



NATYAKRISHTI

Theater & Cultural Association of Greater Washington

PRESENTS

Rabindranath Tagore's

রক্ত কবী
(Red Oleanders)

Direction: Jogabrata Majumdar

November 17, 2006 – 8 PM

F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre
Rockville Civic Center Auditorium
603 Edmonston Dr., Rockville, MD 20851

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Disclaimer: Natyakrishti apologizes for any inadvertent mistakes, omissions and misrepresentations in this publication.

About Natyakrishti-TCAGW

Natyakrishti-TCAGW is an amateur theater and cultural group based in the greater Washington D.C., USA.

In 1985, a group of enthusiastic, dedicated theater lovers in the greater Washington area, aspiring to initiate theatrical and cultural activities, formed an amateur drama group. A number of highly acclaimed dramas were staged by the group at the Durgapuja festivals organized by Sanskriti, Inc. of the Washington Metropolitan area. These dramas were also staged in various other cities of the USA, namely, Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Virginia Beach, Fairfax and Columbia. Some of the members concurrently participated in the theatrical and cultural events organized by other groups like Manab Kalyan Kendra, Sanskriti, Mayur, etc. They performed in major roles in the dance dramas Achalayatan and Moha Mudgar, organized by the Hon'ble Ambassador Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, which were staged in Kennedy Center, Gandhi Center and the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C.

With the belief that the efforts at promoting theatrical and cultural activities will not be sustained only by staging dramas, a few distinguished individuals of the group planned to increase the horizon by nurturing the Indian theatrical school of thoughts in the USA, exchanging views with Indian stalwarts in the field and introducing their vision in the thespian endeavors of the group. Hence, with a view to developing histrionic talents, active association was initiated with renowned theater groups like Nandikar, Sayak, Calcutta High Court Advocates' Drama Association in India (Hon'ble Minister Ajit Panja's group). When the Indian groups performed here in the USA, these individuals were involved in different aspects of the productions, including stagecraft, sound, lighting, and performing in dramas like Chokh Galo, Meghnad Badh Kabya, Sesh Sakshatkar, Kabye-o-Ganey, Barda, Gotraheen, Daibaddha and Noti Binodini.

At the dawn of the new millennium, with the knowledge and experiences that have been gained since 1985, the need was felt to change the course of direction with a view to conducting more intense and mission oriented programs. To this end, these distinguished personalities along with other vibrant and talented members of our community, informally formed an

amateur group with a new vision and mission, and named it Theater and Cultural Association of Greater Washington. The group, for the purpose of organizing themselves, had already staged several greatly commended dramas, which were either authored or previously produced by famous personalities like Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Utpal Dutta, Manoj Mitra, Sailesh Guha Niyogi and Mohit Chattopadhyay. These dramas were staged in many different cities of the USA.

Over time, the vision of Indian drama stalwarts translated into the thoughts and views of the group, and at present, they have officially formalized the creation of a progressive and creative cultural organization named Natyakrishti- Theater and Cultural Association of Greater Washington (Natyakrishti-TCAGW). Natyakrishti-TCAGW embodies a vision for the future and embraces all talented as well as the novice, skilled and unskilled actors and actresses, singers and culturally oriented personalities irrespective of their color, creed, national origin, or religious beliefs. Natyakrishti-TCAGW assures that it will serve the purpose of quenching the thirst of all drama loving people in the USA and Canada.

Recently, Natyakrishti staged Rakta Karobi, a classic play by Rabindranath Tagore, in Toronto, Canada. The performance drew accolade from the entire audience, including a renowned movie personality from India who was present in the auditorium. The selection of a symbolic play like Tagore's Rakta Karobi, and its successful production, characterizes Natyakrishti's journey towards realization of its vision.

Presently, Natyakrishti-TCAGW is a registered organization in the State of Maryland and gearing towards filing for non-profit status. The officers and members of Natyakrishti do not receive any compensation in any form (cash or gift) whatsoever, nor do they hold any economic or financial interests in the organization.

Natyakrishti is thankful for the inspiration and encouragement received from well-wishers in the community, several theater activists in the USA and Canada, and above all, the doyens of Bengali theater such as Professor Rudraprasad Sengupta, Swatilekha Sengupta, and Gautam Halder of Nandikar, Kolkata, India.

Previous Performances

| Drama/Production | Direction | Staged in |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Rakta Karobi Natyakrishti-TCAGW | Jogabrata Majumdar | Toronto, Canada |
| Kanamachhi Khela TCAGW | Jogabrata Majumdar | Germantown, MD Monmouth J., NJ |
| Buro Shalikher Ghare Rnow TCAGW | Jogabrata Majumdar | Rockville, MD Monmouth J., NJ |
| Dampati TCAGW | Jogabrata Majumdar | Potomac, MD |
| Same Side TCAGW | Jogabrata Majumdar | Potomac, MD Greenbelt, MD |
| Subarna Golok | Nihar Roy | Potomac, MD Greenbelt, MD |
| Past involvements with other groups: <i>Some of our vibrant members participated in major roles and even directed the theatrical productions organized and presented by other groups.</i> | | |
| Moha Mudgar Gandhi Center | Kamala Devi | Kennedy Center Washington, DC |
| Tiner Talowar Anartik | Jogabrata Majumdar | Bethesda, MD Cleveland, OH |
| Chak Bhanga Madhu Anartik | Jogabrata Majumdar | Bethesda, MD Boston. MA |
| Achalayatan Indian Embassy | Siddhartha Roy | Washington, DC |
| Chitrangada MKK | Jayantee Paine Ganguly | Greenbelt, MD |

Cast

(In order of appearance)

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Nandini | : Jayasree Majumdar |
| Kishore | : Rajarshi Chattopadhyay |
| Adhyapak | : Rabin Roy |
| Gokul | : Sunil Kundu |
| Raja | : Kamanashish Chakravorty |
| Chandra | : Archana Bandyopadhyay |
| Fagulal | : Monoj Sircar |
| Bishu Pagal | : Sarbajit Sinha (Rana) |
| Sardar | : Sikhindra Mitra |
| Gosain | : Kalyan Maitra |
| Morol/Mod Bahak | : Prabal Bandyopadhyay |
| Palowan/Astra bahak | : Rashbehari Ghatak |
| Pujarini | : Madhumita Sircar |
| Prahari | : Nikhil Basu |
| Ranjan | : Mayukh Sircar |

