



A study of the element ‘Character is Destiny’ in Major Tragedies of Shakespeare with reference to Hindu Philosophy.

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Abstract:-

According to the Hindu Philosophy and religious literatures- nothing happens without reason. All things happen according to the ‘Rule of Karma’ (deeds). As we know, literature is the representation of society. Through literature we can learn many things. It gives us moral lessons. Many great authors of literature are the social reformers also. They teach us good lessons or ethics through the representation of their characters and especially the mistakes they commit. It is the best way to make the reformation in the culture, society and among the people. The central idea behind the research paper is ‘Rule of Karma’. This rule, simply we can define as “Virtue rewarded, Vices punished.” The same message we find when we read the works of William Shakespeare, especially his tragedies. Here the researcher has discussed the ‘Rule of Karma’ or ‘Character is Destiny’ in the four great tragedies of Shakespeare i.e. *Hamlet (1601)*, *Othello (1604)*, *Macbeth (1605)* and *King Lear (1605)* with a special reference of Hindu philosophy (Bhagvad Geeta).

Key Words:- Character, Destiny, Shakespearean tragedies, Hindu philosophy.

Introduction:-

In most of the Shakespearean tragedies we find many common characteristic features. Shakespeare believes in fate element but he considers the man responsible for his prosperity as well as fall or decay. In his tragedies find that he believes in “Character is Destiny” i.e. the character himself is responsible for his doom, which we call tragic flaw or fatal flaw. The very small mistake can change the whole life of the protagonist and

lead him to decay. In *Bhagvad Geeta* also Lord Krishna advised human how to live, what to do, and what not to do. Here are some points which will help us to understand how character plays its vital role in forming his own destiny, fate or luck. Before we understand the dictum of character is destiny, we understand the word Destiny.

What is destiny? For many people it is how they live their lives. They believe that everyone's life has its own destiny or course. In other words our destiny is our fate. It could either be a good thing or a bad thing and for most people it has already been decided by a Supreme Being or God, but that is just the cynical view. Others believe that one can decide his or her own destiny. A person just has to know how to control it and become a master of it. The researcher personally believe partially in both that one can control his or her own destiny by the deeds he do on the same way God also decides one's destiny. But if we just live our life expecting that everything will be controlled by God or destiny then we are wrong. Nothing in life is pre-destined as in the people we meet, the jobs we get or the person we marry. According to the researcher the notion of destiny is just an excuse that people use for the misfortunes or fortunes that they encounter. Each action, each desire, each thought, produces its result with unfailing certainty. "As a person sows, so shall he also reap." By this the researcher means to say that whatever you do, you will have to be ready to pay for it. The result may be either reward or ruin, depends on the deeds.

According to Dr. A.C. Bradley-

The story, next, leads up to, and includes, the *death* of the hero. On the one hand (whatever may be true of tragedy elsewhere), no play at the end of which the hero remains alive is, in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy; and we no longer class *Troilus and Cressida* or *Cymbeline* as such, as did the editors of the Folio. On the other hand, the story depicts also the troubled part of the hero's life which precedes and leads up to his death (Bradley 7).

A tragic flaw is a personality trait that leads to the downfall. It can be also a wrong action performed by the protagonist that results in his own ruin. We find such tragic flaws in Shakespeare's great tragic heroes which are the reasons of their decay or death. For example: Hamlet's indecisiveness, Macbeth's obsession with power, Othello's jealousy and King Lear's pride and unjust. In Shakespearean tragedies the element of 'Fate' is introduced by other modes of supernatural elements. It is good to say "the doctrine of character is destiny", in place of the "the theory of character is destiny."

The tragic story is primarily concerned with one person. It includes the death of hero. The sufferings are exceptional and also contrasted with previous glory and happiness. The calamity of tragedy does not simply happen; they proceed mainly from actions of men. The catastrophe follows inevitably from the deeds of men and that the source of these deeds is 'Character' himself. Dr. A .C. Bradley says-

The dictum that, with Shakespeare, 'character is destiny' is no doubt an exaggeration, and one that may mislead (for many of his tragic personages, if they had not met with peculiar circumstances, would have escaped a tragic end, and might even have lived fairly untroubled lives). (Bradley 13)

The tragic flaws of Shakespeare's heroes and the reason of their sufferings.

