
**REVISITING TAGORE'S CHANDALIKA THROUGH THE LENS OF
DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION**

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Abstract: This paper aims to study Rabindranath Tagore's dance drama "Chandalika" using Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction. Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet and writer who spoke against social injustice. His play talks about caste discrimination in society. The story is about a girl named Prakriti who belongs to a lower caste. When a monk gives her respect, she starts to see her own worth. Tagore uses this story to show that all people deserve dignity and respect. As the drama presents an idea against caste discrimination and support for women's freedom, a closer reading of it shows that it contains contradictions and unanswered questions. Using ideas like binary oppositions, 'differance,' and the instability of meaning, this paper aims to explore how "Chandalika" challenges fixed ideas about purity and impurity, spirituality and desire, and freedom and submission. It also studies how language, movement, and silence in the performance add to these doubts. These elements help us to see that the meanings may shift depending on how we read or watch the drama. The aim is to show that "Chandalika" is not just a simple moral tale, but a complex work that opens up deeper questions about identity, power, and meaning.

Key Words: Deconstruction, Binary Opposition, Differance, caste/class discrimination, Spirituality.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, playwright, philosopher, and social reformer whose works often explored deep human emotions, social issues, and spiritual questions. He was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore believed in the dignity of all human beings and often spoke against social evils like caste discrimination, gender inequality, and blind religious practices. His dance dramas, like Chandalika, combine poetry, music, and movement to express powerful messages. Through his creative work, Tagore challenged traditional norms and invited his audience to think in new ways.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika* tells the story of Prakriti, a young girl from the untouchable caste, who experiences a profound shift in self-worth when a Buddhist monk, Ananda, asks her for water. This simple act of human interaction becomes a life-changing event for Prakriti, as it challenges the deep-rooted social conditioning that has made her believe she is impure and unworthy. The monk's gesture, though seemingly small, acts as a catalyst that triggers a psychological and emotional awakening in her. She begins to see herself not as a societal outcast but as a person deserving of dignity and love. However, what begins as a moment of empowerment gradually transforms into an emotional struggle, as her gratitude and admiration for the monk turn into a passionate desire for his presence and love.

Although *Chandalika* is widely recognized as a protest against the caste system and a call for women's dignity, it is also a text filled with emotional, spiritual, and philosophical complexities. The play navigates the terrain between social reform and individual desire, between external freedom and internal conflict. Prakriti is not just a simple example of a girl fighting against injustice, and Ananda is not a perfect holy man without faults. The way they behave with each other makes us think about who has power, how women are treated, and how people deal with emotions.

This paper aims to read *Chandalika* through the lens of Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction, which challenges fixed meanings, stable identities, and rigid oppositions. It allows us to see *Chandalika* not merely as a moral narrative about social change but as a layered and dynamic text that constantly questions itself. By applying concepts such as binary oppositions, differance, and the instability of meaning, this study will explore how Tagore's play uses conventional ideas of purity and impurity, spirituality and sensuality, submission and autonomy.

Review Of Existing Literature: Dutta, Krishna, and Andrew Robinson. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*. St. Martin's Press, 1995. The paper explores the argument of the authors that Tagore's plays, including *Chandalika*, were not just artistic expressions but also acts of resistance against rigid social norms. This view situates Tagore within the context of Indian Renaissance thinkers who sought to blend modern ideas with Indian culture. However, while the biography offers important historical and cultural context, it focuses more on Tagore's intentions than on the complexities and contradictions in his texts. Thus, it leaves room for further interpretation using modern literary theories that examine the instability of meaning.

Radice, William. "Tagore's Religion and Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 38–52. The paper explores Tagore's writings, especially *Chandalika*, showing a deep mix of spiritual ideas and human emotions. He believes the characters go through personal, emotional changes. However, Radice does not focus much on the political issues in the play, like caste and gender. So, his view can be balanced with Deconstruction, which helps explore the hidden tensions and opposites (like spiritual vs. sensual) in the story.

Lal, Malashri. "Tagore's Women." *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, edited by Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003, pp. 89–104. The paper explores how Chandalika has been interpreted as a work of social protest, spiritual awakening, and emotional conflict. While some scholars view it as a clear stand against caste and gender inequality, others highlight the inner transformation of the characters. Feminist and psychoanalytic readings further reveal the psychological depth of Prakriti's struggle. However, these interpretations often overlook the contradictions within the text, which this paper examines through Derrida's theory of Deconstruction.

Bandyopadhyay, Sibaji. *Bartho Oitihya [Burdened Heritage]*. Dey's Publishing, 2005. (Translated excerpts from Bengali writings on Tagore). The paper explores how Chandalika reflects deep emotional struggles through Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's psychoanalytic reading. He sees Prakriti's desire for the monk not just as a wish for love or respect, but as a sign of her inner emptiness and need for self-worth. Her attempt to control Ananda becomes a way to gain power in a world that has always rejected her. This view shifts the focus from social issues to the emotional pain and fragility behind her actions.

