



Portrayal of God in Tagore's *Sacrifice*

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Introduction

The play *Sacrifice* by Rabindranath Tagore reflects primarily the practice of animal and human sacrifice to please the goddess Kali in Hinduism. Sacrifices of goats and roosters are common sight in many temples of goddess Kali in India. Animal sacrifice is widely prevalent in many temples of India even today.

Sacrifice is a religious rite in which something pleasing to the god is offered to obtain blessing. Man maintains a relationship between his own self and the supreme power through sacrifice. This religious attitude is widely prevalent in India. Every one offer something to the god present in the temple. We may desire for good rain, good harvest, wealth, children or health and other material benefits from the god in the temple through our prayer and offerings.

Sacrifice in the form of animals or flowers are also made to please gods and goddesses in order to seek forgiveness for the wrong doings or sins, which we might have committed.

Many non-vegetarians give up meat eating as a form of sacrifice to please their gods and goddesses on specific days. An extreme form of sacrifice is human sacrifice where a human being is killed as an offering to the god.

The play Sacrifice

Gunavati, the queen in Rabindranath's Tagore's play *Sacrifice*, wonders whether she had offended the fearsome mother goddess, because even though she was a queen and the whole world was under her feet but still she was not fortunate enough to become a mother. Was it a curse upon her for the sin she might have committed in the past or previous birth? Here the fearsome mother goddess is the Hindu goddess Kali (CPPR 513). Kali worship is more popular in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal. People were not educated and often led a very superstitious life without any reason or scientific approach during the period of Tagore. The spiritual Gurus like the temple priest Ragupathy took advantage of the people's ignorance and maintained a superior authority over the King and his subjects. His words were authority and people must obey it blindly. Even the king was no exception to this law of the priest who was a symbol of vanity.

He advises the queen to make an offering of a beast and flowers to please the Goddess. The queen brings the goat of the poor girl Aparna and flowers for offering to the temple. The king Govinda questions the servant Jaising about the offerings.

The servant advises the girl that it was the mother's (Goddess Kali) wish and Aparna need not repent for it. Aparna argues that she was like the goat's mother and took care of it as if it was her own child.

The king bans all the sacrifices in the temple and an announcement was made to forbid sacrifice in the name of god to the priest and the courtiers. The king also instructed them to spread his order to all parts of his land.

The priest argues and warns that the king's rule should be only outside the temple and not in the matters of age old traditions and religion. The priest condemns the king for disregarding the goddess Kali and not giving her due sacrifices.

The queen was very upset since her offering too was turned by the order of the king. The King tried to convince her that it was mother kali's command and he must execute it against all odds.

The priest decides to give an offering of a beast to the Goddess, but the King prevents it through his general Nayanrai and Chandpal, the second commander with their soldiers. But the general refuses to follow the order of the king and surrenders his royal sword to the king himself because his faith in religion and age old beliefs was dearer than the king's order.

The king's sanction was not required for religious rites because the power of the king rested outside the temple and within his territory.

The priest makes a conspiracy to get rid of the King with the help of prince Nakshatra who was also the brother of king Govinda. The priest tells Nakshatra that he would be the next King as per the wish of the goddess after offering the hot blood of King Govinda. The priest out of his vanity encourages a brother to kill another brother in the name of faith and religion.

People fear age old tradition and religious rite than anything else in India. The superstitious belief was responsible for many evils in the days of Rabindranath Tagore. People led a poor life due ignorance and poverty. Faith in religion was strong and they would stoop to any level to restore their faith. They would

disobey the Kings order and even kill others for the sake of faith. People like Ragupathy exploited the faith of the people to fulfill his vanity.

Jaising ultimately promises to bring the blood of the king as an offering to goddess Kali.

The king's love for a small boy Druva worries the Queen because he could be the next possible contender to the crown. The Queen orders Prince Nakshatra to get rid of the boy by sacrificing him to the Goddess Kali. The Prince informs the queen that the goddess wanted only the king's blood. The queen then orders Prince Nakshatra to sacrifice the boy instead of the King(CPPR 523).