1. Hamlet's Tragic Flaw

The character of Hamlet has come to symbolize the person whose thoughtful nature is an obstacle to quick and decisive action. Character is Destiny means that plot should draw out of the characters themselves. The fact that Hamlet spares the king when he finds him praying is, from its effect on the hero's fortune of the great moment but the cause of the fact, which lies within Hamlet is described as thoughtful, as well as self doubting and not certain of his own rightness. He is intelligent. His soliloquies are the most important vehicle for the expression of his personality.

Hamlet is an outstanding example of the revenge play. It is a tragedy in which the attainment of justice entails the avenging hero's death. It is in the first scene of Act-III that Hamlet speaks a soliloquy that has become a verbal emblem for Shakespearean tragedy.

To be or not to be that is the question:
Whether't is nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings & arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep.

(Nandwani, *Hamlet*, 124)

In Chapter 2 of *Bhagvad Geeta*, Arjun suffers the same turmoil while standing in front of his own relatives to fight the war. He says to Krishna,

कथं भीष्ममहं सङ्ख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदन ।
इषुभिः प्रतियोत्स्यामि पूजार्हावरिसूदन ॥ 4॥

न चैतद्विद्मः कतरन्नो गरीयो
यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषाम
स्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥ 6॥

(Mukundananda)

When lord Krishna teaches the rule of karma, Arjun says that the people on his opposite side are worthy and respectable like Bheeshma and Dronacharya. I can't even argue with these venerable Gurus then how can I think to attack on them with weapons. He requests Krishna from his understandings of moral duties. He is in confusion whether to fight or not. But Arjun wins his confusion by choosing right option while Hamlet fails in taking right decision. That was his flaw. He cannot take a firm decision – right or wrong at the moment of killing

Claudius. He delays the action of taking revenge of his father's murder by Claudius. This indecision and consequent delay make him impotent for action. And that brings his downfall leading to death in the fencing match. In this way 'Procrastination' is Hamlet's tragic flaw.

2. Othello's Tragic Flaw.

In all tragedies the hero has to suffer the tragic flaw. He is the only responsible of his downfall. One of the main factors which push Othello to his death is his jealousy. Iago is playing with Othello about an affair between Desdemona and Cassio. Iago is just telling him that they are together and uses small details to prove Othello, it really happened. Even with this lack of evidence, Othello choose to believe Iago because he is thinking only about what Desdemona possibly did to him. He is looking for a way to obtain revenge more than to find out the truth. The only proof Othello thinks he has the handkerchief, he believes Desdemona gave to Cassio. He is ready to kill his wife by pure jealousy. This was the reason for his tragedy. Othello was credulous; this was his mistake or tragic flaw that leads him to his tragedy or death. Iago says...

O beware, my lord, of jealousy,
It is the green eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.

(Mansi Sachdeva, *Othello*, 126)

In Chapter 4 of Bhagvad Geeta the Almighty describes that,

यदृच्छालाभसन्तुष्टो द्वन्द्वातीतो विमत्सरः ।

समः सिद्धावसिद्धौ च कृत्वापि न निबध्यते ॥ 22॥

(Mukundananda)

This verse teaches to be satisfied whatever we have in our life. The one, who is free from jealousy, and envy, and lives in a state of contentment, he is beyond the dualities of all kinds in life. But Othello's mistake is his jealousy. Calling jealousy a "green-eyed monster" is a metaphor full of imagery. Picture a green-eyed monster gnawing your spleen as it calls you names. That's jealousy.

3. Macbeth's Tragic Flaw

Macbeth is one of the four best tragedies written by William Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare teaches moral lesson. Ambition is good when it aspires for the spiritual and the eternal but over ambition directed towards the death or decay. Macbeth's tragic flaw is his vaulting ambition for power. When he plans to kill Duncan, his king, Macbeth admits to the one thing that drives him forward.

I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition...

(Nandwani, *Macbeth*, 50)

In the following verses of *Bhagvad Geeta*, Chapter 16, the Almighty says about over ambition and its results. The major aspect of the materialistic world is greed which Lord Krishna defines as selfish desires that can never be satisfied and it doesn't care about its harmful effects on others. The ambition to reach higher and higher at the cost of another's sufferings called greed which is the cause of Macbeth's downfall.

