



SHAKESPEARE'S 'MACBETH' AND GIRISH KARNAD'S 'TUGHLAG' AS TRAGIC HEROES:A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Dr.S.Chelliah,MA,Ph.D

Professor & Head Department of English &Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

William Shakespeare is a great dramatist finding no rivals to expel him from the throne and still wearing the crown of supreme master. He is, no doubt, a poet of the eternal verities. The human soul in intense emotion has expressed itself in his literary creations and his plays are not ephemeral or ideal songs of an empty day; instead, they are nothing but realistic presentation of life and also a mediation upon spiritual illumination of life. He is a moralist upon spiritual illumination of life. He is a moralist having an implicit faith in a moral order. Villains, however prosperous at the beginning, have to play the penalty in the long run. Thus, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have to yield to the inexorable moral law. Good men like Macbeth have, no doubt, to suffer but that suffering is the outcome of the Aristelian 'hamartia' or 'tragic flaw'. Girish Karnad, one of the greatest of Indian dramatists writing in English, is a versatile genius who himself has translated Tughlag and Hayavadana into English, out of these two, Tughlag became immensely popular and raised Karnad at once to the front rank of Indian dramatists in English. Today he towers head and shoulders above other writers in this dramatic field in India.

Both the dramatists Shakespeare and Karnad have created immortal tragic heroes Macbeth and Tughlag respectively, who belong to different ages; yet clubbed here to serve the purpose for this simple but critical analysis. Both these men are born with silver spoons and they are born to rule and not to be ruled for they are endowed with same exceptional dignities. On the frontline thus analysis pictures the stories of exceptionally extraordinary persons like Macbeth and Tughlag who are basically good but 'evil' in them surges up for a moment and brings about their fall into the vally of destiny. Shakespeare and Karnad are great masters in the art of drama and have taken the stories from history and moulded it to suit their taste. Each work does present the challenging and remarkable imaginary capability of its author. Their stories prove the statement, "To err is human but to forgive is divine"

Macbeth is one of the shortest plays of Shakespeare which is Shakespeare's unique tragedy. Macbeth is a man of action who seizes the throne and misgoverns in the spiritual side of his character than in the political consequences of his tyranny. It is a study of the tragedy of ambition. According to King James, the greater passion that leads men into temptation is ambition which makes them fir subjects for the devil's work. M.R.Ridley interprets Macbeth's story as "a study of the deterioration by hardening of what might have been a noble character and he deteriorates his balanced self-control steadily increases"

(Mathur 13)

Macbeth, as a Shakespearean tragedy, has a special tone or atmosphere of its own, the effect of which is marked with unusual strength. In Macbeth, we have the murk and nightmare torment of a conscious hell. This evil being absolute and therefore alien to man, is in essence shown as inhuman and supernatural. Macbeth is fantastical and imaginative beyond other Tragedies. It is a desolate and dark universe where all is befogged, baffled, constricted by the evil. Tughlag is a masterpiece of historical drama dramatizing the Machiavellian of Sultan Muhammad Tughlag who reigned in the 1300's and is perhaps one of India's wiliest rulers. It has been called 'a historical play' because the principal character is a historical figure and the events which constitute the play's framework are 'historical events'. It is much more than an ordinary chronicle play because it is not just a sequential presentation of facts and events taken from recorded history but a very imaginative reconstruction of some of the most significant events in the life of a great king. It is nothing but a personal tragedy providing an interpretation of human character in its depth. Both Macbeth and Tughlag are, no doubt, 'tragic heroes'.

The tragic hero is better than an ordinary man. He may not be an embodiment of virtue, but he must have an element of greatness. If he is a man of high estate, his fate normally affects the welfare of the whole nation. He is to enjoy greater reputation and prosperity so that his misfortune may be regarded as a national calamity. This also evokes one's sense of pity because his misfortune is due to his initial mistake. The tragic hero is noble in elemental feelings and passions. One can feel akin to him for he shares with us certain common traits, yet he is idealized. His misfortune is brought upon him not by moral depravity, but by some 'harmartia' or 'error of judgement'. Hamartia may be differentiated from 'Mochtheria'. In Harmartia, there is no moral depravity and there is pity and fear, but in Mochtheria, the moral responsibility of the agent is much greater. In Macbeth, there is Mochtheria, as Macbeth is goaded by an insatiable ambition and kills the king who is his guest and subsequently wades through blood at his throne. But in Tughlag, one can see harmartia as he is misled by his misconception and consequently meets failure, frustration and anguish turning his kingdom into kitchen of corpse.



J.S.Smart sums up the freedom of tragic hero as:

“It is his own character that works out events from
Within, his own emotions that prompts and mislead.
What he is, is revealed by what becomes of him
in the end and it is upon himself the ultimate
Responsibility falls” (Sengupta 69)

Macbeth and Tughlag end up with the death of the hero and others who are associated with him. It is some inherent defects in Macbeth and Tughlag that fail them to adjust themselves to the environment.

