

Altruism vs. Selfishness: A new interpretation of Tagore's Raktakarabi (Red Oleander)

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Abstract:

The article intended to analyse the play Raktakarabi (Red Oleander) by Tagore from the viewpoint of altruism and selfishness. Character analysis of four characters namely Morol, Chandra, Gokul and Professor of the play has been selected for analysis. The article also tried to explore the relevance of the proposed analysis in the present society. Therefore several case studies have been taken occurred particularly during pandemic in India. It is found that crisis and selfishness is directly proportional to each other. Selfishness again is of two forms viz. neutral and bad selfishness. In ruthless and brutal society of exploitation few people exist who are busy with mundane benefit of their own and thus serve the purpose of ruler indirectly and passively. Naturally they express distrust to the force raising protest against ruler. Ruler in fact sustains crises to have these selfish people in majority. If Nandini and other protagonist characters are the example of altruism, these characters represent the dark selfish part of the human nature as well as society. These four characters actually serve as a reverse template of Tagore's own belief of elevated human being.

Background:

Tagore's Red Oleander has been interpreted in many ways. But as a classic masterpiece it has many more interpretations yet to come. Any classic has its inherent capability to be contemporary. The article therefore tried to explore a different meaning of the play corresponding to the present scenario. During the pandemic period India encountered severe economic and social crisis and several inhuman and selfish activities. On the other hand few altruistic incidents also occurred where people rendered help to the victims sacrificing their own wealth, time and even life. Under this backdrop the article tried to find out the relevance of Raktakarabi at the present context.

Material and Method:

The article intended to analyse a few characters namely Professor, Morol, Chandra and Gokul. Case study method is considered to describe the current socioeconomic crisis.

Results and Discussion

It is found that selfishness increases among the society in almost directly proportional way. People become more and more focused to their own wellbeing. This selfishness is of two kinds, viz. neutral and bad selfishness. People try to remain attached to those who are holding the social, political or economic power to get mundane benefits. Thus they become neutral selfish though in many cases unknowingly. But there are few people who get their betterment at the cost of others prosperity or even life thus becoming bad selfish. Ruler knows this and therefore they try to sustain this social system. The altruistic people though exist in society but as their movement is for long term benefit and there are uncertainty to attain that in future their voice and initiative or movement doesn't get much support from the society.

Keywords: Raktakarabi, Tagore, Altruism, selfishness, Capitalism, Pandemic.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

More than 100 years have passed. Red Oleander (Raktakarabi) is still relevant. It has been differently interpreted and accordingly produced time to time but its relevance is beyond any question undoubtedly. Raktakarabi is one of the greatest 'Idea Play' of Tagore. Tagore himself did not make any interpretation leaving the play for readers to do so. Only hint he gives is that "The play is a true story" but he reminds also the readers that they would be deprived if historians try to find out the proof about the time and space of the event. Then how it becomes a 'true story'? His opinion is that it is true in the knowledge and faith of the poet. This clearly indicates to the symbolism and mysticism of the play. Aronson describes the play as "... a drama in which vague, shadowy figures, indecisively male or female, meander through the pages, uttering pseudo – Maeterlinckian platitudes"¹. Desai (1973) also opines in favour of the symbolism of the play². Another

important thing should be kept in mind that the term 'poet' is used by Tagore instead of playwright. According to Tagore's own belief which is influenced by the Upanishadas, the poet is a person who finds and foresees the truth. Therefore, the play written by a poet is a 'true story'.

There are many interpretations of Raktakarabi by different scholars. Naik says "Red Oleanders is symbolic presentation of the triumph of humanistic values over soul – killing Mammonism. Nandini, the spirit of joy, love and beauty destroys the tyrannical regime in Yaksha Town, which has reduced its citizens to gold – digging slaves, though she herself dies in the process"³. Ananda Lal (1987) relates Raktakarabi with beauty and death⁴. Bhaswati Ghosh interprets the play as a conflict between freedom and exploitation⁵. Asoke Kumar Misra finds the root and similarity to the Epic Ramayana⁶. Now, it should have to be taken into consideration that theatre has two dimensions. First in its written form and secondly when it is translated into theatrical language and staged. There it becomes the baby of the director. Director has the right to interpret the play according to his or her own belief and vision. After Tagore's own production Shambhu Mitra is the first to stage Raktakarabi successfully. He also followed the mentioned interpretation but the component he added to it was the conflict between ruthless capitalism and freedom of mankind, between regimentation and exploitation leading to dehumanization and free will. During production theatrical language of his production like acting style, set, music, costumes or light added more emphasis and distinct flavour to the said interpretation without distorting the dialogues. After Mitra's milestone production so many performances were staged retaining the fundamental structure of the play with minor modifications. Now, under the present socio political scenario a completely different dimension of the play is needed. This article therefore tries to find out the meaning of Raktakarabi in the view of the dilemma of altruism and selfishness.