So, the priest wanted to sacrifice the king and the queen wanted to sacrifice the little boy. Hence this part of the play clearly indicates the practices of human sacrifice prevalent in the society during the period of Rabindranath Tagore.

There was always a conflict in the minds of the people whether to follow the king or to follow the age old faith and religious rites by following the order of the priest to execute the king. Ultimately the boy was chosen for the sacrifice in lieu of the King.

The prince and the priest make every effort to sacrifice the boy to Goddess Kali but were prevented by the king. The priest and the prince were arrested and sent for eight years of exile by King Govinda.

Jaising kills himself to offer his own blood to fulfill the promise made to the priest instead of the King as his blood too belonged to the royal lineage.

The king believed in justice and righteousness which are the personification of God himself. This is also reiterated in the Srimad Ramayana (Sarma 31). The king prevented sacrifice and the priest disobeyed to establish his authority and age old superstitious beliefs over the King and his authority. Ultimately the priest fails in his endeavour.

Jaising was very dear to the priest because he brought him up like his own son and his loss was a great shock which shattered all the hopes of the priest. Raghupati calls the goddess as dumb deaf, blind and a mere stone. He throws away the image and declares that there is no Goddess. The Goddess is not in the Stone image but in the heart of the woman. Thus the play ends with the destruction of falsehood through the unfortunate death of Jaising. The God is present in the heart as the soul of an individual (Rajagopalachari 19).

Hindu belief is based on the assumption that everyone reaps the fruits of one's own Karma (Weeraperuma 11). Karma means the consequence of good or bad acts of a person in his or her previous birth. This explains the reason, why someone is wealthy, blessed with good health and life whereas others suffer from poverty, disease and calamities in life. If your action is for good, then you will enjoy its fruit in the next birth. According to the law of karma, we are actually the product of our acts and thoughts during the previous birth.

As per this law of karma, Gunavati is the queen because of her previous good deeds but she does not have a child because of the wrongs (sin), she might have committed in her previous birth. Gunavati might suffer either because of wrong deeds committed or because mother Kali wanted to test her for some obvious reason only known to Kali, as her ways and actions are secret and unknown to the mortals. But all that happens for the spiritual elevation of the person tested.

As per Hinduism Goddess Kali has four arms with a sword in one hand and the head of the demon in another and the other two hands for blessing her devotees. She has two dead heads as her earring, garland of skulls necklace and a girdle made of human hands as her clothing. She has a protruding tongue, red eyes, her face and breasts are smeared with blood. She stands with one foot on the thigh and other resting on the chest of her husband, the Lord Shiva (Harshananda 113).

Thus, animal sacrifice was very common and killing of animals and human beings was justified in the name of religion by the priests and his followers in the temples across India during the period of Rabindranath Tagore.

The king questioned whether the goddess was really happy to have her creation killed. Religions, by and large, may teach love, compassion and tolerance, but the followers may misinterpret such teaching to fulfill their own selfish means and maintain a sway over the society. This was the case also with the priest of Kali temple in the play *Sacrifice*.

The faith of Rabindranath Tagore based on universal approach of oneness teach mankind to develop love for all living things, as all are the creations of God which is also mentioned in the Upanishads (Rajagopalachari 38).

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore in his play 'Sacrifice' conveyed the message of kindness and love to prevent unwanted sacrifice of living beings in the name of religion.

People were more superstitious and believed anything blindly without rational thought in those days (prior to independence) because of the lack of good moral and scientific education.

Sacrifice of ego was necessary for prosperity and peaceful co-existence of all living things on this earth. So, Rabindranath Tagore wanted the people to sacrifice their ego instead of foolish sacrifices based on superstitious beliefs.

We see the Hindu Goddess Kali around which the whole play revolves. The priest makes futile effort to invoke the blessing of mother Kali to restore the faith of people in the Goddess. But the faith of the priest was shattered as he failed in his attempts to sacrifice either the king or the little boy but instead his dearest Jaising was killed. The priest ultimately declares that there was no goddess and it was only a mere stone image. The real goddess is in the heart of a woman (CPPR 532).

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