

## Aristotle's Concept of Ideal Tragic Hero - Hamartia (7)

**M.A. HAQUE**

Aristotle, a pupil of Plato, is the first systematic literary critic. As he was an experimentalist, he formulated his theories on the basis of their observation and analysis.

He is the first critic to give the theory of poetry and also to discover its aspect of universality as well as its representation of truth. His theory of imitation gave a new meaning and direction to the fine arts. His concept of tragedy has been the foundation for all discussions of literary aesthetics. He defines tragedy systematically and explains its different elements. He reckons the requisites of a good character and refers to the specific qualities of an ideal tragic hero.

The tragic hero gets primary importance in Aristotle's concept of tragedy. According to him, the primary function of tragedy is 'Catharsis', purgation of the twin emotions of pity and fear. As the tragic hero is the chief agent of the tragic action of the play, he must be capable of evoking these emotions. He must be the man above the average that is he must be serious, elevated and dignified. But, at the same time, he should be human enough to make us feel our own miseries in his woes. He should be neither perfectly virtuous nor a consummate villain. He may be invulnerable at all other points, but he must be with the heel of Achilles. In other words, his misfortune should be brought about by some flaw in his character or by some error of judgement. Aristotle has given it the term of 'Hamartia'.

The critics have interpreted 'Hamartia' in different ways. In fact, its root meaning is 'missing the mark'. The hero suffers not because of the act of some outside agency or vice or depravity but because of Hamartia or miscalculation on his part. This is not a moral failing, for Aristotle clearly distinguishes them and points out that by 'Hamartia' is meant nothing but some error of judgement. He writes that the cause of the hero's fall must lie

'not in depravity but in some error or Hamartia'. This error may be caused in three ways. It may arise from the ignorance of some material fact or circumstances. It may also be produced by the hasty and careless view of a special case. Lastly, it may also be caused voluntarily, but not deliberately, as in the case of acts committed in anger. It is also a character trait that the Hero shows tendency to error from the very beginning that is completed in the recognition scene (Anagnorisis), a sudden change from ignorance to knowledge.

M.A. HAQUE

As a matter of fact, Hamartia admits of various shades of meaning, hence it has been differently interpreted by the critics. However, most of the critics are of the opinion that it is an error of judgement. But one thing is quite obvious that it tries to emphasize the possibility of tragedy within the human nature itself. It involves both Pity and Fear. As the tragic sufferer has some human weakness that leads to his miseries, we can identify ourselves with him. His misfortune can create a sympathetic shuddering in the readers. We will feel pity for him for he is a man like us. The situation he is faced with can also confronts us in the same way and with the same magnitude. This idea of imagining ourselves under similar circumstances produce a feeling of fear in our mind. Thus, Pity and Fear are closely linked with each other. Pity turns into fear where the object is so nearly related to us, that the suffering seems to be our own. On this inner likeness between the tragic sufferer and the audience depends maximum of the effect of the Tragedy.

Further more, according to Aristotle, the Tragic

(9)

Hero must be a man of the lofty eminence, raised above the common level in external dignity and station. He should be a highly placed individual. He should be brought low from the height of greatness through some error of judgement or shortcoming in his character. This has double advantage. It enhances the effect of Tragedy, if there is a "mighty fall". Secondly, if the Hero is placed at a sufficient distance from the audience, the pressure of the immediate reality is removed. The spectators will be liberated from their care of their own material existence and will be brought into the world of Art. Thus, the emotions of Pity and Fear, instead of giving them a crushing apprehension of personal disaster, will lead them to an aesthetic enjoyment of the peculiar pleasure that Tragedy prophesies to provide.

Though, the Elizabethan dramatists as well as the modern ones have demonstrated successfully against Aristotle's views about the tragic Hero. But, one should not forget the fact that Aristotle's views are based on the Greek Tragedy. However, it cannot be denied that Aristotle's views have been foundations for all new innovations in the world of Tragedy.

M.A. HAQUE

To conclude, according to Aristotle, a tragic Hero should be an intermediate kind of person, neither eminently virtuous nor consummate villain, whose tragedy is brought about by his own error of judgement.