

Shakespeare's Concept of Tragedy. Character is destiny. - K.L. PG Evy. ce - 11

William Shakespeare, undoubtedly, is the brightest star in the galaxy of English dramatists. He has written a number of plays, both comedies and tragedies, which are read with equal interest in all the ages. His dramas depict human life with all its minutiae and are the immortal books of human nature. His tragedies demonstrate his exceptional insight into the working of human heart and mind as well as his dramatic <sup>ingenuity</sup> ~~genius~~ in delineation of the interplay of different shades of human passion. He is always original, realistic and well acquainted with his surroundings. He has made a progressive revolution in the traditional concept of tragedy. Let us see it in a brief.

Shakespeare's predecessors were fatalists and had a strong faith in the supremacy of Fate and helplessness of Man. Man was considered to be just a puppet in the hands of Fate, simply performing his destined acts and enduring his fated consequences. But Shakespeare has revolutionised this concept and pleads that Man is the master of his destiny. Of course Chance and Circumstances play some roles in moulding character, but Man is quite at liberty to choose what he likes. He is free to choose his course of action, and in so choosing, he decides his own fate.

Secondly, Shakespeare's Tragedy presents a complex picture of good and evil. There is a perpetual conflict between virtues and evils. This conflict is many-sided. It may occur between two groups or between two persons, representing good and evil. Sometimes, it comes in one person between his good and evil nature. On the one hand, he wants good deeds and, on the other, he also in mood

to do some wrong. He is ultimately overpowered by the evil that results in his tragic end. It is this conflict of the hero which is the special characteristic of Shakespearean tragedy.

This conflict between good and evil is a universal truth. In this struggle, evil dominates over good and causes sufferings. That is the hero becomes a tool in the hands of the villains or the evil agents and commits mistakes leading to the catastrophe. He commits wrong but feels it seriously. That is why he remains a tragic hero and not a villain. But the realisation of his guilt and intense emotion of his mind he garners pity and sympathy of the audience. For an instance how pitiable is Lear in his lunatic state of mind when he meets Cordelia, whom he has wronged, and utters these words:

" I pray, weep not  
If you have poison for me, I will drink it.  
I know you do not love me; for your sisters  
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong;  
You have some cause, they have not."

This, Shakespearean tragedy is a tragedy of a person who has some flaw, weakness or drawback in his character. This is known as tragic flaw that brings about death to the hero as well as to other characters of the play. This is Shakespeare's view of tragedy. This is common to all his tragedies. As for example, Hamlet is a prince and is endowed with the richest gifts of nature, culture and scholarship. But he lacks the quality of taking prompt and sharp action. His indecisiveness serves as his tragic flaw. Similarly, Othello is a brave, valiant and faith man who becomes a general. But, the

is too passionate to think rightly before taking any action. The villain, Iago, makes him believe that his wife is false to him. He kills Desdemona and, at the end, realises his mistakes that lead him to suicide. In the same way, Macbeth is a noble, gentle and valiant general. He is loyal to the king and his subjects. He is the thane of Glamis and Cawdor. He is the most honoured person among his people and friends. But, he is over ambitious. Because of this, he is influenced by the witches and Lady Macbeth. He murders Duncan under his own roof and becomes the most hated person and finally killed.

King Lear makes his entrance on the scene with reference to his old age and desire.

"To shake all cares and business from our age  
 Conferring them on younger strengths while we  
 Unburdened crawl towards death"

But the methods he adopts to divide his kingdom among his daughters betray his weakness to self-love. And this self-love subjects a man to flattery. By asking his daughters "which of you shall we say doth love us most, he indirectly demands flattery from his daughters. The speeches of Gonoril and Regan, are befitting flatteries, wordy and designed to please Lear, while Cordelia's reply

"Unhappy that I am, I cannot hear  
 My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty  
 According to my bond, no more nor less.

is temperate, straightforward and reasonable. But Lear gets infuriated because his feelings of self-love is injured. He gives Cordelia's share to other two sisters. However, he is eternally tortured by the ill treatment meted out to him at the hands of his flattering daughters. He goes on complaining against

and showering violent curses upon them:"

"Hear nature, hear, dear goddess hear!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou dost intend  
To make this creature fruitful!  
Into her womb convey sterility;"

Lear goes out in an stormy night in a high rage tears his white hairs in his insanity and finally, dies in madness. Thus, self-love or pride is the tragic flaw of Lear as indecisiveness is of Hamlet or over credulous nature is of Othello or vaulting ambition is of Macbeth.

In short, Shakespeare gives a new direction to the traditional concept of tragedy. It is he only who makes a villain out of a hero or hero out of a villain. His heroes meet tragic end because of their tragic flaw in their character.