Behind the Stage

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Assistant Directors | : Rabin Roy, Sarbajit Sinha (Rana) |
| Background Music & Sound | : Gargi Roy |
| Special Effects & Light | : Dilip K. Som, Panchanon Chattopadhyay |
| Live Music | : Pramita & Deb K. Chatterjee, Jitu Das |
| Producer | : Kamanashish Chakravorty |
| Stage Design | : Prodyut Niyogi |
| Stage Design Assistant | : Prabal Bandyopadhyay |
| Art & Décor | : Raka Saha, Sunil Sukla, Archana Bandyopadhyay |
| Costume Design | : Bharati Mitra |
| Choreography | : Sukanya Mukherjee |
| Make up | : Sutapa Ghosh, Kamanasish Chakravorty |
| Stage Manager | : Sanghamitra Dutta, Deb K. Chatterjee |
| Subtitling | : Dilip K. Som, Suchismita Chattopadhyay, Jayati Bera, Swati Sinha (Piu) |
| Video | : Pratik Majumdar, Shonali Roy |
| Still Photography/Access TV | : Shonali Roy |

Director

: **Jogabrata Majumdar**

Rakta Karobi Management Team

Advisory Committee: Rudraprasad Sengupta, Swatilekha Sengupta and Gautam Halder (Nandikar), Asok Motayed, Alokadri Bose, Dhruba Chattoraj, Alokanda Paul, Bratin Saha, Budhhadev Paul

Chairman: Mihir Mitra

Vice Chairpersons: Bandana Bose, Sikha Paul

President: Taraknath Bhar

Vice Presidents: Kalo Baran Bhattacharya, Sikhindra Mitra

Secretary: Sudhansu Saha

Treasurer: Sarbajit Sinha

Community Outreach: Eva Chakraborty, Purnima Rana, Bharati Mitra, Deb Kumar Chatterjee, Sakti Nandi, Kalobaran Bhattacharya, Rama Saha, Sanghamitra Dutta, Panchanon Chattopadhyay, Pradip Ray

Playbill: Suchismita Chattopadhyay, Dilip K. Som, Amiya Samanta

Facility Coordinators: Sudhansu Saha, Prabal Bandyopadhyay

Lobby Management: Tapan Bera, Utpal Dasgupta

Ushers: Sreya Sinha, Sree Sinha, Trisha Dalal, Tiasha Bera

Auditorium Management: Dhruba Chattoraj, Kalobaran Bhattacharya, Himadri Bhattacharya

Natyakrishti-TCAGW acknowledges the support, encouragement and donations from the following patrons and grand patrons for staging Rakta Karobi.

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Washington DC Area

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Surajit & Samita Goswami

Dev Kumar & Pinal Kar

Tapan & Gouri Mukherjee

Nitya & Jayasree Nath

Buddhadev & Sikha Paul

Dilip & Alokanda Paul

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Panchanon & Suchismita Chattopadhyay
Dhruba & Sruti Chatteraj
Rashbehari & Dipali Ghatak
Debdas & Meera Ghosal
Sunil & Jayasri Kundu
Kalyan & Rekha Maitra
Jogabrata & Jayasree Majumdar
Mihir & Arati Mitra
Sikhindra & Bharati Mitra
Asoke & Saswati Motayed
Pradyot & Anima Niyogi
Rabin & Gargi Roy
Raka & Bratin Saha
Sudhansu & Rama Saha
Amiya & Susmita Samanta
Sarbajit & Swati Sinha
Monoj & Madhumita Sircar
Dilip K. Som



Rudraprasad Sengupta

March 15, 2006

Dear Friends of Washington Theatre
and Cultural Association,

As cultural activists, like never before, we are facing an ever-increasing encroachment upon our space. Opposed to the 'open sky', the 'synthetic'... and 'mass', non-commercial space for culture is shrinking everyday.

Crisis for cultural activists becomes deeper when we notice that this 'global village' of ours perhaps resembles a huge world-wide platform teeming with variously displaced persons with damaged cultural identities.

As students of Tagore, we can remember that "Ye must not presume to lead the world out of your own fear, rather try to ride your boat with faith in your boatman!"

When we heard that Washington Theatre and Cultural Association was preparing a presentation of 'Raktakarabi' (Red Oleander), our first reaction, as fellow travellers, was a feeling of respect, almost a sense of reverence. We know how difficult it is....

But then, if one does something for sheer joy — for example, a production of 'Raktakarabi' — who can deny our journey from joy to joy! When inmates of a Concentration Camp in Poland awaiting certain liquidation were performing 'Daghar' (Post Office), they were not fighting the War, neither they intended to embark upon a narcissistic journey; they were actually resurrecting their souls!

Dear Friends, you have loved 'Raktakarabi', now go and share it with some of your dear and near ones there. We shall pray — no, not for your success — for your journey in togetherness, — in search of a 'stillpoint', with Tagore, at a time when 'time is out of joint', and, in a space, where this wonderful 'Brahmanda' of ours is no more than 'a small planet', to quote IBM.

Friends, can it be just a coincidence that Tagore's visit to the USA prompted him to write 'Raktakarabi' and you, stationed in the same place, are keen to recontextualize the same play after long 82 years!

Bravo, sisters and brothers of America!

With fond regards,

For Rudraprasad, Swatilekha, Goutam, Sohini, Hebsankar
and the rest of Nandikar —

Rudraprasad Sengupta

Rakta Karobi – sequences of the play

The drama is set in a place called Yakshapuri. The people of Yakshapuri work in gold mines. Their unseen King lives behind a structure of intricate network. All events of the drama take place in front of this structure of network.

Sequence 1: Nandini and Kishore

The young boy Kishore innocently expresses his affection for Nandini when he admits that merely pronouncing her name brings him joy. He also presents her with her favorite flower, the red oleanders (Rakta Karobi), which she earnestly wanted but could not find.

Sequence 2: Nandini and Adhyapak (Professor)

Adhyapak's liking for Nandini is expressed through his awe at her dazzling presence. Contrary to Adhyapak's belief, Nandini is not scared of the place.

