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ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE VALUE-MAKING:
WITH REFERENCE TO *FOUR CHAPTERS*

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ABSTRACT

Culture includes every aspect of human life which deals in the beliefs and values of the society. The values, customs, beliefs, ideologies and practices change with the passage of time in a society. Culture develops with the evolution of modern thinking and how people adjust to the changes around them. The society creates cultural values jointly and preserves it for the future generations. Culture has great implication so far as the cultural identity of a country is concerned. The Indian culture is the way of life of the people of India which is itself the amalgamation of several cultures within the country. It not only includes social but intellectual aspects of a human being also. India is a country with lot of diversity in social environment but within these diversities, there is unity in the cultural values which acts as a joining force among the various religions. A noteworthy trait of Indian culture is that with the passage of time it has elegantly accepted the changes in the living style; on the other hand the spirit of Indian cultural values has remained constant. The family values, human values and social values are the primary part of Indian culture. And the youth plays an important role in the value-making of a country. The future of any country solely depends upon the values which youth carries forward. Henceforth the role of the youth is amplified with the responsibilities. All this is treated as one of the major theme in the Indian fiction especially by Rabindranth Tagore. The present paper critically examines the same theme through the text titled *Four Chapters* by Tagore.

Key Words: Cultural-values, Belief-system, Human-values, Society, Youth.

Culture deals in various belief-systems, customs and values of the society. Culture is the pattern of thinking which people living in particular social set – up create. It is the centre of the society, is not inborn rather learnt socially by associating with each- other and is in fact, the outcome of social interaction which is passed on from one generation to the next. To achieve its highest potential it requires the energy and enthusiasm of whole society:

High culture or ardent intelligence, pervading a large body of the community, acquire a breath of basis, a sum of force, an energy of central heat for radiating further, which they can never possess when they pervade a small upper class only. It is when such a broad basis is obtained, that individual genius gets its proper nutriment, and is animated to put forth its best powers; this is the secret of rich and beautiful epochs in national life. (Carroll 63)

Culture does not remain static, it undergoes changes from time to time. "Any attempt to define culture needs to mull over a broad range of topics such as politics, religion, anthropology, psychology and sociology" (Pandey 187). The traditions, values, customs, religions, beliefs, ideologies and practices change with the passage of time in a society. Culture develops with the evolution of modern thinking and people adjust to the changes in the world around them. The society collectively creates culture and preserves it in the form of works of art and traditions.

The word culture has evolved as a theory since the definition given by Matthew Arnold. It has become a part of "Cultural Studies". The term "Cultural Studies" was used by Richard Hoggart in 1964 when he founded the 'Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' (Wikipedia). After Hoggart, Stuart Hall (1932-2014), a Jamaican – born cultural theorist, became the director of the centre and strongly associated himself with the term "Cultural Studies". Some publications in 1950s were influential in framing the concept of Cultural Studies. Roland Barthes (1915 - 1980) in his book *Mythologies* (1957) analysed social conventions and examined the tendency of contemporary social value systems. Richard Hoggart (1918 - 2014) in his work *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working – Class Life* (1957) dealt with the working class culture of 1930s and 1940s. He brought working-class culture into focus which was earlier condemned by the high culture society. Even more influential was Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958) in which he criticised the distinction between 'high culture' and 'low culture'. His slogan 'Culture is ordinary' had been a strong influence in cultural studies:

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning.... The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind.... A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture; that it is always both traditional and creative.... Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (Williams 93)

The Cultural Studies in India emerged in 1980s. Cultural studies posed challenge to the discipline of English literature in India from the very beginning. The practitioners of this study did not take any serious initiative towards it. "The initial reception of Gauri Vishwanthan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British rule in India* (1989) was lukewarm till the ascendancy of post-colonialism made it impossible to remain impervious to the range of audacious new questions raised in the wake of Said's Bhabha's and Spivak's works" (Mukhapadhyay 282). Vivek Dhareshwar, "a self-styled guru of Cultural Studies" (283), focused that the cultural studies needed to be reinvented for India because of "its preoccupation with the 'trivial' things that go into the making of our everyday worldly life: advertisement, fashion, popular music, television etc." (283).

The Cultural Studies is that field of study which encompasses the different cultural practices of a society. In India, it took the form of a movement in the nineteenth century. The cultural revolution in India flourished and surged forward with the social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy (1772 - 1833), followed by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876 - 1938), Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) and Kazi Nazrul (1899 - 1976). The cultural movement led by them outmoded the religious bigotry, dogmas and social prejudices which victimised the downtrodden and oppressed section of the society in India. This spirit of reform opposed the social practices such as untouchability, discrimination on the basis of caste, custom of 'Sati' etc, and supported widow remarriage and women's education. The momentum accumulated through this reformation went a long way in the upliftment of the society.