Chaudhuri, Sutapa. "Signifying the Self: Intersections of Class, Caste, and Gender in Rabindranath Tagore's Dance Drama Chandalika (1938)." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2010, pp. 549–558. Sutapa Chaudhuri's paper explores how Chandalika presents the growth of a woman's selfhood by linking caste, class, and gender. She highlights how Tagore's use of dance allows Prakriti's female desire and inner transformation to emerge boldly—challenging social norms. The paper reads the drama as both feminist and radical for its time.

Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2003. The book provides a clear, accessible introduction to deconstruction, focusing on Jacques Derrida's key ideas and their impact on literary and philosophical thought. Norris explains how deconstruction challenges the idea of fixed meaning in texts and analyzes the works of major theorists like Paul de Man and Harold Bloom. The updated edition includes recent debates and an extensive reading list, making it a practical guide for students and scholars exploring poststructuralist criticism.

Research Scope: This paper aims to study the theory of Deconstruction in the work "Chandalika". It examines the idea of binary opposition, like purity/impurity and desire/spirituality. It will also focus on the language of the text and the multiple meanings which we find in the drama as well as in the text.

Research Goals:

1. Exploration and identification of binary oppositions in the play.
2. Studying the language and the narrative style.
3. Studying Tagore through the lens of Deconstruction.

Research Methodology: There are mainly two types of methodologies in research, i.e., Qualitative Method and Quantitative Method.

The paper follows the Qualitative Method of research and explains the ideas, concepts, and emotions without using numerical data; rather, it focuses on text and images.

Throwing Light on the Theory of Deconstruction: Jacques Derrida was born on 15 July 1930 in El-Biar, Algeria. He was a French philosopher. He developed the theory of “Deconstruction,” which gives the idea of challenging traditional beliefs, identity, and meaning in language. Derrida critiqued the idea of structuralism, which discusses that meaning in language is always fixed. Derrida believed that words do not have fixed meanings. Instead, the meaning of a word comes from how it is different from other words. For example, the word “light” only makes sense because we know what “dark” means. So, every word depends on other words for its meaning. That is why meaning is always changing or incomplete. Deconstruction also studies binary oppositions. These are pairs like:
Man/Woman
Pure/Impure
Upper/Lower
Powerful/Weak

Derrida also used the idea of “differance,” which means that meaning is always delayed or shifted. When we read something, the meaning is never final—it keeps changing as we read more or think more. Using deconstruction, we can find the hidden meanings, contradictions, and gaps in a story. Even if a text seems to support justice or equality, it may still carry old ideas or power structures deep inside. So, when we apply Deconstruction to Chandalika, we try to see not just what the text says on the surface, but also what it hides or does not say clearly—about caste, gender, power, and identity.

Analyzing Chandalika Through Derrida’s Deconstruction:

1. **Breaking the Binary of Pure and Impure:** The drama begins with the monk Ananda asking for water from Prakriti. She is shocked because no one has ever treated her as a human being. This moment appears revolutionary.
Ananda: “Give me some water, I pray.”
Prakriti: “I am the daughter of the chandaal, the untouchable. Alas, I am not worthy enough to quench thine thirst!”
(This scene challenges the binary of pure (monk) and impure (untouchable). Ananda treats her with respect, showing that spiritual values do not support caste discrimination. But this change is only temporary. Ananda walks away, and the society around Prakriti still sees her as impure. Later, Prakriti says:
Prakriti: “He called me human. He touched my heart. But now I am again nothing.”

This reveals that her human identity is unstable. It depends on someone else's recognition—in this case, the monk. The binary has not disappeared; it has only shifted. The hierarchy is still there, just in a new form.

2. **Women's Desire and Dangerous Power:** At first, Chandalika seems to support women's empowerment. Prakriti speaks against her fate: Prakriti: "Why was I born if I cannot live as a human? Why must I be untouchable?" This sounds like a call for self-respect. But as the play progresses, her desire becomes obsessive. She forces her mother to use black magic to bring Ananda back. Prakriti: "Mother, call him back. I want him. I must have him!" This shows her losing control—a return to the stereotype of the emotional, unstable woman. The play then punishes her for this desire, making her guilty and ashamed. Prakriti (later): "Free him, Mother! I don't want him like this. I am burning with shame."

This shows a contradiction that the play allows her to speak, but it also blames her. The idea of Deconstruction shows how texts give power and then take it back. Prakriti's rebellion ends in guilt and not victory.

3. **The Monk - Ananda:** Ananda, the Monk, is a peaceful and spiritual man. When we read it closely, we find out that, though he is a liberator of the society, he is also a silent oppressor because initially he is shown as a person who does not discriminate between the classes, but on another side, he does not pay any attention to Prakriti. He awakens Prakriti's human feelings but takes no responsibility. Prakriti: "He gave me a drop of water, and I drank the sky." This line explores how deeply she is affected, but when Ananda returns by black magic, he says, Ananda: "Who calls me? Who pulls me down into darkness?"