Both Macbeth and Tughlag are men in high state. Macbeth is a General while Tughlag is a king. Both appear to be in the afternoon of life. In neither of the two can be found the iridescent gleam of youthful vigour and exuberance. They have certain tragic flaw and they are singly and solely responsible for their fall and their errors precipitate their doom and harvest the fruits of their sins. The element of fate can also doom their tragic vision. There is no contribution of villains in these plays, since each play depicts the story of a hero-turned a villain. The Greek dramatists believed in ‘Nemesis’ the goddess of justice who, according to Greek religion, is the instrument of punishment for all human vices. Hero meets his death because of his own faults and poetic justice can be given to all wrong doers; this justice awards reward or punishment to those who commit good or evil deeds.

The tragic heroes are all lonely figures. Though Macbeth had a partner in his sin, lady Macbeth leaves him in the middle and Macbeth meets his doom in the end. Whereas Tughlag is a lonely figure. He has no friends and he resembles mighty tree amidst puny plants and grasses. These two characters suffer and die, yet they make us feel depressed. They are confronted with terrible calamities and yet their deaths mean a bold affirmation of the positive values of life. Some critics hold the view that Shakespeare’s conception of tragedy is that character is destiny, in other words, the hero is chiefly responsible for his fall. It is because of vaulting ambition that Macbeth is tempted to murder his most noble king, Banquo his friend and comrade in the battlefield and Macduff’s wife and children. In Macbeth, except Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, all other characters are flat. As is already seen, an absolute good man cannot be a tragic hero. Macbeth cannot be a tragic hero if he is an absolute good man. The prophecies by the witches wake up the sleeping horse in Macbeth’s heart which is smitten by the ambition to become a king. Though Macbeth is not ready to murder the king, he cannot overcome his resistance and cuts a sorry figure when he shows his reluctance and all his good reasons fall into deaf ears when he is totally hen-pecked by Lady Macbeth. The interview between them shows the forceful personality of Lady Macbeth. Macbeth is weak in making up his mind. Merely to think of something which is anti-social depicts as a major crime for Macbeth. When the witches hail him as “All hail! Macbeth! That shalt be king hereafter” (Macbeth P2). That has been regarded as ‘disloyal’. The problem is Macbeth’s emotional weakness, his inability to face his desires as well as his crime.

Ambition as the tragic flaw is not in itself bad. It is in fact this element that raises Macbeth as a social hero. The problem is ‘ambition’. It has been divorced from social consideration and individualistic advantage is gained outside of social process. Macbeth has formulated his desires in terms of the witches taking the proper means to achieve them but producing the wrong result, the exact opposite of his intention. He cannot hope for the rewards of life which cannot suit him except punishment. He has got what he asked for-the crown, but kingship means something more than symbolic to Macbeth, thus he feels the valueless and fruitless crown on his head. Macbeth’s success is ‘failure’. The mouth-honour he receives instead of genuine respect is reminiscent of Falstaff’s exposition of honour at the end of Henry IV-Part-II.

The social position cannot be achieved by individualistic means; it may bring merely an appearance which is, in reality, a mockery. He has got the throne without social resonance which implies he has got only the mockery of what he wanted- ‘fair is foul’. Without heir for himself, Macbeth wants to wipe out the bloodline of all who might rival him, thus he hires murderers to kill France and Macduff’s son. Malcolm and Donalbain are forced to run out of Scotland to save their life; and in the end it is children who rise up against him. Malcolm leads the army to destroy Macbeth. Supernatural elements are at work in the tragedy of Macbeth. His second meeting with the witches is to get the reassurance to the safety of life and crown. He is told that he is safe because no man of woman born will ever have power to kill him and that he is safe, “Until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him” (P 1390). Both these prophecies are spoken by apparitions of children. The words of these children lead Macbeth into false confidence and the bloody child who speaks the first prophecy itself is the image of Macduff-who was untimely ripped from his mother’s womb. Destiny has placed a fruitless crown on his head and a barren scepter in his hand. Macbeth thinks that he has justice on his side when he decides to kill the sons of many. For him, everything that is foul is indeed fair and fair is foul. The interest of the plot is subordinated not to his character but to his action which provides tragic tension.



In a Shakespearean tragedy, both inner and external conflicts are clearly manifested. The soul of the hero is at war. A Shakespearean tragedy is more introspective than that of his contemporaries and his tragic hero has a world within a world. Macbeth is shown in his mental conflict and Shakespeare has actually made the audience feel the conflict of Macbeth's passion and his soul rather than external conflict. Herford points out;

“The rain and death of a man of extraordinary
Greatness and intensity of soul by the occurrence
Of an outward, usually hostile situation with
Some weakness or blindness rooted in his own
Character and often directly derived from
His noblest and splendid traits” (Sengupta 71).

Macbeth is distinguished from Oedipus, whose tragedy is due to the working of inexorable fate, although some critics suggest that his 'hubris' or 'pride' is his fatal flaw. Shakespeare's Macbeth is an exceptional being who is shown dignified even in his fall. A noble tragedy is always a better revelation. And it brings one closer to truth and dissolves all vanity, prejudice and darkness of godly dignity. Macbeth has been compared with Hamlet in his madness. Hamlet is unduly speculative but not at all active and he behaves like a dream. But Macbeth never suffers from dreams. He is very practical and wants to hold the crown tightly and murders many who come in his way.