Sequence 3: Nandini and Gokul

Gokul is puzzled at who Nandini really is and remains suspicious about her. He fears Nandini will bring a terrible evil by the end of the day.

Sequence 4: Nandini and the Voice

Nandini picks up a conversation with the man behind the closed gates, the "King", whose presence is known only by his Voice, and deemed by all as a fearsome being. He expresses his inner self. He is envious of her simplicity and perfection, as well as her love for friend Ranjan.

Sequence 5: Phagulal, Chandra (Phagulal's wife), Bishu and Gokul

Chandra argues about Phagulal's habit of excessive drinking. Chandra suspects that Nandini's presence is somehow affecting everyone, and he warns Phagulal against it. She also cautions Bishu about Nandini. Gokul expresses his distrust for Nandini's motive and warns Bishu against her.

Sequence 6: Phagulal, Chandra, Bishu, Sardar (Commander) and Gosain (Holy man)

Bishu explains to Chandra, -- hard work driven by hunger brings exhaustion, which can be soothed by getting drunk on Nature's beauty. But the dearth of Nature in the midst of Yakshapuri's demanding work leads them to find comfort in getting drunk by alternate means. They lament about their present

life, being known not by names, but numbers allotted to them. As Sardar enters, Chandra requests his permission to go back home during the harvest festival. Sardar makes an obvious false promise to consider the request, and introduces Gosain, the holy man who is supposed to look after the so-called spiritual well being of the miners. Phagulal does not like the idea.

Sequence 7: Phagulal, Chandra and Bishu

As Nandini calls Bishu, an angry, irate Chandra blurts out that men are attracted more towards women that they find intriguing or mysterious and ignore simple ones like her. She cautions Bishu against the catastrophe that Nandini might bring him and then she leaves, dragging Phagulal along.

Sequence 8: Bishu, Nandini and Sardar (Commander)

Bishu tells Nandini how she had offered him relief from the depressing life at Yakshapuri. He relates how he was challenged by a woman and thus came to Yakshapuri and unable to flee now. She assures him that she is going to take him out of here. They talk about the King, whom only Nandini has seen. As they discuss about Sardar, he arrives. Nandini requests Sardar to let Ranjan come, and he assures her that she will meet Ranjan that very day. At this, Nandini happily offers Sardar a garland of kunda flower. Sardar accepts it and leaves.

Sequence 9: Bishu, Nandini and the Voice

Nandini's request to let her come into the room goes in vain, as the Voice tells her that it is not the proper time yet. The Voice becomes outraged and expresses his desire to destroy her partnership with Bishu. He asks for the red oleanders from her. At the mention of Ranjan, he gets infuriated and wishes to grind Ranjan to dust. At this, Nandini scorns him for his pretension to frighten others. He grows impatient and orders her to leave, but Nandini defies it. He finally calms down and expresses his wish to be with Nandini, which he feels will bring him peace that he is longing for. Nandini feels that Ranjan will be coming today and says she will give Ranjan a feather of blunneck, the sign of victory, when she meets him.

Sequence 10: Sardar (Commander) and Morol (Headman)

Sardar directs Morol not to let Ranjan come to this area. Morol relates that Ranjan has been taken to Vajragarh but while there, he seems to be instilling an air of freedom, and everyone seems to have become his follower. However, he has managed to flee. Sardar spots Ranjan playing music at a distance, and runs out with Morol to capture him.

Sequence 11: Nandini, Sardar (Commander) and Adhyapak (Professor)

Nandini recognizes familiar faces amongst the shadowy figures that are passing by groaning and moaning, barely able to walk. In answer to her query, Sardar remarks that they are “Rajar ento” (vestiges of King’s foods). Nandini is heart-broken at the sight, and laments to Adhyapak that these perfect men that she knew seem to have corroded into rust. They can hear the groans of the wrestler, Gojju, who, as the professor explains, had come to avenge his brother’s death.

Sequence 12: Nandini, Adhyapak (Professor), Paloan (Wrestler), Sardar (Commander) and Gosain (Holy man)

The groaning Paloan drags himself in. Adhyapak denies Nandini’s request to help the Paloan go home. He departs when he sees Sardar coming, but leaves a hint that Nandini’s simplicity also might have shaken the cruel nature of Sardar. Sardar orders the wrestler to go to his allocated shelter. Nandini inquires about Bishu’s whereabouts, and goes into a rage at Gosain’s comments that wherever he is, it is for the best. Gosain flees. Sardar informs that Bishu has been taken to the court of judgment and blames Nandini for dragging Bishu to his peril. He also says that she will never see Ranjan again.

Sequence 13: Nandini, Kishore and Bishu

As Nandini tries to talk to the King, Kishore comes in. He solemnly asks her to be prepared to meet Bishu. Bishu enters in handcuffs. He explains to the devastated Nandini that he is being taken to prison only for speaking the truth. Kishore asks Bishu’s permission to convince the guards to take him instead of Bishu. But he forbids him, offering him a more dangerous job instead, to find Ranjan. Kishore departs, carrying Nandini’s red oleander, as her message for Ranjan.

Sequence 14: Nandini and Bishu

Bishu wishes that Nandini be united with Ranjan. But she regrets, for turning away Bishu empty-handed and also for being unable to reward the boy Kishore, for his deep affection. Bishu points out that Kishore’s inner self has been revealed to him by the fire that Nandini has lighted up in his life. Bishu leaves with the guards.

Sequence 15: Nandini, Phagulal, Chandra and Gokul

Nandini informs Phagulal that Bishu has been taken prisoner. Chandra blames Nandini for it. Nandini is shocked at this and mentions that Bishu wanted freedom, but how could she save someone who wanted to be free from the tyranny of safety? Chandra angrily demands that she bring Bishu

back at any cost. Phagulal suggests that they gather up men and break the prison gates. Nandini wants to join them. Gokul calls Nandini a witch and cautions Phagulal about her. Phagulal urges Gokul to show his bravery by joining them in the fight.

Sequence 16: Nandini and the passers-by

Nandini questions the passers-by, who are getting ready for the celebration of flag worship, about Ranjan's whereabouts, but everybody seems to avoid answering her.