Altruism and selfishness are two concepts prevailing from the dawn of the civilisation and so many scholarly works done on these. The religious preaching states against selfishness. Early works of philosophers treated selfishness as vice and altruism as virtue. But the mind set started changing with the advancement of capitalism after Renaissance. The concept of individualism took a paradigm shift and individual benefits were no longer considered to be vice only. Selfishness is nowadays classified into three categories as good, neutral and bad. "Any pleasure that does no harm to other people is to be valued"⁷. Thereafter newer terms came into being like healthy selfishness⁸ and pathological altruism⁹ and the simple concept of virtue and vice began to be a paradoxical form of discourse. Numerous works were contributed by different researchers from different angle. Fromm stated "Modern culture is pervaded by a taboo on selfishness. It teaches that to be selfish is sinful and that to love others is virtuous"¹⁰. He further argues that this cultural taboo has had the unfortunate consequence of making people feel guilty to show themselves healthy self-love, which he defines as the passionate affirmation and respect for one's own happiness, growth, and freedom. Kaufman, and Jauk (2020) also did a detail work on the issue¹¹. Crocker *et al.* have examined recent evidence on the consequences of selfishness and otherishness for psychological well-being, physical health, and relationships¹². But in the present world especially during and after the pandemic situation we experienced a lot of inhuman activities perhaps as outcome of fear of insecurity or even death. But these fists raised the question and discourse of selfishness and altruism in a greater magnitude which should be addressed and analysed with a newer mindset. The present article finds the issue already embedded in the play Raktakarabi and intended to focus on it. This interpretation is completely a pioneer endeavour as no other scholarly works did not through light on it as discussed earlier.

The play in brief:

Before going through the main part of the paper it is better to state the storyline in a short. The space of the play is Yakshapuri. Time is not specified. The ruler of the place is The King who lives behind a mess. The rules are maintained by his will with the help of his subordinates like Sardar, Morol or Gonsain etc. People are digging the wealth and instead of personal name just some numbers are assigned for each of them. No recreation or rest is allowed as well as freedom of speech, thought and other human attributes are strictly prohibited there. It's a ghostly place without light and air. But there comes a girl called Nandini. She and her companion Ranjan almost torn the system of Yakshapuri. Ranjan never appears on stage but his overall influence on the resistance against the system is always quoted by everybody. Nandini brings new hope of freedom. According to Tagore, "This girl supposes to destroy the mess behind The King camouflages". While Chandra and Gokul are those who only oppose Nandini and mistrust about her and her activities spreads over them, Bishu, Kishor, Fagulal and lot of other labours of Yakshapuri take the side of Nandini. Sardar along with his force retaliates and the protesters are either murdered or arrested by the brutal system. Ranjan himself becomes a martyr. Nandini finally calls the all out war against the system and probably also sacrifices her life. The play ends with the beginning of The War.

