



Pandemic as a Metaphor for Moral Degeneration in Tagore's *Rajarshi*

Ananya Chatterjee

Abstract

This paper shall unpack the Pandemic by reading the metaphor of moral degradation that gets regularly associated with disease and death. Tagore's novel contemplates this metaphorical association and undoes it by locating human agency outside of naturalized morality. The paper establishes Tagore's modernist understanding of human agency and responsibility through two characters – Gobindamanikya and Bilwan. The protagonist, Gobindamanikya, exemplifies Tagore's personal form of Virtue ethics, whereas in Bilwan we see a more practical equivalent of that Virtue ethics in the form of an ethics of care. A formidable opposition to their ethical positions is provided by the character of Raghupati, who invokes the natural order to establish a deontological view of reality. Within this naturalistic deontological worldview, calamities like the pandemic become almost an agreeable occurrence, thus testing the validity of both the positions of Bilwan and Gobindamanikya.

By looking at the thanatopolitics of the pandemic situation in the Indian subcontinent, this paper will analyse the assumptions about moral degeneration that cropped up during an epidemic in Tripura. The absence of a mature understanding of the human-nature relation results in conflicting moral stances on both the individual level and between two different religious communities. The paper will explain how the central characters stage a denaturalization of traditional authority through the moral intervention of the central characters. Tagore's novel establishes a mature vintage point from which humanitarian action can be conducted in the event of an epidemic or pandemic.

Keywords: Degeneration, Morality, Virtue Ethics, Pandemic, Sacrifice.