



William Shakespeare's and Thomas Hardy's Tragic Vision.

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Abstract:

Tragedy', according to Shakespeare, is a serious play or serious story set in a serious atmosphere of exceptional calamities of a hero or heroine suffering extraordinarily leading to a catastrophe or dire consequence. This, according to A.C.Bradley, happens due to 'hamartia' or "tragic flaw" in the hero or heroine. The hero or heroine suffers extraordinarily due to his or her inherent defect in the character. In Shakespeare, the heroes or heroines are not ordinary men and their sufferings are exceptional from a height to the bottom. In Shakespeare's major tragedies, viz, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark and Antony and Cleopatra the heroes or heroine suffer from extraordinary calamities only due to 'hamartia' or inherent defect in their characters.

In Macbeth, it is the over ambition for which he murders King Duncan, he himself becomes the king and his wife Lady Macbeth finally, becomes mad and dies of suicide. He is killed by Macduff. Othello's tragic flaw is over jealousy over the cause of faithlessness of his wife Desdemona, who, in fact is not really so. He does wait for a moment to prove the truth of the alleged co-incidents.

When he learns of Desdemona's faithfulness, whom he has already killed by "strangling", ultimately, he kills himself. The Negro General, with so much of experiences in war faces his doom. It is due to his over jealousy. Had he tried to prove the fact, his tragic doom, could have been avoided. Had it been otherwise, he could have avoided the tragedy.

In Hamlet also, the Prince of Denmark, wants to take revenge on his father's murderer. There is a sense of delay which is the cause of his failure. "Overspeculative" nature is the tragic flaw in him. Similarly, King Lear in his old age is 'rash' in dividing the kingdom between Goneril and Regan, he fails to understand the reality of Cordellia's love for him. His 'rashness' is the 'hamartia' which causes his extraordinary sufferings, and, ultimately death. Antony is the Roman governor in Egypt. His duty is not indulge in love. Cleopatra is the queen of Egypt. Her duty is to rule her country. It is not wise for her to be involved in love affair. Hence, both Antony and Cleopatra meet their tragic doom, i.e, death through extraordinary sufferings. The mere accidental death is 'sad', but not 'tragic'. It is a co-incident.

There are other ingredients of tragedy. In Thomas Hardy, similar sort of incidents and episodes occur in about half a dozen of his novels. His philosophy grows out of the reflection and experience before he is acquainted with Schopenhauer. From an early time, he feels of an obscure volition in the depths of

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things, and curbs the readers' individual destinies under a law greater than themselves. At a later stage, he readily adopts the theory of an 'immanent will' seeking unconscious ends through a blind striving. Ramji Lall observes in this connection as follows,

“Everywhere in his novels human beings appear to us crushed by a superior force: that of nature, at first, and of an indifferent, so most often a hostile chance; then, that of errors implied in our own desires. Whether his creed is fatalism or determinism, he is hunted by the vision of necessity. He grasps it grandly, like a tragic poet, and illustrates it with untiring persistence”.¹

1. Ramji Lall: Thomas Hardy: Tess of the D'Urbervilles 1977, p.57.

Thomas Hardy's philosophy grows out of reflections and experiences. Half a dozen of his novels can be truly tragedies or, such as, tragic novels. The essential originality of his temperament is included in half a dozen books of a deliberate realism which underlies nature as a cruel tigress with her teeth and claws ever red in blood. What is true of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native* is also true of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*. In all novels, happiness, to man is largely denied, is a comic episode in the generally tragic drama of pain.

The term 'Tragedy' is “broadly applied to literary, and serious and important actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the 'protagonist' or chief character”.²

Aristotle defines tragedy as “an imitation of action that is complete, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end”.³

Thus, the action is to be complete of certain magnitude or greatness and complete in itself, in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than narrative presentation, which incorporates “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the Catharsis of such emotions. Precisely, how to interpret Aristotle's “Catharsis” which in Greek signifies “Purgation” or “Purification” or both – much disputed. On two matters, however, a number of commentators agree.

2. M.H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Prism House Books Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, 1993, P.212

3. Aristotle; ed V.Rai, *The Poetics*, 1984, p. 86,

Aristotle in the first place sets out to account for the undeniable, though remarkable, fact that many tragic representations of actions and ultimate defeat leave the audience with feeling of not being depressed, but relieved or even exalted. In the second place, Aristotle uses this distinctive effect on the tragic from the comic or other forms, and he regards, the dramatist's aim to produce this effect in the highest degree as the principle which determines both the choice of the tragic protagonist and the organization of the tragic plot.

Since Aristotle, the convention of tragedy has changed. “Tragic hero' suffers from a 'hamartia', 'error of judgments', as often though less literally translated, his 'tragic flaw'. One of the common form of 'hamartia' in Greek tragedies was 'hubris', that 'pride' or 'overweening self-confidence' which leads a protagonist to disregard a divine warning or to violate an important moral law. The tragic hero moves the readers to pity, fear or admiration, since he is not an evil man. But his misfortunes are greater than he deserves, hence he moves the reader to fear because the similar possibilities of error might occur to them also. “Catastrophe” is the tragic effect 'Peripetia' or 'Reversal of Fortune' from happiness to disaster.

Tragic conventions have undergone changes in Europe since the medieval age, i.e, Chaucer's time “Senecan tragedy” was to be recited rather than to be acted. Earliest example of it in the history of English stage was Thomas Sackville's and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1562). Other most sensational play was modelled on Seneca which is called *Tragedy of Revenge* or *Revenge Play* in which the scenes of horror, terror and bloodshed etc. were popular. *The Jew of Malta* (1592) of Christopher Marlowe and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* are the examples of it.

It has gone further changes, especially, in the Victorian Period. Instead of poetry, tragedy has been written in prose narrative. Thomas Hardy is successful in writing this sort of novel. He has left behind nearly six of them.

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4. Lall, R : Tess the D'Urbervilles (Rama Brothers) 2007.
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