II. MATERIAL AND METHOD:

A. Character analysis:

Character analysis has been accepted as an important tool for criticism of drama. The article endeavoured to interpret the play in the context of contemporary time focusing on analysis of four characters of the play namely Morol, Chandra, Gokul and Adhyapak (Professor). Indeed, Raktakarabi, apart from its symbolism is important from the point of view of its characters also. It is not only has its academic significance as Desai states, "The characters sometimes oscillate between the symbolic and the allegoric"² but hold a mirror to the contemporary Indian society. Therefore analysis of characters reveals many dimensions of the play as well as its significance in contemporary time. Characters of Raktakarabi are representative kind of nature. They actually represent a particular class or section of people. So mostly the characters are devoid of personal multidimensions in almost all cases and named after their posts or status at the governance and society. Simultaneously the lyrical and allegorical nature of the dialogues or the play itself also hinders such multidimensionality of the characters. The play has fifteen characters and uncertain number of mass. Interestingly characters are not in a binary of protagonist and antagonist sort of nature but several intermediate forms. While at one hand the characters Nandini, Bishu, Fagulal, Kishor are protagonists Sardar, Gosain, Morol etc. are antagonists. But Chandra, Gokul, Adhyapak, Mejo Sardar etc. represent that gray nature zone taking no side firmly. The present article selected four characters named as Morol, Chandra, Gokul and Professor according to the nature of selfishness for the discussion and analysis. If the protagonists are altruist these characters along with the antagonists are considered as selfish. Again to discuss selfishness only that gray zone is selected keeping in mind that the hardcore antagonists are the power builder and somehow designated as flat type of character by the author himself. But characters like Chandra, Gokul or Morol and Professor are common people who consists the society, enjoy the benefits or suffer from crisis. They are those people who actually hold different shades of nature, vacillate between good or evil, express the true nature of the society of a given time and space. Thus while the Sardar creates the system these characters are the victim of the system. They form a unique cluster that represents a unique type. Chandra and Gokul even themselves use the term 'We' to describe themselves e.g. "We can trust features that are plain enough to understand" (Gokul) or "We simple women, our price is not so high, but we at least keep you on the straight path (Chandra). Thus they themselves create their own cluster distinguishing them from the others and unifying in a group. Morol on the other hand reflects a separate kind of character, a different identity. But all four characters show a common attributes i.e. selfishness. The present article intended to discuss about those four characters. There are a few of scholarly works done on character analysis of Red Oleander. Vinatha¹³ Subhash¹⁴ described the role Chandra and Gokul played in Raktakarabi. Rama kundu discussed in detail the characters of Raktakarabi¹⁵. Rao and Padmasree¹⁶ criticised the characters of Nandini and King. Marak¹⁷ cited Gokul as a character accepting higher power i.e. the king. But unfortunately literature on detail analysis on Professor, Morol Chandra and Gokul are scanty from the viewpoint of selfishness and altruism. The paper thereby focused on the significance of these four characters from the said stand point in the context of socio political scenario. At the same time it tried to explore the relevance of such characters in real life in the present context and in so doing establish the relevance of the play after more than a century of its origin.

B. Case Study: The Incident of inhumanity and selfishness during the Lockdown

Case I: The case of Arambagh, West Bengal, India:

BDO and the family of Goghat 1 live at Mathpara in ward 14 of Arambagh municipality, West Bengal, India. Neighbours, including the BDO's landlord (also a state government official), were scared after the chief of the Goghat 1 panchayat samiti and a few employees had reported to be positive for COVID-19. 20-odd people, headed by the owner of the house, had gathered and they said the family could enter the home till they proved they were not infected even to stay away, irrespective of the test results, for at least two weeks. Finally Police responded and dispersed the mob eight persons, including the homeowner were arrested, and subsequently Pal and her family into their home. "The landlord had called me up and asked me when I was coming.... I was stopped from entering the house. Hours later, I could enter the house with the help of the police," said the BDO. Nripendra Singh, the subdivisional officer of Arambagh, said: "It was very unfortunate that an official who is working to combat the disease was stopped from entering her own home." "The prejudice against healthcare workers, administrative officials and others deemed to be coming in direct contact with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients has caused many of them and their families problems across Bengal"¹⁸. Even the Hon'ble Chief Minister repeatedly issues specific instructions for prevention of such prejudice-based stigmatisation and other harassment of COVID warriors but no results is found so far.

Case II: Daily wage migrant labourer problem

Since the nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24 to deal with the coronavirus epidemic in India, most of the daily wage earner labours who live a hand to mouth existence in big cities were in a critical

condition. Thousands of them from Delhi, Haryana and even Punjab reached Anand Vihar, Ghazipur and Ghaziabad's Lal Kuan areas after tough treks on foot in a bid to ride buses to their respective native places on March 28. Though a few buses were there to carry them but it was just a token gesture in comparison to the number gathered and by March 29, the area had been cleared and Delhi police allowed no transit and barricades were placed on all entry points into the terminus at a distance of about 500 metres. "They are beating people who try to move further. I am here with my wife and 11-year-old son and we can't afford to be beaten up by police" said a daily labour Mr. Singh. "We do not have money for rent and food. During the coronavirus, the government is asking people to maintain social distancing. The situation in shelter homes is even more pathetic and we do not want to go there," said Mohammad Imran, 25, a native of Uttar Pradesh, India¹⁹. Similar incidences happened in Mumbai also. Under these circumstances people walked on the railway track or highways to go their home towns different corners of the country covering thousands of kilometres. The death toll from COVID-19 climbed to 25 and the total number of cases to 979 on March 29. Dutta²⁰ reported death of 198 such migrant workers on road accident during first phase of lockdown as on June, 2020. Gulf News reported the suffering of people from 'hunger, starvation, suicide and more hunger, starvation, suicide and more'²¹.