Sequence 17: Nandini and the Voice

Nandini urges for the door to be opened. The King orders her to leave. He tells her that he has ordered the Commander to bring Ranjan to her. Nandini fearlessly defies all his commands and demands that the door be opened immediately. Gods can wait eternally for offerings, she says, but sorrows of men cannot. The Voice grows impatient and disturbed. Nandini says that she hates his pampering, and wants to be scared by him just like the others. The angry Voice is dismayed at this comment and said it is time to smash her audacity, time to unravel him to her. The door opens and the King steps out.

Sequence 18: Nandini and King

Through the open door, Nandini sees into the King's chamber, where she finds someone lying down. Instantly, she recognizes Ranjan. The King vehemently denies, but Nandini's insistence leads the King to eventually realize the truth. She implores the King to use his magic power to wake up Ranjan. The King laments that all along, he has used his power to kill youth and now, the curse of dead youth is on him. Nandini lovingly places the feather of blunneck, a sign of victory, on Ranjan. She notices the string of red oleanders on Ranjan's hand and realizes that he had met Kishore. She asks the King about Kishore, who, the King says, has burst out like a bubble. Nandini, now outraged, challenges the King. The King responds by pleading to Nandini to join him in this fight. He breaks his flagstaff and invites Nandini to tear off the flag. He yearns to be hurt by Nandini to death, and his ultimate freedom.

Sequence 19: Nandini, King and Phagulal

Phagulal sees and recognizes the King and starts accusing Nandini of conspiring with him. Phagulal explains that they have set out to break down the prison and the King expresses his intent to join them in this uprising. Nandini explains to him that her wish of bringing Ranjan amongst them has been fulfilled. At Phagulal's comment that Ranjan is lying silent, Nandini proclaims that he is not silent, through his death has arrived his message of

triumph over tyranny and he is sure to come back again. She sees Sardar, with her garland of kunda flowers hanging on his spear-head. She runs out to meet him, declaring that she is on her way to dye that garland the color of the red oleander with her blood. The King follows, calling out to her.

Sequence 20: Phagulal and Adhyapak (Professor)

Finding out that the King has finally comprehended the secret of Life and has gone on its quest, Adhyapak abandons his books and seeks to follow him.

Sequence 21: Phagulal and Bishu

Bishu comes in looking for Nandini, bringing the news that the workmen have broken into the prison and gone off to fight. Phagulal informs him that Nandini has departed, ahead of the rest, for the last freedom. Bishu sees Ranjan lying there. He then sets off to his last journey, calling all to join the fight. Phagulal follows him.

Tagore's Rakta Karobi

Jogabrata Majumdar

After World War I, the great poet of our land, Rabindranath Tagore realized that all sensible people in our world should immensely engage in shaping and guiding the destiny of our civilization. The spirit of an organized power, which is not social in character and disproportionate to normal constitution of human civilization, would always disseminate the ignorance of darkness. This grandiose realization along with overwhelming passion for human dignity and total dedication to the cause of human rights prompted our universal poet to author an “epic of love” in the form of a drama named “Rakta Karobi. The poet has portrayed Nandini in Rakta Karobi as a real woman who knows that wealth and power are illusions (*Maya*) and the real expression of life dwells in love.

In his article “Crisis of Civilization” Tagore exclaimed “It is a sin to lose faith in humanity”. In Rakta Karobi, he has manifested that love is such an

invincible tool that it could disarray organized powers that subjugate humanity. To provide light and shade to the portrayal of the principal characters, Tagore centers our interest upon the idealistic love between Nandini and Ranjan, which resembles a vigorous tidal wave that has paramount potentiality to wash away the strong barrier between the king and his subjects. Nandini recognizes the potency of her youthful love with Ranjan, which she utilizes to sweep away all barriers. She proclaims that wherever Ranjan exists, he makes a sense of freedom prevail and that inspires his associates to move on towards the wisdom of light and fight to tear shackle of slavery. Rakta Karobi has a whole gallery of characters and portrays the perspective of two camps each derived from distinctly different doctrine, one that is dominated and oppressed, as characterized by Nandini, Ranjan, Fagulal, Bishu Pagal, Gokul etc., and the other that dominates, the organized power, as portrayed by Raja, Adhyapak, Sardar, Moral, Gnosai etc. The futility of Nandini's adoration toward Kishore, the violation of human rights in so called *Jakshapuri* (which symbolizes modern mechanized culture) and her experience through a series of incidents where Anup, Upamannyu, Saklu, Garju and other villagers are brutally tortured, prompted her to rise against the oppressor. She challenges the king with her firm and powerful voice "open the door, now it is the time for me to mobilize my force and declare war against your establishment". The king eventually wrestles to free himself from the network that symbolizes his superstitious and autocratic environment, and comes out from the darkness of his baneful existence to the radiance of cosmic light, where for the first time in his life, he realizes the true meaning of "Life" and "Death".

The play commands profound moral lessons to inspire us to get involved in shaping our destiny. The poet teaches that the fundamental principle of humanity should dwell in the wisdom of light and not in the ignorance of darkness. Since the industrial revolution, the journey of our civilization has taken a dangerous path that has evolved from a purely materialistic philosophy of amassing wealth even at the cost of moral ethics and human dignity. The two world wars bear ample testimony to this misguided philosophy. Moreover, with the advancement of science and technology, the world order has taken another dangerous path leading to quite a few nations engaging in ever spiraling arms race with a bitter competition to stockpile nuclear arsenal. A substantial amount of the nations' capital income is appropriated for the production of nuclear arms at the cost of human development and creating poverty, sufferings from malnutrition, starvation and even death. This is the true character of an organized power that resides in the ignorance of the true values of human dignity.

The definition of love as depicted by Shakespeare in his great drama Romeo and Juliet, when compared with that in Rakta Karobi, illustrates that just as the tragic end of love between Romeo and Juliet ceases the inherited quarrel between two families that vitiated their relationship over generations, so does the cosmic love between Nandini and Ranjan, with their ultimate sacrifice, reverberates a profound message that love is a powerful tool that helps disband hatred, fear, jealousy, greed, and all the treacherous instincts in men which drive them to grab power by all means. Truly, these are the human traits that cause restlessness in our society and threaten world peace.

