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Group A (History of English Literature)

Attempt a critical appreciation of the Shakespearean tragedy: Literature  
Language

Introduction — A tragedy is a pathetic tale of death and suffering. Many Shakespearean tragedies are very powerful stories of suffering and demise (death). According to Dowden "Tragedy as conceived by Shakespeare is concerned with ruin or the restoration of the soul and of the life of the man."

William Shakespeare wrote a large no. of tragedies Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra etc. a famous critic of Shakespearean tragedies A.C. Bradley quotes, "A Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death. He further quotes, "Shakespeare himself had a sense for tragedy not a philosophy of it." The main motive of the Shakespearean tragedy is the display of man is unsuccessful conflict with critical circumstances.

Characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy :- The hero of the Shakespearean tragedy is always a man of an outstanding social status. He may be a king, a prince, a noble etc. It is the tragedy of one man, the hero, or of the two, the hero and the heroine. It is seen that other characters also feel several ups and downs of fortune.

Suffering adversity and death :- A tragedy always ends in a suffering and death. A tragedy always depicts the suffering, adversity and death of the hero, Macbeth realises the pang of assassinating King Duncan in his heart. He loses all interest in life and reveals his views to hear the gloomy news of Lady Macbeth suicide, "A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury". King Lear becomes mad Hamlet ruined by mental torture and Othello experiences a tempest in his very soul.

The hero as an outstanding figure :- The hero of every Shakespearean tragedy is a great person. As for examples, Lear and Julius Caesar are kings. Hamlet is a prince.

Macbeth and Brutus are nobles and Othello is a General of the public of Venice. A.C. Bradley says "The advantage of Shakespearean conception of the tragic hero is that has credulity and rashness in action and Lear has folly and fondness - of old age his fall is more bewildering and conspicuous as contrasted to his former prosperity."

The cause of suffering and death: - Shakespeare says, "character is destiny" primarily it is his character or a fatal flaw in his character which is responsible for it. The Shakespearean tragic hero is good but not perfect. He is neither a Superman like a Marlovian hero nor he is a villain. The dictum character is destiny is fairly true of a Shakespearean tragedy. Macbeth has vaulting ambition, Hamlet has nobleness in action, Othello.

The conflict in Shakespearean tragedy: - In every Shakespearean tragedy there is a serious conflict. It had been said, "No conflict no drama." There are two types of conflicts the external conflict and internal conflict. There is an external conflict between the hero and the heroine. Regarding their external circumstances and the internal conflict is between two attitudes and passions. In Othello we find an internal conflict but in Macbeth, Hamlet and King Lear, this conflict is both external and internal. It is perceived that villainy is punished in every Shakespearean tragedy.

Role of fate and chance: - In the Shakespearean tragedy, fate and chance play their own vital roles. In Romeo and Juliet, it is a chance that Romeo never got Friar's message and Juliet didn't wake from her long sleep.

In Hamlet the pirateship attacked Hamlet ship. So that the prince was to be back to Denmark. In King Lear it was by chance that Edgar could not reach the prison, earlier

than the ambition of Cordelia. In Othello, it was a chance that the dropped handkerchief of Desdemona was found and passed it on to Jago by Emilia.

Use of the supernatural elements:- We find that there is a beautiful use of supernatural elements in the Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespeare used some kinds of supernatural elements such as, Ghosts and witches in his tragedies among the supernatural elements tempest, cyclone, earthquake, volcano etc. We observe that these elements do their vital roles of influencing the life of the hero. It can be narrated that these agents play major parts in the downfall of the hero. In Shakespearean tragedies, they behave like mere spectators, it is observed through different Shakespearean tragedies that the damnation takes place from the actions of the hero to do what harms him. The ghost in Hamlet, moulds extent and prepares him for his tragedies.

Poetic Justice in a Shakespearean Tragedy:- Villains are generally punished for their evil deeds. Macbeth who had assassinated King Duncan of Scotland and had been responsible for other murders also meets his tragic end in the battle field lady Macbeth also suffers for the planned conspiracy of Duncan's heinous assassination even the villains like Jago and Edmund get austere punished lady Macbeth also suffers by committing a suicide because she had crushed her own nature of femininity.

Conclusion — A Shakespearean tragedy demonstrates that the hero or the heroine has to meet with his or her tragic end. Several factors guide him or her to face challenges of suffering and death. The ultimate power of Shakespeare's tragedies is neither entirely fated nor entirely moral. This power is so pre-dominantly moral that it distinguishes between good or bad.