

7. Chandaliḱa

Prakriti, a young girl of the “untouchable” caste, or the Chandalis, is shunned by those around her because of society’s terrible practice of oppressing a sector of its own people due to perceived inferiority. A wandering Buddhist monk asks Prakriti, or “Chandalika,” for some water. Chandalika initially refuses, stating that society forbids a higher individual such as the monk to interact with an untouchable. The Monk, Ananda, persuades Chandalika to give him water by teaching her that all human beings are equal in the eyes of god. Ananda then continues on his way, but Chandalika has fallen in love with him. She begs her mother to use her magical powers to bring this marvelous being to her. When he returns by the power of magic, shamed and degraded, Chandalika realizes that she has done him great harm and asks for forgiveness.



ACT-1:

Invocation: A dance in praise of Rabindranath Tagore’s Chandalika, Kuchipudi art, and the members of the orchestra

Scene-1:

Chandalika awakens early in the morning and tends to her chores. She hears the call of flower sellers in the market and goes in search of them. When Chandalika approaches them, high cast women intervene and forbid the flower sellers to sell to her, an Untouchable girl. Similarly, Chandalika is shunned while trying to buy milk from the milkmaids and bangles from the bangle sellers. Chandalika is at first bewildered and hurt, Then becomes filled with fury and rages at the injustice and oppression committed by society.

Scene-2:

Hurt and angered by this encounters, Chandalika becomes depressed. Her mother, Maya, Finds her daughter’s listlessness difficult to understand. She scolds Chandalika, urging her to tend to her daily chores and work. Chandalika expresses her frustration to her mother, asking why she had ever been born an untouchable, blaming god and her mother for her plight. Why was I bourn in to this life of isolation? She asks. Unable to understand her daughter, Maya leaves, perplexed.

Scene-3:

A weary Buddhist monk, Ananda, enters and sks Chandalika for some water to quench his thirst. Legend has it that the monk was Ananda, The principal disciple of the great Buddha himself, the Enlightened One. Chandalika refuses initially to serve Ananda, saying her low Chandala Cast forbids her from serving someone as fortunate and blessed as he. To her surprise, he rejects this explanation, saying that all human beings are created equal in the eyes of the God. He calmly asks her to judge herself by her own standards rather than the artificial standards of an unjust society. These were revolutionary wards to Chandalika, yet they articulated the same feelings churning within her heart. Entranced by these words, she serves him water from the well. Ananda proceeds on his journey, and Chandalika is at first unwilling to accept that her encounter with the monk was real. Seeing the water bucket placed in a different location, near where thought she had seen the monk, convinces her that the conversation with Ananda had been real. Chandalika filled with a sense of renewed life, freedom, and joy, dances in ecstasy.

Scene-4:

The encounter with Ananda has transformed Chandalika. She is brimming with gratitude and love for him. He has become her world, her only focus, and her reason for living. She yearns for his return. She tries to describe her feeling to her mother, and asks whether Ananda will ever return to her.



Scene-5:

Maya and Chandalika are interrupted by the arrival of two messengers from the King, to request Maya to use her supernatural powers to recover the princess's missing parrot. Over hearing this conversation, it occurs to Chandalika that her mother's supernatural power could bring Ananda back to her. She pleads with her mother to do this for her.

Scene-6:

Maya is reluctant at first, knowing that her powers could have devastating effects on Ananda. Seeing the desperate plight of her daughter, however, she relents. Chandalika points Ananda out to her mother, in the village. Maya then begins to work her spell, calling upon the forces of the spirit world, symbolizing worldly desires, to entrap Ananda and bring him back to Chandalika.

Scene-7:

Ananda, besieged by the evil forces, is brought, tortured and tormented to Chandalika's door. Chandalika watches in a magical mirror belonging to her mother, as Ananda is dragged back to her. Seeing the spirit forces devastate Ananda as he is forced back, Chandalika begins to regret her actions. Ananda returns, sick and worn, and begs for some water, and Chandalika is then struck with grief and horror at what she has done. Through her tears, Prakriti tells that she is not even worthy enough to give him water because of the wrong she has done him. Ananda, however, blesses Chandalika and says, "Your tears of repentance have washed away your mistakes and lifted the veil of ignorance. You have become enlightened, and have broken the circle of illusion". Hearing his words, Chandalika is redeemed a second time. She learns that freeing herself from all worldly attachments and following the path of selflessness is the road to nirvana. Ananda accepts her as a disciple, and Chandalika sets off on a journey to the eternal truth.

- THE END -