Nandini's love for Ranjan is, in the truest sense, youthful in character, free from fear and limitation, and independent of social, political and religious restraints. Their profound love is invincible, cannot be subdued by any powerful and domineering force and can best be characterized by the poet's immortal lyric:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into
Fragments by narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever widening thought and action into that heaven of freedom,
My Father let my country awake.”

Oh Lord! Let this human civilization be enlightened with the cosmic light of love and be free from all sorts of fear, superstitions, greed.

Tamoso ma jyotirgamoyo

The Red Oleander: then, now and always

Bharati Mitra

In describing his political drama “The Red Oleander” (Rakta Karobi), Rabindranath Tagore makes his most important philosophical statement when he says that there is nothing called a “modern-day problem.” All dire socio-political problems transcend space and time. Even today, all civilized countries are striving to become world economies; their citizens are absorbed in the acquisition of wealth. In pursuit of that goal, it’s easy to lose sight of the fact that it is love and not power that leads to true happiness and that peace and tranquility in life are far more precious than all the wealth in the world.

Through Bishu Pagol’s statements, as eccentric and ambiguous as some of them may seem, Tagore makes his profoundly philosophical observations, which are equally applicable to today’s lives and thought processes. Bishu tells Phagulal and Chandra that greed for more and more gold (or wealth) becomes an addiction binding us in its shackles with no escape in sight. Later it is Bishu who observes that the King is in fear of his own Sardars (deputies) and cannot free himself from their evil grasps. A curious contradiction plays a constant tug-of-war within the King, namely a conflict between good and evil. At once he is the evil emperor Ravana and his do-gooder brother Bibhishon. And in the end it is the good in him (as there is good in all of us) that wins and helps him break away from his own prison of greed.

Of course the pivotal character is Nandini, an innocent breath of fresh air, a young girl of simple beauty who comes to Jakkhapuri bringing with her happiness and joy long unheard of in the wretched world of gold-digging and slave-driving. The Professor compares her to the sudden glimpse of sun-light through a crack in the wall.

When all the men including the Sardar, even the King himself, seem to be intoxicated by Nandini’s beauty and charm, it is Bishu Pagol who observes that Nandini has suddenly made everyone in Jakkhapuri feel alive again with the help not of her physical beauty but of her inner qualities: the love and kindness in her heart, her interest in everyone young and old, rich or poor, and her utter fearlessness of the regime.

Tagore advises us to keep our attention focused on Nandini throughout the play to grasp the true meaning of Rakta Karobi. He claims that the entire play is based on Nandini's slow transformation by the tumultuous events that take place, comparing her to an up-surgings fountain, which makes its way through the tiniest of spaces under the earth to its final outburst into the atmosphere.

Throughout the play, one can detect numerous allusions to the modern world. Nandini wonders why the King remains behind a prison-like confinement (fully comparable to bullet-proof vests, large number of body-guards and armed brigades of today's heads of states). The King observes that he can have thousands of workers carve out all the gold underneath the earth's surface, however he is yet to grasp the magic of a blooming flower or the sprouting of a bed of grass (reminiscent of modern cities almost completely made up of concrete and bricks where the denizens are often out of touch with nature). Chandra exclaims how the King's deputies who are ruthless killers can be so religious, to which Phagulal replies that they do not seem to experience any pangs of guilt in keeping their temples, pubs and armory in close proximity (a common sight in all oppressive regimes of the modern world). The workers in Jakkhapuri are all identified by numbers as opposed to names, a common feeling in modern day corporate world where employees often are treated as mere numbers.

By Tagore's own claim, the story of Rakta Karobi, and in effect even the story of the Ramayana, is the story of human beings, their interactions, their love, their greed, their success and failure. Humans never change ... rather their characteristics never change ... even though their surroundings do. Humans act the same way under same or similar circumstances. Curiously, however, they create their own circumstances, thus their problems remain the same throughout the ages.

Raja – The King of the Dark Chamber

Nandita Dasgupta

A considerable expanse of the writings of Rabindranath Tagore centers on an elaborate discourse about the *seen* and the *unseen* – about illusion and reality – about presence and omnipresence. In his various works Tagore has transformed this spiritual metaphor of the unseen and the invisible into a powerful symbol for feeling, touching and ultimately understanding the sacred and the sanctified. The play *Raja* is an exaltation of this unseen and invisible truth.

Tagore composed *Raja* around 1910-1911. Originally inspired by a Buddhist *Jataka* tale, Tagore shaped it into a symbolic play in prose. It is an allegory of man's spiritual adventure in pursuit of the eternal truth and beauty. Kshitish Chandra Sen translated the play in English in 1914 under the supervision of Tagore. The English version was named *The King of the Dark Chamber*.

It is the story of a *King*, whose presence pervades the land through his impeccable rule. Yet he is never seen, his authority is never imposed and thus he remains an anonymous and mysterious figure to his subjects who are free and equal in his kingdom. There is a pervading curiosity in the country and outside about the *King's* existence and actual form. The character *Thakurda* (Grandfather) however cherishes the existence of the *King* with all his heart. His *King's* banner has a thunderbolt within a lotus demonstrating a tender character with streaks of firmness and valor. He claims that the *King* is not noticeable as a distinct individual because he mingles and hides himself among the common populace and would not choose to stand out among others. The Queen's maid-of-honor, *Surangama* is the only other person to deeply feel the *King's* presence around herself as well as in the kingdom. In the gentle blowing of the faint breeze or the soft fragrance of a perfume, she seems to hear the *King's* footsteps in her heart. To *Surangama*, the *King* is wonderful, superb and miraculous.

The beautiful and conceited Queen *Sudarshana* yearns to see the *King* in daylight. But the *King* makes his visits only during the night in a dark chamber and does not make himself visible to her. Finally, after repeated requests and pleadings by the Queen, the *King* agrees to show himself

during the festival of the full moon of the spring, albeit amongst a huge congregation, from which the Queen would have to recognize her *King*.

