on stage, his influence is deeply felt. His constant thirst for wealth and control is what drives the kingdom’s oppressive system, where justice is secondary to self-interest. This sovereign’s hunger for treasure becomes the pretext for the illegal arrest of Bajrasen, who is falsely accused of theft simply because he is a wealthy outsider.

Adding to the injustice is the deceit of the palace guards, who, rather than seeking the truth, blindly follow orders and arrest Bajrasen without proper exploration. Their lies and handling of facts show how those in positions of authority can become tools of domination when they abandon honesty and integrity. It is through their falsehood that the innocent is condemned and the tragedy is sealed.

Thus, Tagore masterfully interweaves these three moral failings — Shyama's uncontrolled desire, the sovereign's insatiable greed, and the guards' dishonesty — to demonstrate how personal weakness and systemic fraud can together lead to devastating consequences. The play ultimately urges the audience to reflect on the dangers of acting on impulse and self-interest, reminding us that without truth, compassion, and accountability, society fall away into chaos and suffering.

The protagonist Bojreshen is a foreign merchant. He has a priceless necklace, which is beautifully decorated with expensive and valuable stones. He has decided not to sale it, but to gift it to someone who would be his sweetheart in future. But soon it so happens that some guards are tracking him for the crime of theft from royal treasury. Though he is undoubtedly innocent, guards arrest him. As he is pulled for the execution, beautiful courtesan Shyama witnessing the whole incident, feels fascinated towards him. And due to her intense love, she cannot see him in chains. She is ready to do anything for him and decides to save him at any cost.

Though Shyama is extremely beautiful and chased by many admirers, but her heart sets on Bojroshen only. She implements a plan to save him and she does it with success, but the way she manipulates it, is erroneous. She does it in such a way that one of her passionate admirer Uttiyo, who is ready to take the blame of the charge theft. Though Uttiyo offers his life, he becomes ready to accept to take upon himself the blame of Bojroshen. Shyama also becomes ready with this, here she commits crime by being ready. Uttiyo does it to win Shyama's veneration, and Shyama does it to win her love that is Bojroshen. Thus in exchange of the life of a young man, Shyama saves Bojroshen.

Shyama does everything only for her 'physical desire', authoritarian tyrants wants to have that necklace that is their 'greed', and guards are unable to catch the real thief, and they are putting Bojroshen in, so that they will have someone to execute, this is their 'falsehood'. Guards are discussing with each other,

*"There has been a theft in the Royal Treasury.
We need a thief, no matter how.
It doesn't matter if it's just any man, we need a thief.
Otherwise we will lose our honor."*²

Here it is very clear that authoritarian tyrants do not bother about whom they are putting in the prison they just want someone to execute. They throw guiltless people in jail and enjoy executing them. It also reflects Tagore's deep concern with the aggregate unsettled atmosphere of contemporary India. In his lifetime British dictators were exploiting Indian innocent people. He has expressed his deep distress about them. As he was also a social reformer here we see his concern reflecting in his writing.

It is remarkable that these things were happening not only in his own lifetime but his thoughts are relevant even today. Though Tagore wrote these plays before a century, it seems as if still we are dealing with these issues. Though the countries and leaders are not the same still, we see today guiltless people are put to death. Tagore is as relevant and persistent today as he was for his contemporaries.

According to a true religious norms, if one has gained success with the help of a wrong path he will eventually have to suffer. As In 'Shyama', Shyama and Bojroshen run away to that unknown land where no one knows them. They think that they will live a happy life. But royal wrath pursues them. They have to face the catastrophic end. After going so far they cannot save themselves from being humiliated and being separated. As after some days Bojroshen starts asking Shyama the way she has saved him.