Case III: Dalit murder in India

A 45-year-old Dalit man, S. Diwakar died in Uttar Pradesh after he was beaten by a group of five men allegedly over rumours²². The brutal incident was caught on camera. Somebody found catching this video laughing and seems to be reluctant about the brutality. The incidence is not a scattered one but for several centuries the oppression against so called lower caste is a customary feature in India. But for last few years this attitude got a momentum. Report says "Maharashtra recorded a 62% rise in cases of rape of women belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC)/ Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities between 2017 and 2019"²³. This is just tip of the iceberg and supposed to be ocean in a dew drop from where we can get an idea of the real situation of India regarding attitude towards oppressed.

Analysis of Characters:

Throughout the play Chandra and Gokul as stated earlier are against Nandini and her action. The fundamental relation between them is based on mistrust, fear, hatred and agony. First sign of this mistrust appears with the entry of Gokul in one of the three exposition scenes. He expresses his fear addressing Nandini as witch, "You know some spell, I'm sure. You're snaring everybody here. You're a witch! Those who are bewitched by your beauty will come to their death". He also says, "I don't believe you, one bit! You're up to some trickery. Some evil will befall us before the day is out. That's why you have got yourself up like this. Oh you terrible, terrible witch"! When Nandini wants to ask the reason of such hatred he explains her as 'like an ominous torch' and says, "I don't trust what I can't understand" or "We can trust features that are plain enough to understand". Thus we come to know that this mistrust is due to not understanding Nandini i.e. her ideology. Such doubt and misunderstanding of people about its own friend further strengthens with the entry of Chandra. If Nandini is a witch to Gokul, she is a spy to Chandra. In tune of Gokul she also blames Nandini to be a master of trickery, "The witch is up to all kinds of tricks, and is sure to bring misfortune". Gokul's agony is only due to the mysticism of Nandini, which he can't comprehend while in addition to that Chandra has jealousy and envy also. The root of her envy lies in the beauty of Nandini. She believes that Yakshapuri is a place of curse and flaunting her prettiness all over such place makes her sick. Their agony reaches the extreme when Bishu is arrested by Sardar. Gokul intends to burn Nandini, "That witch must be burnt alive, before everything else". Chandra also agrees with Gokul but again here also her target is beauty, "That won't be punishment enough. First knock off that beauty of hers, with which she goes about ruining people. Weed it out of her face as the grass is weeded with a hoe". To summaries, it can be said that the relation of this cluster of characters against the main protagonist character, Nandini is incomprehensibility, agony, envy resulted into hatred. The characteristics of the characters of Chandra and Gokul depicted in Raktakarabi are rooted in this relationship. Actually they act as an interface, a buffer zone between protagonists and the antagonists of the play. At the end of the play one of them, Gokul is asked by Gagulal to turn his stand towards protagonists but it is not clearly stated whether he finally decided so. Chandra, interestingly has no trace left at the end of the play. Therefore, the fate of both Gokul and Chandra in the whole play is not clearly mentioned. Such incompleteness of a character in a play like Raktakarabi by a person like Tagore may bring to mind another important research work. Perhaps Tagore intends to opine that there exist such numbers of people who takes the side neither in favour of protagonists nor the antagonists directly but during the ultimate social revolution or bottom uprising some of them are pulled towards the revolutionary force and others just perish silently as it is characterized by Gokul and Chandra respectively.