Complications develop when a fake king makes himself public. He hatches a plot with the neighboring king of *Kanchi* to set the palace garden on fire for some ulterior motive. In that disastrous moment when the palace is on fire, the Queen desperately seeking help, sees the bogus king and mistakes him to be his own *King*. She gets enamored by his bewitchingly handsome presence.

In the same night, in the spring festival of the full moon, amidst the fearful doom, the Queen eventually sees her *King*. She looks on him for one instant. Alas, he appears to be terrible and dreadful, “black as the threatening storm-cloud, black as the shoreless sea with the spectral red tint of twilight on its tumultuous waves!” She, who worships beauty and detests ugliness, suspects her husband, the *King*, to be unsightly and abandons the palace. The *King* makes no effort to stand in her way.

After a long soul-searching journey of self-conflict, trial, humiliation and suffering, the Queen realizes the superficiality and transience of her worldly endowments. She returns to the *King* recognizing the force within his tranquility, and the true nature of his deeper beauty. She now feels that her *King* is the manifestation of Light as well as Darkness and the supreme epitome of fulfillment. The play ends with the scene of the dark chamber where the Queen surrenders her love and life to the feet of her *King* -- her “cruel, terrible ... and peerless Lord of Darkness!” She has ultimately discovered her Lord after a long voyage of quest. The two would come out into the light together for the first time ever! The spiritual pilgrimage of *Sudarshana* in profound search for her own inner consciousness has now come to an end. She has now met her *King* outside the dark chamber, free from the shackles of the dark night of her soul.

Raja was written by Tagore in the first decade of the last century in an imaginary historical setting. But the timeless quality of this complex philosophical commentary transcends all temporal and spatial bounds. Even to this day, this deep philosophical discourse about man’s quest for wisdom has not lost its appeal and relevance. In the current year, 2006, the play has been staged in Calcutta by the “Blind Opera”, a performing arts group of the visually challenged in the city. Around the same time, *Raja*, directed by Kavalam Narayana Panikkar was presented in Malayalam in the Tagore Festival in Calcutta.

Raja is a story of our search for wisdom and consciousness, a perpetual expedition towards the exploration of the invisible and the intangible ultimate bliss, dispensing with the superficial, mundane worldly endowments. Tagore's *Raja* is a spiritual dialogue on becoming a *person* in the true sense of the term.

Tagore's Red Oleander a poignantly profound message of a poisonous flower

Samita Goswami

Rabindranath Tagore wrote this drama, where he spins this fantastic tale of a gold mine ruled by a ruthless king. When the reader is allowed in the play, this drama has been going on for a while. The king's men, "the sardars", had perfected their ways of torturing the gold mine workers by teaching them greed. These poor villagers, once so close to nature, have forgotten their true purpose for living and have become automatons. The religious leader "Gosai" plays further tricks with their mind, by preaching dishonesty and religious dogmatism under the sticky sweetness of his so called pious religious acts. Amidst this rampant culture of coercion and violence, rises the central character Nandini. She is this luminous soul of pure consciousness. She adorns herself with red oleander, a gift from her lover Ranjan, a gold mine worker who has lovingly created garlands from this flower. Her voice speaks of the journey of true human spirit which Ranjan, Kishore, and Fagulal, all gold-mine workers, remember. Her laughter and innocence reminds the "sardars", "Gosai", Gokul, and Chandra of their earlier life of simplicity. The king, a recluse behind his own iron curtain, is afraid of her spirit, but Nandini, as fragile as she is, is not afraid of him. She gladly embraces the enemy and sees only the truth and beauty in every one of them. By her very existence she preaches Tagore's music of embracing all humanity. Nandini triumphs at the end by bringing down this self imposed iron curtain, with the king himself realizing her truth and power.

This drama is more of a cry for forgiveness and love than social justice. Nandini could forgive the king for killing her beloved Ranjan and march

for freedom and peace with the king himself. Her connection with the Source was always apparent in her clarity of purpose and determination. This is a call for all of us from Tagore himself. To question our integrity and ask ourselves if we should be partial to our friends, our groups, our temple, our religion, our philosophy, or could we stand tall and see the unity amidst this diversity. The very nature of criticism is an act of segregation. Nandini embraces all.

Red Oleander reminds me of Dr. David Hawkins' book called, "Power versus Force." Power is silent, it knows no division, it progresses with the spirit of belief; no group can break its integrity, no cult can overshadow its truth. Force, on the other hand, is naked in its act of coercion. It thrives on greed and victimizes the weak. We saw this in the systematic mechanization of human resources, by the great king who taught the oppressive gold-mine culture.

Did we ever stop to think why Tagore chose red oleander and not a red rose or a hibiscus or any other red flower? If ingested, every part of this plant is highly toxic and can cause severe reaction, even death. The red color could easily signify the violence of blood spilled, as Ranjan was killed at the end. Yet Tagore tried to tell us all to overlook the poisonous and superficial garb of a variety of ills in our society and appreciate the triumph of the light of the soul that shines through, and to transcend the apparent impurity and darkness of greed and rekindle the simplicity of love and forgiveness.

Nandini has the innocence to answer love's call. She wore love as a garland around her neck, waited for it and ran when it came to ask for her hand. She is a true believer. We often ask for love, but when it comes and waits for us at our doorstep we cannot recognize it and let it go forever. We are busy with our so-called adult life. Tagore asks us to break this bond forever. He asks us to see beyond our lure of gold and hoarding, to see beyond our comfort of day to day routine and step into our true nature. He believed in the true power of women and often made them enact his golden truths.

This amazing drama transcends time. The truth here is the truth of life itself. The beauty of the conversation and the play of the words between the characters in Bengali are as lyrical as music and most profound. I am deeply moved by this enchanting play and my heart is open to its prayer.

Rabindranath Tagore – His Plays and Works

Samprasad Majumdar, Ontario, Canada

THE PLAYWRIGHT:

As a playwright alone, Rabindranath Tagore is simultaneously allegorical, dancing, delightful, gentle, international, metaphoric, musical, philosophical, poetic, political, prolific, rhythmic, spiritual and universal. Without being complete, in the following is given his dramatic works in rough categories - or captions and examples - remembering that a play may easily be categorized in more than one caption.