Basically Macbeth is not a desperate soul and is made so by his incessant murders. He is certainly not a villain, for a tragic hero cannot be a villain. Macbeth is a successful 'Volourisminion', who commands the love and trust of many people. He appears to be 'fallen' from great height and he is not completely denuded of his human and heroic qualities. He murders but he lacks the prurience of a murderer. The entire world of Macbeth is shifting from realities, where he struggles unsuccessfully. Macbeth says,

“Life is but a walking shadow a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing” (Macbeth 170).

It is his life that has lost its purpose. Meaning in life is indicated earlier which Macbeth later makes it rather impossible. In the end, he never misses our sympathy and there remains something sublime in his defiance against Macduff in the battlefield. He encounters earth, hell and heaven at one stroke. Macbeth's universe itself of nightmare quality, is bridged by phantasies and ghosts; the dagger of Macbeth's mind, the ghost of Banquo, the apparitions, the vision of Scottish kings; that is why life is here 'a tale told by an idiot', 'a fitful fever' after which the dead 'sleep well'. There are constant references to the image of blood. Macbeth and Banquo 'bath in reeking wounds' (Knight 147) in the fight reported by the bloody Sergeant: Macbeth's sword 'smoked with bloody execution' (P 14) there is blood on Macbeth's hands, and on lady Macbeth's after she has 'smeared' the sleeping grooms with it. There is the description of Duncan's body 'his silver skin laced with his golden blood' (P 147). Duncan's murder and its results are felt as events of confusion and disorder, as interruptions of the even tenor of human nature, and are therefore related to the disorder symbols and instances of unnatural behavior in man or animal throughout the play, Macbeth.

The play Tughlag is a symbol of the political situation of India of the sixties. It depicts the political mood of disillusionment and disenchantment symbolized in the opening sentence "God what's this country coming to" (Tughlag 20). Symbolism is part and parcel of its texture. Karnad has made effective use of four major symbols which are prayers, rose, game of chess and sleep. Prayer has been used as the leitmotiv in Tughlag. Tughlag killed his father and brother at prayer time. At first, he orders prayers five times a day according to the scripyure, later bans it when Muslim Amirs and Shihab-ud-din conspire to murder him during his prayer. He stabs Shihab and orders Najib to behead those who are involved in this conspiracy. It is Ratan singh who suggests the murder of Tughlag in his payer but Amirs does not approve his idea of murder especially a muslim at prayer time. At this Ratansingh ironically says: "Where's your holy Koran? The tyrant does not deserve to be considered among the faithful and then, he killed his own father at prayer time" (P 36).

Tughlag is fanatic about prayer. The plan of murder fails due to his farsightedness and his secret knowledge of the conspiracy. He is disillusioned and he realizes the futility of prayer and prohibits prayer in his kingdom: "I had wanted every act in my kingdom to become a prayer, every step to lead us nearer to God. But our prayers too are ridden with disease and must be exiled. There will be no more praying in the kingdom, Najib anyone caught praying will be severly punished. Hence forth let the moment of prayer walk my streets in silence and leave without a trace" (P 43).



The chess symbol has a unique significance as it runs through the play. It symbolizes his approach to life wherein he regards other people as pawns to be manipulated for his own advantage. In his political game, he is checkmated by Aziz. Tughlag knows that Sheikh Inam-Ud-din has been inciting rebellion against him in Kanpur. Ain-UI-Mulk is marching towards Delhi and Tughlag wants to get rid of both his enemies, so he uses Imam who resembles him asking him to visit Delhi to give enlightenment to his citizens. Tughlag humbly requests Imam to go to Ain-UI-Mulk as a loyal envoy and to dissuade him from his folly. He diplomatically says, "please Sheikh, I am not asking you only for my sake but for all the Muslims who will die at the hands of Muslims if there is war" (P 33). But Ain-UI-Mulk mistakes him for Sultan and kills him. Thus Tughlag gets rid of both his enemies at one stroke. He forgives Ain-UI-Mulk since he has solved the famous chess problem set by Al Adli. This clearly shows how Tughlag uses them as pawns.

Rose garden is symbolic of Tughlag's ideal world. The rose garden which becomes a rubbish dump is a perfect objective correlative of Tughlag's idealistic aspirations. It becomes an image of the absurd, the unbridgeable gulf between man's expectations of orderliness and the chaos and irrationality which confront him. Similarly sleep becomes a symbol of a much-needed peace which perpetually eludes Tughlag and comes to him at last when he realizes in a flash that he is not alone in his madness. Aziz and Aazam are cheats who symbolize opportunistic and unprincipled people who exploit liberal ideals and welfare schemes of the democratic government to fulfil their own pockets. Daulatabad is a Hindu city. It is a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. So Muhammad transfers his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, but the entire experiment meets failure. Instead of bloodshed and utter chaos, Girish Karnad enhanced the expressive power and beauty of language.

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