This buffer zone understands their situation very well. They know that ruthless exploitation is the single reason behind all sorts of their misery. Even Chandra admits also that this place is a miserable one, a curse. When Fagual expresses his frustration, "The caged bird spends its holiday knocking against the bars", Chandra wishes to leave the place and go back to the village they came from. Her simplex question to the system as common people usually wants to ask, "Brother, they've hoarded such heaps of gold, can't they stop digging now"? These ignorant people feel but don't realize the unlimited greed of the capitalism. This is the tragic story of these people. Paradoxically though they are that section of people who are in favour of status quo. Knowing well about the villains of their life they rather prefer in begging their happiness to them instead of protesting against the extortion and exploitation. Here Chandra in one hand admits the curse but says to Sardar, "Give us leave, Sir Governor, do give us leave". Instead of claiming their right they just depend on petition and application. Therefore they try to remain attached to the supreme power and don't trust the strength that wants to change their fate of desolation and unhappiness forever. In fact their hatred to Nandini is out of fear. The fear about the uncertainty of fate of revolution, fear about the probable torture from the oppressor, about the loss of property (whatever they have), loss of peace (no matter what they have) or loss of lives of close persons. But they somehow respect the sacrifice of those rebels who fight for their liberty. As they don't join the struggle, they feel a kind of guilt. Therefore their tune of antipathy against Nandini or Ranjan is so magnified. Simultaneously they try to express this antagonism with as maximum magnitude as possible to impress the ruler and thereby try to be more and more intimate to them for snatching extra privilege. This stance may even lead to the brutal death of the protagonists as at a certain moment when Bishu is arrested both Chandra and Gokul exhibit their wish to kill Nandini.

The character of Morol is apparently considered as the management or governance part like Sardar or King Himself. But keen analysis reveals his status of a common person also. He tries to be associated with the power and feels proud about it. At the sametime he consciously uses his association with Sardar. Sardar simply makes use of his selfishness and by means of favouring him he fulfills his purpose. While Chandra and Gokul concentrate on Nandini, Morol's focus rather is on Ranjan and Bishu. He deliberately maligns Ranjan and Bishu in front of Sardar. Apparently it seems to be his loyalty to the system but after a while we find his hidden interest behind such attitude. He enters twice in the play. In the first session he describes the nature of Ranjan. In fact apart from Nandini we come to know about Ranjan through his description. According to him Ranjan is a daring boy who does not obey any rule and even ridicule the system. He says, ".....the fellow doesn't know what fear is. Threaten him, he bursts out laughing. Asked why he laughs, he says solemnity is the mask of stupidity and he has come to take it off". He further cautioned Sardar that "Nothing seems to fasten on to him. His boisterousness is infectious. The diggers are getting frisky". At last he is successful. His wish to come closure to Sardar is fulfilled. Sardar directed him to take action against Ranjan, "Go and seize him instantly! He must not meet Nandini in this parish, for anything". Upto this part it is apparently uncomplicated gesture of trustworthiness to the system. But in the second part of appearance in the play his veiled desires are exposed. In this section we find Morol as well attached to Sardar. He has been given the 'prestigious' duty to assist The Lady Sardar driving to the garden-house, where the feast of the Flag-worship, one of the most esteemed festival of Yakshapuri is to be held. At this point the true character of Morol starts revealing. He assures Sardar and then raise the issue of Bishu, "let me tell you one thing before I go. That 69 Ng, whom they call mad Bishu, it's high time to cure his madness". Not only Bishu, his complaint is also against some 47 V, who according to Morol's observation is rather 'too friendly with' 69 Ng or Bishu. When Sardar admits the observation he comes to the main interest. "Your Lordship's observation is ever keen", says he with flattery. But with modest totaling he humbly states that keeping eye on so many concerns, one or two issues may by chance overlooked by him. For instance, "there's our No. 95, a distant connection of mine by marriage, ever ready to make sandals for the feet of Your Lordship's sweeper out of his own ribs, so irrepressibly loyal is he that even his wife hangs her head for very shame, and yet up to now....". Sardar understands and approves the job of No. 95 in Yakshapuri. But Morol's purpose is not yet served. He, with his excellent effort earns the assurance of the prosperity of his own as well as his keens like his third son, his own brother-in-law. So the character of this man exposed is a kind of shrewd, oily tongued, Greedy, nepotistic character. He can easily blame and malign other person for his own prosperity and due to such feast he feels no repentance at all.