- **Gadya-Naatya** (plays in prose): Raaja, Nalinee, Daak-ghar, etc.
- **Kaavya-Naatya** (play in poetry): Bidaaya Abhishaap; Chitraangadaa; Karna-Kunti Sambaad; Gandhaareer Aabedan; Satee; Lakshmir Parikshaa, etc.
- **Nritya-Naatya** (dance-dramas): Raajaa, Sharadotsav; Daak-Ghar; Mukta-Dhaaraa; Rakta-Karabee; Taaser Desh, Chitraangadaa; Chandaalika; Shyaaamaa, etc.
- **Ritu Naatya** (a Play for the seasons): Basanta, Phalgune, Shesh Brshan, Sharodotsav, Sundara, etc.
- **Roopaka-Naatyas** (allegorical plays): Raajaa; Achal-Aayaatan; Mukta-Dhaaraa, etc.
- **Haasya-Naatya** (hilarious/farcical plays): Chhatrer Pareekshaa; Pete o Peeethe, Chintaa-Sheel; Roger Chikitsaa; Rasikataar Phalaaphal; Bini Paisaar Bhoj; Khyaatir Bidambanaa, etc.

His creative ingredients, his play-categories in particular, held up consistently throughout his life. For example, in 1939 he rendered his immortal work, Shyama, into its final dance-drama form. This will be clear from the brief chronology of his published fictions and plays, that is given below. **The list, however, does not name:** his vast repertoire of short stories in prose or rhyme, his works of non-fiction, his stand alone poems or songs and his works in English: a vast store-house of original works and translation of other's works.

Up to Sixteen (1861-1877): Karunaa, Bheekhaarinee, Kavi-Kaahinee, Bhaanu Sinhgir Padaavalee.

Sixteen to Twenty-three (1878- 1884): Vaalmikee-Pratibhaa; Bhagna-Hridaya; Rudra-Chanda; Sandhyaa-Sangeeta; **Kaala-Mrigayaa**; Bau-Thaakuraaneer Haat; Prabhaata-Sangeeta; Bibidha-Prasanga; Europe-Baasir Patra; Chaabi o Gaana; **Prakritir Pratishodha**;

Twenty-four to Thirty (1885-1891): Rammohan Roy; Ravichhaayaa; Kadi o Komala; Raajarshi; Maayaar Khelaa; Chithi-Patra; Maanasee; Post-Maastaar; Aalochanaa; Samaalochanaa.

Thirty-One to Thirty-Seven (1892- 1897): **Chitraangadaa;** Godaay-Galad; Shikshaar-Herpher; Sonaar-Taree; Meyeli-Chadaa; Pancha-Bhootera Dairy; Europe Yaatreera Dairy; Vichitra-Galpa; Kathaa-Chatushtaya, **Vidaaya-Abhishaapa, Kshudita-Paashaana;** Lakshmir Pareekshaa, Kantha-Rodh.

Thirty-Eight to Forty-Four (1898 – 1905): Kanikaa; **Kathaa o Kaahinee;** Kalpanaa; Kshanikaa; Galpa-Guchha (first part); Chokher-Baali; Naukaa-Dubi; Raakhi-Bandhan; Aatma-Shakti, Baula; Swadesh.

Forty-Five To Fifty-Two (1906- 1913): Bhaarat-Varsha, Kheya, Naukaa-Dubi; Goraa; Raajaa-Prajaa; Prajaapatir Nirvandha; Samaaj; **Shaaradotsav;** Shikshaa; Gitanjali (Geeta-Anjali); Raajaa; Jeevana-Smriti; Daaka-Ghara; Chhinna-Patra; Achala-Aayatana; English translation of Gitanjali and reception of Nobel Prize.

Fifty-Three to Sixty-Three (1914- 1924): Phaalguni; Chaturanga; Sabuj Patra; Balaaka; Chaturanga; Ghare-Baire; Geeti-Maalya; Geetaalee; Sanchay; Parichay; Galpa-Saptaka; Palaatakaa; Mukta-Dhaaraa; Lipikaa; Shishu-Bholaanaath; **Basanta; Rakta-Karabee;**

Sixty-Four to Seventy-One (1925 – 1931): **Chirakumar Sabhaa;** Shodhbodh; **Natir-Poojaa; Nataraaja; Ritu-Ranga;** Yogaayoga; Shesher Kavita; Shesh-Rakshaa; Yaatrii; **Tapatee;** Mahuyaa; Bhaanu-Simher Patraavalee; Raashiyaar Chithi; Bana-Baane; Prashna; Sahaj Paath; Geeta-Bitaan; Sanchayitaa; **Shaap-Mochan;**

Seventy-One to Eighty (1932-1941): Parishesh; Kaaler Yaatraa; Punascha; Bharaat-Pathik Raam Mohan; Dui Bon; **Chandaalikaa; Taasher Desh; Bansari; Maalancha; Shraavan Gaathaa;** Chaar Adyaay; Shesh Saptak; Beethikaa; **Nrityanaatya Chitraangadaa;** Patraput; Chhanda; Shyaamalee; Saahityer Pathe; Jaapaane; Parashye; Paaschaatya Bhraman; **Chandaalikaa;** Muktir Upay; Sejuti; Pahaasinee; Aakash Pradeep; **Nrityanaatya Shyaamaa (1939);** Pather Sanchay; Naba-Jaatak; Shaanai; Chhelebelaa; Tin-Sangee; Rog-Sajyaay; Chitra-Lipi; Chitraali; Aarogya; Janmadine; Galpa-Salpa; Aashramer Rup and Bikaash. His last composition, a poem: “**Tomaar Srishtir Paath**” was dictated from bed, on July 30, 1941. He passed away on August 06, 1941.

In fact, each and every work of Tagore, that has a story-line is convertible into a play. It may be a short story, a long story, a novella, a novel, a poetical narrative of events, or a story retold. For the last item –story retold – the source-book is usually an immortal work like the Ramayana, Maha-Bharata, Puranas, Upanishads, Buddhist scriptures, Oriental or Occidental

legends, and so on. Such a story that Tagore told invariably includes wonderful pieces of dialogue that the original does not have; and becomes itself immortal.