Culture has great significance so far as the cultural identity of the country is concerned. The Indian culture is the way of life of the people of India which is the amalgamation of several cultures within the nation. It includes social and intellectual aspects of a human being and the youth play an important role in it. Almost all Indian writers have tried to maintain the values and customs in their works. Rabindranath Tagore too deals with the theme of indigenous culture in his novels. His novels exemplify Tagore's remarkable ability to treat the cultural values. Tagore through his novels suggests that culture and society are interlinked.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Four Chapters* (Char Adhayay, 1934) has the theme of tragic dialectic between human values and political agitation like his *The Home and the World*. In *The Home and the World*, the primary concern is the impact of Swadeshi Movement on the individuals whereas in *Four Chapters* Tagore has taken the Terrorist Movement as its theme. "The nature and course of love between Ela and Atin – the principal characters – needs to be interpreted, however, in terms of not only their individual characters but also their interaction of self and circumstances" (Raj 96-97). Tagore himself testifies in his note to the novel, *Four Chapters*:

What might be called the only theme of the book is the love of Ela and Atindra. The nature and course of the love between man and woman is determined not only by the individual characters of the lovers; it is influenced also by the impact of their circumstances on them. The river brings down its gushing nature from the mountaintop that gives it birth, but it acquires its distinctiveness from the contour of the land through which it flows. The same is the case with love. On the one hand, there is inner feeling, on the other, the conflict with outward circumstances. It is the combination of these two factors that gives the complete picture its individuality. (179-180)

The novel comprises of four sections, each one reveals a particular phase of Atin – Ela relationship. The author narrates the story using the flashback technique from time-to-time in the text. "The narrative framework is strengthened by a skillfully dove-tailing of present and past incidents through the device of flashback" (Raj 107). Along with this, Tagore makes the extensive use of the dialogue form to reveal the characters in the narrative. Any controversy provoked by the novel "falls outside the province of literary criticism" (179). "Besides being non-literary, it is pointless in that what the novel presents can not be and should not be measured against the actual political situation in Bengal since it creates its own world in which the characters are the products of circumstances under the plot structure of the novel" (Raj 100).

Social injustice is unfair treatment with an individual by the society. This unjust behaviour towards any person fills him with frustration and hatred. Tagore has presented Indranath, another character of the novel, as the victim of social injustice. Indranath, portrays self-love and rebels against the society for the injustice he has faced (he is accused of being a political suspect in Europe and his bright career in research is ruined thereafter). It is his personal frustration rather than love for the country that compels him to take the path of terrorism. He uses terrorism as an easy way to avenge his humiliation at the hands of the British Government which has destroyed his dream of scientific fame. He becomes a political suspect in Europe and comes back to India with no hope of a career in research. In India, he secures a job of a teacher through the recommendation of an eminent English scientist. But soon he resigns from the job and starts an institution for teaching German and French. He tells Kanai Gupta (retired sub-inspector of police) about his frustration:

...They tried to make me petty by closing the door on every side. I'm determined to show them that I'm great, even if that entails disaster at every step. You can see for yourself, Kanai, how these followers have come round me at my call, recking nothing of life or death. Why? Because I know how to call. That's what I want to make clear to myself and others; and after that, I don't care what happens. (Tagore, *Four Chapters* 196)

Indranath has the intellect and charisma coupled together to assume the command of the terrorist movement. Tagore records about his personality:

To say that Indranath was handsome would be to leave much unsaid... Harsh words were not difficult for him to speak, but he spoke them with a smile... He took just so much care of his appearance as was necessary for his dignity, and no more... Some believed that his intelligence was unusual, others that his power was super natural; so that some had limitless veneration for him, others an unaccountable dread. Students all over the country looked on him as an uncrowned king. (187-88)

Social injustice fills Indranath with revenge and hatred which turns him into a man without any value and ethic. He becomes so emotionless that does not hesitate to put the lives of innocent people into danger to gain his personal benefits. He is a frustrated man who is ready to avenge it on society through his actions. He declares:

I've long given up thinking in terms of victory and defeat. As leader in a grand enterprise I'm here because it becomes me; either victory or defeat will be equally greatOn a historical view, the epic may seem to end in a vast burial ground of defeat. Still it would be an epic. For the curtailed manhood of this slave-ridden country, isn't it the greatest of opportunities to be able to die the death of a hero? (196)