Professor at one hand wants to talk to Nandini, "...what harm if you stop a moment in answer to it? Let us talk a little". To him Nandini is "The sunlight gleaming through the forest thickets surprises nobody, but the light that breaks through a cracked wall is quite a different thing. In Yaksha Town, you are this light that startles". He understands everything as he is educated and conscious person, an 'unmitigated scholar'. He admits the Yakshapuri as eclipsed sun admires Nandini. He with his wisdom wishes to comprehend the significance of Red Oleander. So he asks for 'one of those flowers, a moment's gift'. But he fears the strength of Sardar and aware of the suffering he would have to face if he raise voice against Sardar. So he says "There comes the Governor. He hates to see me talk to you. So I must go". But at the end of the play he joins Nandini

and enters into the battle "It is only now that we shall reach her. She won't evade us any longer". Thus while Gokul or Chandra leave with no clear ending Professor shows distinct conclusion.

III. DISCUSSION:

"We are still animals, and our physical, emotional and cognitive abilities are still shaped by our DNA. Our societies are built from the same building blocks as Neanderthal or chimpanzee societies, and the more we examine these building blocks – sensations, emotions, family ties – the less difference we find between us and other apes" says Harari²⁴. But "Until the Cognitive Revolution, the doings of all human species belonged to the realm of biology, or, if you so prefer, prehistory (I tend to avoid the term 'prehistory', because it wrongly implies that even before the Cognitive Revolution, humans were in a category of their own). From the Cognitive Revolution onwards, historical narratives replace biological theories as our primary means of explaining the development of Homo sapiens. To understand the rise of Christianity or the French Revolution, it is not enough to comprehend the interaction of genes, hormones and organisms. It is necessary to take into account the interaction of ideas, images and fantasies as well"²⁴. Thus more the development of cognitive power in man happened more they gradually started differing from other natural animals even their own ancestors. Something special and unique cognitive features put mankind on the top of the food chain. These unique features or attributes in society can be called as of two kinds broadly speaking good or bad, virtue and vice etc. Though it is difficult to define and classify because all these characteristics features are person specific, society or culture specific and time specific. Several traits have come to be considered even just reverse in nature with regard to space and time. Still we can categorize them good or bad as whether they are beneficial or detrimental for the society. This statement can be true irrespective of era or society. Tagore probably is the answer of this debate when he clearly pointed out the same tune hundred years ago. He discriminates the objective of existence of man and animal as "The pain of desire for the near belongs to the animal, the sorrow of aspiration for the far belongs to man" (Bishu says to Chandra in Raktakarabi). This philosophical notion is reflected in different writings of Tagore like *Manusher Dharma* (The spirit of Man) also. He says, "The material animals come across by their sight and smell is of mere necessity. Raising head man saw not the matter itself but a unity of matters. Man found itself in a centre of undivided expansion. It may be called as free vision"²⁵. Stepping one step forward Tagore always speaks for the noble virtues of human nature as the ultimate aim of its existence. He thus, alike other eternal noble doctrines by great religious preachers advocates in favour of virtues or free vision. But unfortunately evil always exists along God and thereby vice always accompanies virtue. Altruism and selfishness are two such virtue and vice respectively present in human nature from its origin. They are inherited from our animal ancestors through millions of years. The difference is that animal species exhibit such attributes by instinct and they are genetically controlled behaviour. They never judge it philosophically or blame or repent for the manifestation. But human being with its so called Ego or Super Ego evaluate each other cognitively. Hence the terms virtue and vice should not be applicable to animals but *Homo sapiens sapiens* imputes its cognitive supremacy and decides accordingly the way of life. At this point of discourse we come to another very important fact that in class divided society like other features 'To be or not to be' altruistic or selfish usually depends on environmental influence or more specifically speaking the financial status and stability of a person and crisis in the financial condition of the society. So in human society these attributes are person specific and environment specific. More crises mean more selfishness. Off course this crisis is also class specific and relative. State in class divided society acts only in favour of the effluents but provide some benefit for the oppressed. This inadequate support rather creates more need and thereby greed for the people. To achieve these mundane needs they admit the subservience and become selfish. On the contrary Nandini, Ranjan, Bishu speaks for ultimate revolution which has no immediate relief. Rather there exists uncertainty and doubt regarding the success of the revolution. Thus the contradiction occurs between immediate profit and long term freedom. As a result Chandra and Gokul don't trust and rely on Nandini or Professor does not stand with Nandini and we call them selfish. But the question arises why someone is selfish and some is not? Should we consider the selfish person as bad or altruistic person as good? Is the evaluation should be a binary? The answers certainly are embedded in the social structure.