His words show fear. He neither recognizes nor accepts Prakriti's love for him. Deconstruction explores the silence in the text. What is not said is more important than what is said. This Ananda's silence explores that even in silence he controls the narrative.

4. **Nature, Magic, and Women:** Prakriti's name means "Nature". Nature is often seen as wild and feminine—opposite to man-made order or culture. This fits into another binary: Nature (woman) vs. Culture (man). Her mother is a healer and magician. When she agrees to cast the spell, it is not seen as power, but as danger. Mother: "What you ask is not right. To use force is to trap the soul."

It shows how women in the drama have power only through emotion or magic, not through reason. This again fits into an old idea: that female power is unnatural.

Later, both women suffer because of this magic. So, the power they gain is temporary and punished. This reflects the underlying conservative message of the text.

5. **Differance – Meaning That Always Slips:** Derrida’s concept of “Differance” means that meaning is never stable—it is always changing and incomplete. In Chandalika, Prakriti keeps shifting between roles: From untouchable to awakened From confident to obsessive From lover to sinner She says: Prakriti: “Was I wrong to want? Is love also forbidden to me?” This question has no clear answer in the drama. Sometimes it seems like love is natural. Other times it seems like desire is evil. The meaning of her actions keeps shifting. This is what Derrida means by differance—a word or identity never has a final meaning. It always changes in context. Even Ananda’s words can mean different things: “Give me water.”

This simple sentence breaks caste rules. But it also begins a series of events leading to guilt and suffering. So, a sentence that gives hope also causes pain. There is no stable meaning, and that is exactly what deconstruction shows.

Conclusion: Rabindranath Tagore’s Chandalika is a bold and thought-provoking play that speaks about the problems of caste and a woman’s struggle for self-respect. On the surface, it tells the story of Prakriti, a girl born into a low caste who is made to feel that she is unworthy and untouchable. But one day, a Buddhist monk named Ananda speaks to her kindly and changes the way she sees herself. She starts believing that she, too, deserves dignity. However, if we read the play more closely using Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, we start to see that things are not as simple as they seem. The message of the play is not straightforward; it is filled with tensions, contradictions, and hidden layers.

Deconstruction asks us to look at the opposites or pairs of ideas we find in a text—like high and low, pure and impure, man and woman, powerful and powerless. In Chandalika, these opposites are everywhere. Ananda stands for peace, religion, and control, while Prakriti is shown as emotional, wild, and troubled. But as the play goes on, these roles shift. Ananda, who is supposed to be calm and above worldly feelings, loses control when he is forced back by Prakriti. On the other hand, Prakriti becomes strong enough to use magic and bend others to her will. These changes show us that the clear lines between good and bad, powerful and weak, are not so clear after all. This is exactly what deconstruction points out—there is no fixed meaning in a text.

Another point Derrida talks about is that meaning is never stable. In the play, Prakriti’s identity keeps changing. At first, she feels dirty and unwanted. Then she feels

proud because someone treated her kindly. Later, she becomes angry and obsessed, and finally, she breaks down and feels regret. So, who is the real Prakriti? The play doesn't give us a final answer. That's the beauty of deconstruction—it shows us that characters and meanings are always moving and can't be fixed into just one idea.

Also, Chandalika seems to speak out against the caste system. But if we look deeper, we see that the castes structure is still present in many ways. For example, even though Ananda says everyone is equal, he still acts like he is above others. He blesses Prakriti in the end, which again puts him in a position of power. Prakriti's mother also wants her daughter to be strong, but she uses dark magic, which shows a kind of moral weakness. These small details show that the play carries mixed messages. It questions the caste system, but also quietly accepts some of its values.

Another important thing to think about is that Prakriti's freedom depends on others—on Ananda's words, on her mother's help, on her own desire for love and acceptance. So, even when she seems strong, she is still not completely free. This again shows the confusion and double meanings that deconstruction helps us to see. The play does not give us one clean answer. Instead, it opens up many questions.

The language used in the play also plays a big role. Words like “pure,” “sin,” “love,” and “freedom” are repeated often. But what do these words really mean? For Prakriti, being touched by Ananda means love and respect. For Ananda, it may mean breaking his rules. For her mother, it means danger. These different meanings for the same word show us that language is not always clear. It changes depending on who is speaking and what they believe. This is another point that Derrida makes—language always carries different meanings, and no meaning is ever final.

In the end, Chandalika is not just a play about fighting caste or giving women power. It is also about how identity, truth, and freedom are never simple. The same story can be read in many ways, and each time we read it, we may find something new. Deconstruction doesn't say that the play is wrong. It simply shows that there is more to it than what we first see.

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