A. Hagn

## King Lear: Play of unregulated Passion

P.G. Eng. CC-11

There are no two opinions regarding the dramatic

excellence of King Lear. It is the greatest tragedy that Shakespeare wrote. Its greatness is not due to its superb poetry, its intricate craftsmanship, its skilful characterization and excellently contrived plot but due to the fact that it is an exposition of the interplay of human passions in all their intensity and complexity. As we read the drama we watch before us a free play of violent human emotions, passion, fury, rage, revenge, frenzy, madness and ingratitude. King Lear shows us what pernicious, destructive and disastrous consequences these passions are capable of.

As a thinker opines, all human passions can be reduced to one, namely, anger. Anger is a short madness. The most destructive of all passions. It is the epitome and breeding ground of all human weakness. The feeble and the old are its easy victims. It takes its origin in pride and self-esteem and has vengeance for its object. Lear's self-esteem begets his anger against Cordelia that finally leads to the tragic end.

King Lear is presented as a story of the disastrous consequences of the unrestrained anger of an old man. Lear's dramatic career is the history of ravages of the uncontrolled anger. It is a tragedy of wrath in old age. Lear makes his entrance with reference to his old age and a desire:-

"To shake all cares and business from our age;  
Conferring them on younger strengths while we  
unburthened crawl towards death."

But the methods he adopt to divide his Kingdom betray his weakness to self-love. Self Love subjects a man to flattery. By asking his daughters

"Which of you shall we say doth love us most"

Lear is, indirectly, demanding flattery from them. The speeches of Gonoril and Regan are befitting flatteries, designed to please, where as Cordelia is temperate, straight-forward and reasonable. As in injured self-esteem anger takes its rise, the old King burst out in frenzied anger

"Here I disclaim all my paternal care  
Propinquity and property of blood."

Kent, like a good friend, tries to dissuade him from this unjust action. But Lear shouts at him:

"Come not between the dragon and his wrath?"

Lear seeks to have revenge by giving Cordelia's share to other flattering daughters. Kent again moves on to check the King but he is banished from the Kingdom. From the discussion between Gonoril and Regan it becomes apparent that Lear has always been something of the problem at home. Gonoril says that the best and the soundest of his time hath been but rash. She cannot be tolerant any more:

"By day and night he wrongs me; every hour  
He flashes into one gross crime or other  
That sets us all adds. . . ."

As she demands that he must "a little disquantity" his riotous train, he cries out violently:

"Darkness and devils  
Saddle my horse, call my train together  
degenerate bastards!"

At Albany's efforts at pacification, he breaks out in a new torrent of rage and throws the flood of violent curses to the ingrateful Gonoril:

Hear, Nature hear! dear goddess hear!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou dost intend

To make this creature fruitful

Into her womb convey sterility."

Lear soon learns that his retainers are reduced to fifty. He starts cursing, raging and threatening vengeance in turn.

To Regan's emphasis regarding the decorum of old age and her suggestion to apologise to Gon- oril, he bitterly complains that she has reduced her train by half, has looked black upon him and has struck with her tongue, like a serpent, therefore, he will have it:-

"All the stor'd Vengeances of heaven fall  
On her ingrateful top! strike her young bones  
you taking airs with lameness!"

As the King goes out in the stormy night, we hear from Gloucester the King is in high rage. A little later, Kent informs about the King in storm who "Tears his white hair"

Gloucester recounts his story of having wronged his faithful son, just as Lear has wronged Cordelia

The almost intolerable scene in which Gloucester in blind shows anger and desire for revenge further at work. The scene is a brutish picture of uncontrolled human passions. A servant interrupts Cornwall in his fury at the risk of his life. Like Kent, he is punished for daring to rebuke his master for wrong doing, for he is killed by Regan, as Cornwall puts out the other eye of Gloucester.

The fourth Act brings into bold relief the destruction caused by the passion which is the theme of the Play. The poor Bedlam beggar, who is Edgar, is the result of the evil wrath of Gloucester. But Gloucester himself is paying even heavier penalty for the folly of his anger.

As Cordelia is announced, Lear is unwittingly

to see her for 'A sovereign shame so elbows him'. The scene brings out the heart of the mystery. Cordelia is mistress over passion. It is not primarily ingratitude that has caused his downfall, rather it is his wrath over ingratitude, his wrath over Cordelia's ingratitude, his wrath over the slight and injury. Like Cordelia there would be no tragedy.

The fifth act is a chaos of passion. The jealousy of two sisters leads to an angry revenge that makes each slander the other. The fortune of Gloucester goes against Cordelia and Lear who are put under the power of Edmund. The happiness of reunion, which uplifts the progress of horror momentarily. Gloucester's death also comes from passion, for the recognition of his injured son is too much for him. His heart twists to two extremes of passion, joy and grief burst smitingly. Lear, carrying the body of Cordelia, is a picture of a man who has suffered too long and finds his merciful shelter in madness. He comes to the stage only to die in pitiful manner.