The history of human society is a class divided one. It is divided into the ruler and the ruled, the dominant and the dominated. The form and structure of the ruling have been changed but the fundamental dogma remains same. Raktakarabi addresses this dogma. "The age – old struggle between the individual and the state, between the liberative impulse and the compulsive will, between free intelligence and cold calculating intellect, which has assumed sinister proportions with the development of the scientific technique is the theme of this play"²⁷. On the other hand, the development and vibrancy of a nation or even mankind are inversely proportional to the number of Chandra(s) and Gokul(s) i.e. selfishness. Remarkable and timeless creation always fetches its motivation from affliction. Tagore himself has the view of The Upanishadas "Awake, arise having approached the great teachers, learn. The sages say that the road is difficult to travel on and that the crossing over (of Samsara) is difficult as the sharp edge of a razor"²⁸. Therefore people, always busy with mundane

search for own wellbeing and never looking for the suffering of others, never dare to walk through the 'Rozor' really seems to be numbers and never capable to bring forth any radical change for betterment of mankind both materialistically and spiritually. Because to raise voice against the oppression and exploitation of the ruler needs understanding the situation, feeling others pain, spirit to sacrifice own benefit and held the head high. Ruler knows it well and tries to sustain the crisis. ".....the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it" says Communist Manifesto²⁹. They use imposed misery, fear of punishment and torture, religious doctrines interpreted accordingly for their benefit. Thus in this brutal society human being transforms into mere numbers. "At this stage, the labourers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country and broken up by their mutual competition"²⁹. The same idea is reflected in Raktakarabi when Bishu in his statement says, "The calendar never records the last day. After the first day comes the second, after the second the third. There's no such thing as getting finished here. We're always digging one yard, two yards, three yards. We go on raising gold nuggets, after one nugget another, then more and more and more. In Yaksha Town figures follow one another in rows and never arrive at any conclusion. That's why we are not men to them, but only numbers". Thus the simple tactics of the ruler are to sustain more crises in the society and break the cohesion of the working class so that people always remain busy in existential and identity crisis. Thus this is a vicious circle of a society where division of labour exists. Here in Raktakarabi Professor, Morol, Gokul and Chandra are the representative of those mundane people who passively help the ruler to run smoothly their system. They are self centred and mistrust their own class.

Now it is time to focus on the foremost part of this article i.e. selfishness at present world and its causes and characters and how Raktakarabi addresses this issue hundred years ago. As discussed earlier, selfishness is not always considered to be a vice. In fact selfishness can be categorized into three forms viz. good, neutral and bad³⁰. "The problem arises when we do things for ourselves and at the same time ignore the needs of those around us or when we fulfill our needs at the expense of others. When you make life difficult for others to meet your own ends, then that kind of selfishness is the selfishness that you'd like to avoid"³¹. To understand we focused on the present scenario of India taking the cases referred earlier in the article. A single tiny virus of 120 nm in diameter and 40000 kDa molecular weight i.e. billion times smaller than average human being has shattered the society throughout more than one year. But this is the facade of the problem. We have to analyze in depth and dive into the core of crisis. During prolonged lockdown people have been forcefully taken apart from social bonding and cohesion practiced for thousand years. On the other hand the uncertainty of the discovery of proper vaccine, infrastructure of the treatment and other facilities compelled people to be self interested or self centered due to life risk. Added to this is the crush of economic stability worldwide. India has also been facing the problem of economic crisis as well. Vyas shows how the income of middle class of India, which he considered as one of the chief engine of economy of the country, has faced the fall during April to September, 2020³². Statistica Research Department published statistical report on October, 16, 2020 stating the highest unemployment during May, 2020 (24%) while it is slightly improved during September, 2020 (over 6%)³³. The incidents of police torturing wedge labourers happened during March and the death of them continued upto almost July-August, 2020. This data as well as other data referred earlier regarding the crisis in economical and sociological uncertainty also occurred during March to June, 2021 until the first unlock process started and economy started regularizing slowly. Cases like Arambagh incident occurred during that duration also. Is this a mere coincidence or any circumlocutory correlation behind it? These statistics probably hint some indication that there must be a correlation between these two apparently distant subjects. It can also easily be hypothesized at least that as the crisis of survival increases the selfishness increases too. Two possibilities of behavior always exists in a society called self regard or other regarding behavior. Which would be encouraged depends on the sociopolitical authority or the philosophy of the class ruling the society and what the authority wants for its own benefit. Secondly, where money is the only parameter of well being, selfishness is inevitable because in this system emotion is also a commodity. Good example is that a poor man needs money and not mere empathy to keep life on. If a bad person gives money they praise him and easily submit to the interest of that person instead a good person giving time or sympathy. Only a few people in this system raise their voice against the ruler. Therefore two kinds of common people exist in society, majority of them are selfish and minority altruistic. Selfishness again can be classified into three types viz. good, neutral and bad selfish groups. Here comes the reference of Raktakarabi. Chandra and Gokul are representatives of neutral selfishness who are at the sametime realize the oppression of the ruler but remain attached to them for their sustenance and betterment. Professor remained neutral. He keeps respect and love for Nandini but doesn't take the stance in favour of Nandini directly and stand against Sardar. Chandra and Gokul said to burn Nandini but did not do that in reality. But Morol acted proactively to malign Bishu and Ranjan. In the present scenario taking the example of the Arambagh case the COVID warrior faced refusal from her own neighbors for whose safety and security she was fighting for. This clearly indicates the similarity with Chandra and Gokul who refuse Nandini, their close neighbour knowing well that she is suffering due to their betterment. If we focus to the incident of the migrant labour problem we find that almost every citizen of India knew and understood the suffering of those