काममाश्रित्य दुष्पूरं दम्भमानमदान्विताः ।

मोहाद्गृहीत्वासद्ग्राहान्प्रवर्तन्तेऽशुचिः ॥ 10 ॥

आशापाशशतैर्बद्धाः कामक्रोधपरायणाः ।

ईहन्ते कामभोगार्थमन्यायेनार्थसञ्जयान् ॥ 12 ॥

(Mukundananda)

Shakespeare represents abnormal conditions of mind. For example, hallucinations and deeds issuing from these are expressive, of character. Macbeth did not murder Duncan because he saw a dagger in the air; he saw the dagger because he was to murder Duncan. Macbeth thinks that to gain a crown he would jump the life to come and finds that the crown has brought him all the horrors of that life. Everything, in this tragic world, man's thought, translated into act, is transformed into the opposite of itself. His act becomes a monstrous flood which spreads over a kingdom. Lady Macbeth receives a letter from her husband telling her of the prophetic words of three witches that he will become king. When the chance comes to kill King Duncan as he sleeps, Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to murder the king and the deed is done. Here are the very significant lines by Lady Macbeth to her husband Macbeth.

All the perfumes of Arabia,

Will not sweeten this Little Hand

(Nandwani, *Macbeth*, 106)

The lines show us, teaches us that whatever we have done, we have to pay for it. According to the researcher, we can say in simple words, '**our deed decides our destiny.**'

4. King Lear's Tragic Flaw.

Tragic hero must have three qualities.

- The first is they must have power. King Lear has the highest rank of any leader. He is a king of Britain.
- The second is they must have a tragic flaw and King Lear has several of those.
- The third, they must experience a downfall. Lear's realization of his mistakes is more than a downfall.

King Lear's flaws are his arrogance, his ignorance; he is unjust to his daughter Cordelia that means his misjudgments. Lear the old king of Britain wants to retire and divide his kingdom among his three daughters- Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. To find out which of them he would leave his kingdom in succession to, he asks each of them to describe how much they love him? Blinded by the elder daughters' flatteries Lear does not see that Cordelia his youngest daughter is the only one who loves him really. As she answered,

I cannot heave My heart in my mouth,

I love your majesty,

According to my bond no more, nor less.

(Shakespeare, *I, I*, 73-75)

Furious at Cordelia's answer he banishes her. Lear became angry and divided his kingdom among the two daughters by doing injustice with the younger one. In *Bhagvad Geeta*, such state of mind shows the existing effect of '*Tamo Guna*' which means darkness, imbalance, disorder or ignorance. Person under its effect became fanatic about what they perceive to be is the only final absolute truth. Thus, Lear in his ignorance committed the mistake which became the reason of his downfall. In chapter 18 Lord Krishna says,

यत्तु कृत्स्नवदेकस्मिन्कार्ये सक्तमहैतुकम् ।

अतत्त्वार्थवदल्पं च तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 22॥

(Mukundananda)

The following development of the play shows how Lear slowly loses his followers, his authority and all material goods. His mental degeneration ends up in madness and all his ideas and values break into pieces. At last Lear is wandering all around and after Lear's reunion with Cordelia, the whole action urges to the climax.

Conclusion:-

To conclude we can say, through the above evidences that all the four great Shakespearean tragedies give the moral lesson. To some extent critics and readers are agree with the principle “Character Is Destiny.”

- In Othello, he shows that jealousy is sin and when carried to an extreme it results in crime and tragedy.
- In Macbeth, he teaches a lesson that ambition is good but over ambition directed towards the death or decay.
- Hamlet’s character teaches that don’t be over thoughtful and be confident.
- In King Lear, dramatist attacks the sin of ingratitude. Some feelings, emotions cannot be able to explain in words. It can be felt.

Shakespearean tragedies ultimately leave two kinds of feelings. Feeling of owe and feeling of sympathy. We feel owe at the fall of the great hero while the feeling of sympathy is evoked in a way in which the hero meets his end whether by his destiny or by his own mistakes or flaws. *Macbeth* is more relevant to today’s society due to the prevalence of ambition in everyday life. It can be seen everywhere; in school, in politics, and especially in business. Everyone wants power; it is human nature to want to rise to the top. On the whole the researcher believes partially in this principle Character is Destiny, because the almighty has power to control our life. In this way whatever we get either good or bad that is firstly because of our doings and then because of the destiny. Both play an essential part in the formation of one’s life.

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