THE MULTIFARIOUS GENIUS:

Rabindranath Tagore, the poet-laureate is popularly known to millions of peoples of the earth as: **Kavi-Guru** – the master of poets, **Vishva-Kavi** – the poet of the universe, **Guru-Deva** – the divine master, **Rishi-Kavi** – the sage-poet, and so on, yet he is greater than all of the callings together. The popularity of his literary works alone, for example, is unmatched globally, by any single writer like Dante, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Homer, Hugo, Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Tolstoy or Virgil.

The multifarious genius of Rabindranath Tagore is totally global and worthy of the world fame that it all enjoys. Indeed his world fame lies in the domains of

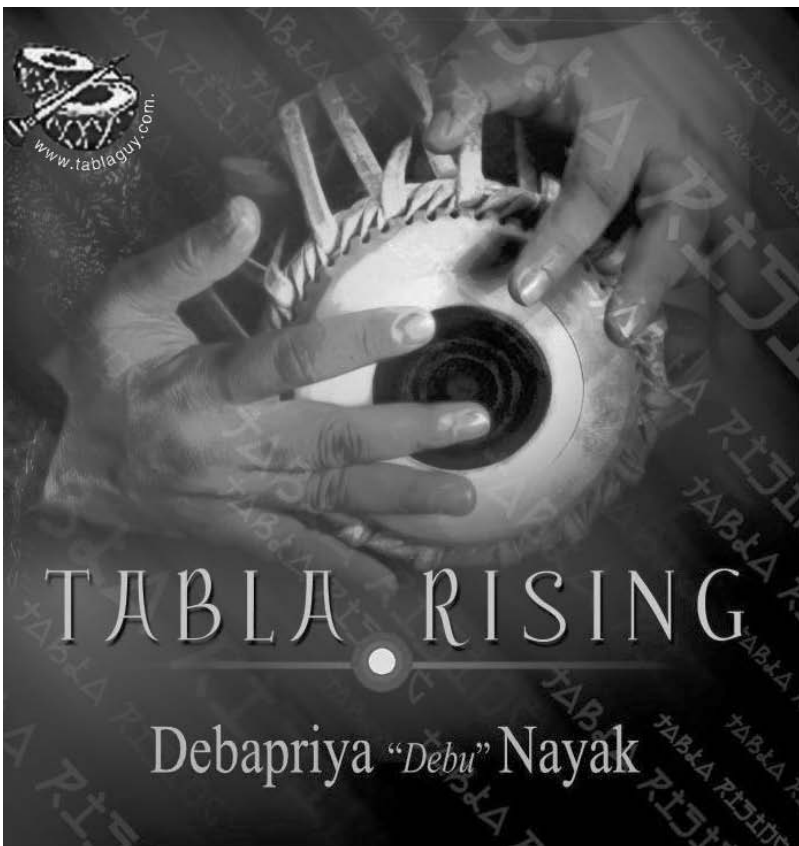
- **articles** writing, editing and research of literary, political, patriotic, social and spiritual imports,
- **arts:** academic and performing;
- **composition of melodies;**
- critic of literary, social and political issues;
- **dance-dramas;**
- education and educational reforms;
- long story telling;
- **musical-plays;**
- non-fiction;
- novels and novellas;
- painting;
- patriotism;
- philosophy;
- **plays (prosaic);**
- poetry – long and short;
- stories retold in prose and poetry;
- short story-telling in prose and rhyme;
- sketching;
- science writing;
- social thinking, theories and reform;
- spirituality;
- short story telling, and so on.

No completeness is assumed in the work above. - October, 2006

বিচ্ছিন্ন হইয়া উচ্চকার জগতের সাক্ষী হইয়া গেলেন যেন।
এই আশ্রয়ের তির্যক আলো নিয়া আলো নন্দিনী
নন্দিনীকে দেখে, তার কাছে রক্ষণের কথা জ্ঞান রাখার ধান
দোলার লোভাল, সেই দেখিয়া তার ধান লোভাল নন্দিনী
লোভালো অশ্রুতের দল, নন্দিনী তার রক্ষণ এই সাক্ষিকতা
থাকে মানুষকে মুক্তি দিতে আসাছিল, তা অর্থ করত
পালনিত স্বার্থ অশ্রুতের দল। তারা রাজ্যকে
দিয়ে হস্ত-করণ রক্ষণাক, কিন্তু তার তা মুক্তির পথ
আবদ্ধ হইল না, লাল আশ্রমের বৃদ্ধ। রক্ষণের বন্ধকরণ
মুক্তি দিয়াছিল নন্দিনীকে, নন্দিনী সেই মুক্তি হস্তে দিয়াছিল,
যদি অধিকারের স্বার্থ, আশ্রমের অর্থের বন্ধ দিয়া রক্ষণ
রাজ্যকে মুক্ত করে দিয়া গেল, বন্ধকরণের স্বার্থের মুক্তি
করণ ধানস্বাক।

এই আশ্রিত এসে কামিনীর মায়ি দিয়ে তুমি
আশ্রয় নও। পিতৃ দিগাহন করি মরুভূমির মানবপ্রভুত্ব
কাছে। মাতার সান্নিধ্য হইয়া আসিয়াছে দিগে অকারণ
একই মাতা না, এত কাজ কর মনে আশ্রিত মানুষেরা, মাতার
ও মানুষকে বুঝার কার মরুভূমির দল, মরুভূমির কিছু মানুষেরা
মাতার সান্নিধ্য হইয়া আসিয়াছে মাতার ওরই মাতাকে বুঝার
কার মনে নিজদেরই মাতার মাতার জন্য। এই মরু ভাষা মাতার
আশ্রয় আরও মাতার মাতার, মাতার মাতার মাতার,
মাতার ওর মাতার মাতার মাতার মাতার মাতার, মাতার
আশ্রয়, মাতার মাতার মাতার মাতার মাতার মাতার
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Resident Priest

Acharya Buddhadev Bhattacharjya is the resident priest at the temple. He is accompanied by his wife Mrs. Anima Bhattacharjya. He has professional certifications and more than 25 years experience in Pourohitya. He has a BA from Calcutta University and MA in Sanskrit from Delhi University. During the last seven years he was the priest of Delhi Kali Mandir. He is fluent in Bengali, Hindi and English.

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