poor victims. Handful of people took the initiative to rescue them or render help to them and others remained busy with their own interest. If this is the example of neutral selfishness then the policemen who *Lathicharged* on those unfortunate and helpless people instead of receiving the case sensitively or sympathetically may be the example of crude selfishness. In the name of order from superior and keeping their own subordination record intact they executed the brutal act. Such order following and thereby exhibiting selfishness are depicted in the experiments of Hofling³⁴ or the Milgram shock experiment³⁵. The same reflection is found in the case of Dalit event. This is an issue persisting through millennium and always the upper cast ruled the Indian society in the name of religion and as upper cast of India is also upper class so always they held the power also. Whenever any Nandini or Ranjan tried to change the scenario they have either been murdered or prisoned or suffered by different ways. In the case handful of criminals did the act. By this mean they showed the loyalty to their religious or spiritual or political rulers. A lot of people saw it in television and read it in newspaper. Only few people raise the protest but lot of people remained silent. Here we see the Morol and Professor respectively either making own benefit at the cost of others or remain silent.

But every oppression has an end. One day comes when quantitative protests cumulate into a big qualitative conclusion and revolt against the system occurs. During this revolution these selfish people either take the side of protesters or have no role to play and they become practically missing as the fate of these four discussed characters face in the play. But who will change the situation? Tagore was aware about the great revolution of Soviet Russia (cf. *Rasiar Chithi* The letters from Rasia). Though criticizing the new Socialistic system regarding few issues he was influenced by their role in changing the system by revolution under the leadership of Proletariat. Perhaps for this reason we find Fagulal as the ultimate leader to break and destroy the Yakshapuri. Replying to the King he therefore says, "To break the prison gate. We may lose our lives, but we shan't fall back". Tagore was out-and-out against this mechanical and joyless environment and always pleaded for freedom of body and soul of human being. "To-day another factor has made itself immensely evident in shaping and guiding human destiny. It is the spirit of organization, which is not social in character, but utilitarian"³⁶. In fact after visiting Europe and America Tagore felt the horrible oppression of ruthless Laissez fair Economics and in several articles he has stated on this issue. Still *Raktakarabi* should not be analysed as a play of crude conflict of capitalism and socialism or any class conflict. Yes, indeed this play is the only one among any other plays of Tagore where such kind of direct conflict between ruler and ruled is portrayed but at the conclusion the liberation of human virtues becomes the salient central focus and the political or to be precise class liberation becomes to some extent latent. It is evident when Morol, Gokul and Chandra perish at the end leaving no trace of their fate, Bishu, Kishor and Ranjan sacrifice their lives and become martyrs, and The King Himself leaves his mysterious cave and marches with Nandini and Fagulal to fight against his own system i.e. the utilitarian system. At this moment the play becomes an Idea Play, the idea of eternal human values. Altruism here wins over selfishness. This is the clear message of the play. So in conclusion it can be said *Raktakarabi* is a play with the contradiction of selfishness and altruism in one of its core focus where Tagore's own inclination is to altruism.

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