Thus, we conclude that the King Lear is the greatest tragedy of uncontrolled human passions.



## The Role of the fool in King Lear

P.L. Eng. CC-II

Fool in Hamlet is Shakespeare's best play.

So King Lear is his greatest tragedy. It is a tragic vision of humanity, a work of a deep philosophic vision, a profound commentary on life and its values. It is also an exalted morality play set against the backdrop of eternity. In this tragic, serious scheme of King Lear, a fool seems to be out of place. This view is further strengthened by the fact that the fool makes only an occasional appearance on the stage. The fool's utility is only for Lear and only during certain period of his history. Hence, his role seems to be but carnal and unimportant. Furthermore, his presence and action can hardly seem other than a blemish in this great work and a hindrance to its proper interest.

However a closer reading of the play will bring to light the importance of a fool in the tragic scheme of King Lear. His role is so important that Prof. Hudson remarks 'our estimate of this drama as a whole, depends very much on the view we take of the fool'. As Bradley points out, 'he is one of Shakespeare's triumphs' and without him 'we will hardly know the tragedy'. Like all the fools in Shakespearean plays, we find him performing the task of providing dramatic relief. He does so by means of his antics and songs, his proverbs and epigrams, his witty pieces from old ballads and folk lore, even in this abiding doom stark tragedy of King Lear.

As a matter of fact, the fool discovers corner potentialities. Even in the most heart-wrenching incidents, we can see elements of humour. For instance, when Lear pathetically explains 'O, me, my heart, my rising heart; but down', the fool tells him the comic story of a woman who tried to cook eels without realising that they must

be killed before being cooked. And it must have been  
 her mother who thought of putting butter on the hay  
 would be kindness to the horse. In another scene, when  
 we sight Edgar as a naked beggar, he philosophically  
 contemplates on the helplessness of man and, in des-  
 pair tears his clothes, the fool converts the situation  
 into a philosophic comedy, saying:

"Peace, uncle, be contented  
 'tis naughtly night to swim."

In King Lear, as a critic observes, the  
 fool's function is that of the Chorus in the Greek tragedy.  
 The function of the Chorus is to comment on the actions. In  
 King Lear comments are necessary for it is the most  
 complex tragedy that Shakespeare ever wrote. The fool  
 is not directly involved in the dramatic conflict. He  
 is there to offer comments and he does so in his own  
 humorous, jocular and witty way. He comments serve  
 as a means of elucidation and interpretation of the  
 dramatic action. He also performs the function of a tra-  
 ditional philosopher whose task is to advise the ki-  
 ng in matter general as well as to help him answer  
 tricky questions at the Court. Many of the fool's questions  
 show deep perception, rare insight and profound  
 wisdom. A critic has described him as the wise fool  
 among the foolish wise. There is a half-cynical wis-  
 dom in his songs such as:-

"Have more than thou showest,  
 . . . . .  
 Than two lins to a score."

The fool hurls a torrent of questions to bring home  
 to Lear his folly in divesting himself of all power and  
 authority. He is the 'voice of Lear's Conscience'. He char-  
 acterises the King, by reminding him of the better truth  
 that he ought not have <sup>been</sup> ~~been~~ old before he was

wise. He strikes at the heart of the matter when he remarks

"He had little wit in his bald crown when he gave his golden one away. He has made his daughters and put the rods into their hands."

The fool seems to possess a paradoxical nature. The working of his mind shows a strange mixture of simplicity and acuteness, sense and nonsense, of sanity and insanity. In Hazlitt's words "he is always half comic and half serious. At times, he is a strong courageous figure, inspiring confidence in the drooping spirit of Lear by his witty remarks. But other times, he is too easily frightened. When he finds Edgar in the hearth he cries out in fear "Help me, Help me."

In the strange assemblage of qualities in him, nothing stands out more contrasted than his sense of pathos and that of the grotesque. He is the soul of pathos in sort of comic masquerade. In him fun and prolific are sublime. He brings diversion to the thought's only to steal a sense of woe into the heart. In assessing the character of the fool, we cannot overlook his two qualities - his love for Lear and Cordelia and his selflessness that drag him into the world of woes. When Cordelia is sent away, he is 'pined away'. His attachment and loyalty to the King make follow his master in his agony and adversity.

In fact, in King Lear, the fool paints the picture of a crisis figure, accompanying the King in time of his crisis. Though he has no suffering of his own, yet he is deeply moved up. His heart is slowly broken under the burden of his master's sorrows. His anguish is the anguish of pure sympathy, so deep and intense as to induce absolute

forgetfulness of self. As his master's wills are shattered into pieces, he is overcome with deep grief. To prevent this clamor he has come, he no longer has anything to have for. So, he withdraws from the scene with prophetic and poignant words

'And I will go to bed at noon.'