

The Idea of Refinement in Hamlet and Arjuna: A Revision

Hemanta Bora

Asst. Prof., Dept of English, Jamunamukh College, Hojai, Assam

Abstract:

The Idea adopted here may arise some disagreement among readers due to its untouched gap between the cultural, and traditional heritage that these two divergent backgrounds bear. And, in this effort of sketching of the two heroes from two great literary fields, my intention is to highlight the similar aspects they carry in its bosom -fundamentality of human kind and its culture. A higher and refined spirit in pursuit of human dignity.

Keywords:

Princely, psycho–physical, dharma, manifestation, sthitaprajna, karma, pilgrimage, perfection.

Introduction

The more we speak or discuss about Shakespeare or his plays, especially some of his character-portrayals the more we get the pressure of centrifugal assumptions – what better summarization that we may get at, as final. Shakespeare, the most balanced of English dramatists, if we perceive it evading our fragile sentimentality, no doubt, bears this position with dignity. Here, we shall try to delve into Hamlet-the-prince from a different angle.

Significance of Similarities

Till date ‘Hamlet’ is with its glorious journey as a successful play. This endeavour, to view Hamlet from a different perspective, is not intended to demean his splendor as a ‘tragic hero’ or to make him aloof over that ground which we shall try to discover, draw out. The touchstone method that his tragedies followed to acquire the status of tragedy was basically what Aristotle defined in its literary or artistic periphery. And there is no doubt about this recognition. In ‘Hamlet’ we get all the required elements nurturing it efficiently. But prince Hamlet seems more so with his tone-of-refinement than what we get in other Shakespearean characters.

We shall try to examine Hamlet with an another impressive character, though he is from an epic. Arjuna- the hero of the ‘Mahabharata’. It seems, we agree, a kind of violation of the tone and trend in examining works of literature but this is limited only to the sphere of assimilation and comparison between two ideas - one historical knitted with supramundane element and the other purely mythological or spiritual. An idea becomes universal when it bears its universal bearing inasmuch as the great works of art and literature pursue, wherein the space-time essence overcomes its own barrier. Now we shall subdue their sources, just for the sake of this subject matter - to what extent the characters coexist on one axis of spirit. Arjuna received the direct help of a divine figure as friend, and as guide, guru, when

eventually he performed his duty overcoming the tremendous shock of despondency. And Hamlet met with some inescapable circumstances that he, out of no resources, could avoid performing his duty. What did Arjuna perform? It was no less a tragic state what we get in Hamlet's state. Both performed their duties in a manly way. Hamlet displayed his royal-dignity in executing his duty, stabbing of his father's murderer, his treacherous uncle, Claudius. Hamlet maintained his equanimity ever remaining inside his mental agonies which an average man would have failed to carry out. After the revelation of the Ghost he seemed so determined yet of his fluctuating state of mind. The divine presence in the form of Ghost's appearance; this *dues ex machina* ultimately paved Hamlet's path with spirited zeal towards his goal of giving justice to the events which apparently, made his interactions with the world more complex, and a bit crude.

As a token of princely class, and his being the hero of a tragedy showed no dearth of their presence in his exertions, though we meet him mostly in his passive tone comparing either to his counterparts, or to a world, we live in. It was essentially due to his balanced state of his psycho-physical being, and in the process, we no more disregard his spiritual tone, the depth-of-Hamlet. When he observed various actions appeared before him either as the result of his direct involvement or thrown upon him by fate, the power beyond human reach, a recurring baffled state was the effect:

“The time is out of joint; o cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right” (‘Hamlet’: Act-I, Scene-V. 196-7)

In the epic ‘Mahabharata’, Arjuna's prime duty was to uphold, reestablish righteousness aggravated by his cousin brother Duryodhana and his supporters. Arjuna also underwent the tremendous shock of suffering out of his ensuing battle against his family members, his teachers, and all those near and dear ones. And it was imminent. The battle was the call of dharma, duty, that a Ksatriya¹ must wield weapon against the injustice, oppressors. He could not control his emotions, and loses heart- after observing all those arrayed in the battle field, he uttered:

“What pleasure can be ours, O Krsna, after we have slain the sons of Dhrtarastra?
Only sin will accrue to us if we kill these malignants.”
(‘The Bhagavadgita’:Ch-I,V-36)

There lies no difference in their spirit except the degree of exertions and interactions. Hamlet's first soliloquy resonates this state of Arjuna out of his worldly delusions and considerations leading to one's spiritual bedrock:

“How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (Hamlet’: Act-I. Scene-II, 133-4)

Arjuna and Hamlet faced indecision, as what to do next in a crucial situation. The most quoted Shakespearean remark, “To be or not to be” (‘Hamlet’: Act-III, Scene-I. 56) also had its effect in Arjuna. It seems, Hamlet successfully withstood the emotional outbursts which got its frank expression in Arjuna. Krsna consoled Arjuna, exhorted him to his sacred duty through his friend-turned-guru

manifestation. Hamlet's soliloquies, mostly figurative, suggest about a tranquil person in Hamlet, and he could transform his divine-revelation to its expected point of realization, finally.

1. "Heroism, vigour, steadiness, resourcefulness, not fleeing even in a battle, generosity and leadership, these are the duties of Ksatriya born of his nature. "Dr. S. Radhakrishna; (ed) 'The Bhagavadgita' (Harper-Collins pub. India, New Delhi, 2008, V-43, 366.

The above utterances that made us to delve into a dilemma is the sign of their refinement-process as human being which lacks in their erring relatives, or we may term it as their supersocial framework of mind. Though they live there amid the prevalent societal-structure but they go beyond the extent that the prevalent framework, as the call of time, requires to be amended. Arjuna's dejection was the result of his self-orientation process within, wherein Krsna as Guru, inspired him till its culmination- realization of his duty through the shedding of family blood. Hamlet was guided by the visitation which he steadily studied and eventually translated to what he was told upholding righteousness. He experienced unfaithfulness, a villain in his uncle, and what the Biblical teaching of the 'Ten Commandments' that got violated through adultery by his pernicious-mother. These all made him more meditative, for which his procrastination has been a flaw in him, yet he surmounted by defeating his fragility. His softer part of his heart for his beloved (Ophelia) seemed not at all an alluring agent but as a rationalized, intellectualized manifestation of his emotions.

So far both the princes, central characters of two great works of literature, that we are trying to dissect have given us sufficient junctures where they get affinities portraying them, above all, as true reflection of decent and dignified human beings. And this dignity is none but the forbearance that they maintained during crucial moments and even not denying what the law, religion, duty demanded for, as action.

From this perspective, Arjuna may also be termed as tragic hero due to the same fateful events that occurred in Hamlet's life. Arjuna had to renounce his family ties and the prevailing social ethos for the sake of his righteous battle reestablishing justice. Hamlet also fought a perilous inner agony until the final moment – seen through treachery, bloodsheds, and to meet with his his own death. But both were recovered from the flaws in their characters by the true performance of revered-duties, as a Sthitaprajna¹, and reverberated what Krsna's guidance to Arjuna suggest:

"To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction."

(‘The Bhagavadgita’ : Ch-II, V-47)

Conclusion

To sum up this revision, we must say that both the valiant heroes performed what they had to perform in their most sublime way. We, no doubt, can view Hamlet more so as a perfectionist, a true pursuer of one's karma or duty viewing him merely as a tragic hero instead. Arjuna's epic-status would never be hurt if someone equals to his courage and generosity from his posterity but would indeed get a glorification. Millions of Hindus revere the 'Gita' which is a composite part of the 'Mahabharata'

(Bhismaparva: from Ch. XXIII to XL) and, here we meet this Dhanurdharah (the archer) Arjuna who, under the strike of false sentimentality tried to renounce his duty, but after his psycho-physical orientation by divine presence, Krsna, once he regained his true self, or uplifting of this very essence by Arjuna would have never engraved such a faith in their hearts. And this is the underneath cause of Hamlet's overflowing impression in the European minds- a pilgrimage to human perfection, which is "a sort of marriage between high thought and right action."²

1. Stable in intelligence, 'The Bhagavadgita', Ch-II, V-55.
2. Radhakrishnan Dr. S.; (ed.) 'The Bhagavadgita' (Harper-collins pub, India Delhi, 2008), 383.