The love relationship of Ela and Atin is disapproved by Indranath who at the time of introducing Ela into the movement cautions her against any kind of emotional entanglement by saying: "The only promise I ask of you is never to become entangled in any social relationship. You are not for society, but for your country alone!" (190). Indranath believes that emotional bond is the biggest obstacle in the way of the service of the country. Indranath draws Ela into the movement because of her love for the country. She has been given the charge of a high school for girls established by Indranath but her main task is to attract young men towards the movement about which Ela is unaware of. Indranath, also called as master, replies to Ela when she complains that she is not given any revolutionary job:

It's not work I want of you. Of course, it is hardly possible for you yourself to know of the glory that lights up the hearts of the boys at the touch of your fingers when you anoint their foreheads with the red sandal-paste of initiation. How can the dry rewards I have to offer evoke the same quality of work? (190-191)

Hence, Indranath convinces Ela about her love for the motherland and she too believes, "This love of mine is day by day overshadowing my love for all else" (191). But human love too takes place with the entry of Atin in the group. The main focus of the novel is on the relationship of Atin and Ela and the complications arising out of the conflicts between them. He is the man with social values and has an urge to serve his country through patriotic work rather than the terrorist activities. He tells Ela: "The new birth, the new age, the gate of death – all these tags sicken me so! The members of the band have tried their best to paint me with their brush, But I've not been able to take their colour" (229)

Ela's blind faith in Indranath is shaken when Atin reveals the nature of the terrorist activities. She feels shattered after knowing the fact and wants to spend rest of her life with Atin peacefully: "I offer you my hand in marriage, Ontu, as the princesses of old used to do. Take me. There's no time to lose. Let us pledge our troth by exchange of vows. Then take me as helpmate along your path" (224). Atin does not want to entangle himself in marriage and believes that this will weaken him as an individual. He is in a dilemma and claims to Ela: "You don't seem to realise how my wings have been clipped, my limbs shackled. I had the responsibility as well as the capacity, to take my own true place in my country's service. You made me forget it" (206-07). He feels that he is so deeply involved in the activities conducted by Indranath that it is almost impossible to come out of it now. Despite this he has a strong desire to be married to Ela:

That's what I've been trying to tell you. I desired union with you – a very simple desire, a most ungovernable desire. I found the usual way closed. I desperately entrusted my life to a crooked way. I have now come to know that it will lead me to my death. When at last I am dead to my real self, your outstretched arms will beseech me. (208)

Indranath too has a belief that Atin will stick to the movement till the end due to his pride of not leaving any task in between. Atin's sense of honour will not allow him to detach himself from the terrorist activities. However, all his calculations prove wrong in the case of Atin and Ela. Atin questions the very philosophy of terrorism and explains to Ela:

One who openly fights a more powerful foe, even if his be a hopeless struggle, is in the same class as his opponent; his honour remains unsullied... It was for us before we were knocked out, before we met our death, to prove ourselves the greater, as men – why else this play of pitting ourselves against immeasurably superior forces?... One thing has become clear to me. To oppose overwhelming strength by brute force can but brutalize in the end one's very soul. (222-223)

Atin active involvement in Indranath's terrorist movement degrades his character and his human values which he himself accepts: "I've come down to the last rung of my degradation. The other day our band robbed a helpless old widow of all she had" (236). This brutal act of Atin makes him feel ashamed of himself. Indranath

makes the best use of this situation and sends police after Atin and Ela with the help of Batu who is another member of Indranath's movement. Ela senses the future and requests Atin: "Ontu, my Ontu, my king, my god! I've not to this day been able to show you how much I love you. By this love I charge you – kill me, kill me!" (237) as she is well aware that Batu wants to get married to her and she does not want to let his unclean hands touch her body. But Atin requests her to sleep and gives her chloroform: "I've brought medicine that'll put you to sleep" (238).

Tagore vindicates through Ela and Atin the superior principle of human love which can conquer the cruelty, meanness and the inhuman machine which tries to crush the human life. This text portrays the real picture of the freedom struggle in early twentieth century and shows how the terrorist activities take place in the name of nationalism. The misuse of nationalism becomes part of this novel as well. Indranath in *Four Chapters* and Sandip in *The Home And the World* fulfill their own interests in the name of nationalism. Tagore has attacked this adverse version of nationalism strongly in his writings.

Rabindranath Tagore has treated culture as an amalgamation of all kinds of social beliefs, values and stipulated norms of conduct and how the youth depict them. Rabindranath Tagore has presented the culture prevailing in the Indian Bengali society in late nineteenth and early twentieth century through *Four Chapters*. The text also presents Tagore's vision of India – a country equal on the basis of caste, race and religion. The strong family values and traditions are also expressed through the texts with the background of political struggle. Transformation of the characters after self-realisation is highlighted through the text discussed along with the importance of youth in value-making.

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