When it becomes more and more impossible to avert Bojroshen, Shyama has to reveal the truth about their union, and how she has rescued him from death. The horrifying episode proved so ruinous that they got separated for ever and ever. Bojroshen feels self-doomed when the bitter truth comes out and he realizes his inability to forgive Shyama. He was speechless and astound on hearing, how she could devastate an innocent life for the sake of her love. He decides he cannot remain happy and cannot lead a tranquil life on the basis of such a curse. Here it is obvious that a moral issue gains interesting dimensions through the exchange of distressed lovers.

On the other hand Shyama though unavailingly tries her best to make him understand that she will face whatever disastrous punishment God will give her. She will always be liable to God, but at least he, for whom she did all the terrible things, should try to understand her. Bojroshen is not ready to hear anything, he continues to reel under the moral disgust. He decides firmly to leave and then he scornfully assaults her. Ironically Uttiyo's sacrifice had become the cause of their union, and the cause of their separation. Two lovers are being left to face mental anguish. The irony is remarkable because Bojroshen reacts as if he has not promised to repay Shyama for what she has done for him.

The final phase of action centers the protagonist Bojroshen who continuously conflicts with Shyama. The dejected state of Bojroshen, now seems to be sealed to all calls of consideration. He is the representative of his tortured conscience. When Bojroshen reappears he is shown as a dichotomized lover who is not able to merge two conflicting things like love and sin. When he picks up the bell left behind by Shyama, it seems as if he is enhancing the impact of the disastrous situation, and revealing his determination about the disgust he is feeling for Shyama.

Shyama comes back to see whether he is thinking to forgive her, but Bojroshen is of the view that she has committed an irreparable sin. He finally rejects her disdainfully. Shyama has to accept whatever was written in unchangeable theory of her destiny. She bends down to touch his legs while departing from Bojroshen. Here Bojroshen remains alone to undergo suffering and distress with the realization of having committed a sin greater than her sin because he feels he is unable to forgive her. It seems he is doubly distressed because an innocent life is sacrificed to save him and the other thing is that he is unable to forgive Shyama, he feels helpless.

At the end we also cannot help thinking that Shyama has also been wronged for the sake of her desperate love. Somewhere or other this is something where she took her decision selfishly. She did it for her lust and she must have to return for her grievously wrong decision of sacrificing Uttiyo. If we believe in God we must have in mind a thought, as our blessings are going to benedict us, so also our curses, we are answerable to them. After sacrificing a young life, how she can live a peaceful and happy life.

Bojroshen is not a selfish man, he is a selfless straightforward man who judges things candidly. He feels anguished and devastated so he takes a very judgmental stand for her contemptible act. He is cleft by sorrow and misery and cannot live with her. He thinks in this situation no one can help them but only the Almighty, and he seeks for forgiveness. He deserts her in moral revulsion and contempt. He is could not forgive her and her fervent imploring proves nothing to him. He contemptuously rejects her. Shyama touches his feet and departs finally quitting herself to her fate. Shyama is carried away by her impassioned love for Bojroshen. Thus 'physical desire of Shyama' becomes the cause of catastrophic consequence in the play.

In a feeling of guilt Bojroshen abandons Shyama and leaves for purposeless roaming. He feels he is unable to wash out the guilt that Shyama has committed for his love. She should go through the suffering for she has committed an abominable crime. Thus 'Shyama' reflects in a way the 'Original Sin'. It mirrors considerably the *Biblical myth* because Shyama has done a punishable act, a lustful act. She has to go through the enormous retribution for her unpleasant act and Bojroshen takes a sudden judgmental decision for her foul blunder.

Thus with the character of Bojroshen Rabindranath Tagore made us familiar with an extra ordinary person who is so honest, and genuine that he had everything all the happiness of the world. Along with someone who loves him the most, but he cannot stand only because the base of their relation is not genuine, he finishes everything only because he cannot live with a person who is deceptive. A critic comments regarding this situation,

"The moral issue gains interesting dimensions through the exchange of the agonized lovers. Shyama unavailingly tries to convince Bojroshen that sinner though she is, he would not be justified in punishing her as it is to God alone that she is answerable for her evil act." 3

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