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## Rethinking Classics, English and Indian: A Comparative Approach to Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost Book I and *Bhasa's Duryodhana in Urubhangam*

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### Abstract

'Paradise Lost' is the milestone of English literature while *Urubhangam* is one of the greatest tragedies of ancient Sanskrit literature. The former focuses on Satan as the main character while the later centres on the character of *Duryodhana*. This study attempts to juxtapose the commonalities of these classics of English literature and Indian Ancient Sanskrit literature. Both the text share some common style of writing, selection of theme and most importantly portrayal of the central character. The focus area for this study is to analyse the resemblances between the character of Satan and *Duryodhana*. Both the characters possess heroic qualities and grandeur in personality. In short, this paper would attempt to describe the similarities of these two characters and how uniformly they are penned.

**Key Words:** Comparative study, Satan, *Duryodhana*

The term 'Classic' has been invariably defined and redefined with variety perspectives in order to understand its incessant impression and effect regardless of time. So far as literature is concern, we may not consider all the works of literature as classics because the term literature broadly encompasses 'anything that is written in words'. Therefore, a newspaper may not be regarded as a piece of literature because it doesn't have permanent value. Just few hours' *Samacharpatra* (newspaper) becomes *Raddi*, (useless paper) even at the evening. While reading even oldest piece of any classics from any literature, we may not feel out dated or uninteresting. It is because of permanent literary value and 'things of beauty forever.' A classic has certain universal appeal. It serves as a standard or model of its kind with lasting interest and significance. For simple understanding of the term 'Classic', one can simply refer to the Oxford English

Dictionary which defines; "A work of art which is generally believed to be high quality."

Here, the word 'Art' is primarily associated with the creation of beauty of highest quality. It encompasses innumerable branches of art. Among these, Literature enables to expand one's mind and rejuvenates spirit. It humanizes mankind and sympathises them. Traditionally, it is said that 'literature is the mirror of the society/life.' Conceptually, it represents life and society. But there is a turn of the screw when we put the idea of concave or convex mirror. The phenomena of 'reflecting life and society' would be rather 'refracting life and society'. In short, we can say that literature is 'a slice of life.' It gives experiences about life, in broader sense; it is a journey towards civilization and humanism.

Indian Classic Literature, a torch bearer for the world classics, is considered

to be the oldest literature full of varied philosophies and theories about life. *The Vedas, Puranas, Dharmashastra, Darshanshastra*, great epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* have incessantly surpassed the boundaries of time. Since the birth of the humankind, it has, with its sheer quality of high philosophic ideas, regenerated human spirit in the most palatable manner.

For ancient Sanskrit literature, history hides more than it reveals because no systematic and illustrated history about the literary writers is available. It is believed that the writers did not want to propagate their names by writing at the end of their literary works. So it becomes more difficult to find out writer's authenticity about a literary text. However, by and large, researchers have invented certain methods for it. Moreover, the references and quotations provided by the writer in his literary text indicate availability of another literary text and writer (contemporary or predecessors) as well.

In 1912, Ganpati Shastri rediscovered thirteen plays of *Bhasa* after centuries of hibernation. A special term was coined to identify these thirteen plays of *Bhasa*. It was; *Bhasa-Natak-Chakra*, 'Cycle of *Bhasa*'s plays'. *Bhasa* has been rightly bestowed with the prefix as *Mahakavi* like other distinguished writers of ancient Sanskrit literature. In Sanskrit literature especially, *Bhasa* is considered to be the most prolific dramatist. *Mahakavi Bhasa* was believed to be predecessor of the great dramatist *Kalidasa*. About *Bhasa*'s greatness *Kalidasa* has genuinely confessed in the prologue to his play *Malvikagnimitram*. He expresses that *Bhasa*'s a literary techniques and creative

process inspired him a lot. It shows *Bhasa*'s literary personality and universal value of his plays.

The most significant thing about *Bhasa* is his sheer quality and quantity in which he produced his plays. His plays still have most widely acclaimed readership and most importantly, varied stage performances all over the world. *Bhasa*'s plays are varied in themes and full of opportunities for stage performance. These plays manifest tremendous poetic quality and *Bhasa*'s personality as a successful dramatist.

The play *Urubhangam* is based on the story of the *Mahabharata*. It comprises the last part of the *Mahabharata* describing war between *Duryodhana* and *Bhima*. This one act play centres the character of *Duryodhana* and his death in the battlefield. *Bhasa*, in the creation of the Character of *Duryodhana*, has consistently built a character different from the great epic- *Mahabharata*. In Sanskrit literature *Bhasa*'s is known for his artistic alteration to the original story and elevating the characters. In a way, *Bhasa* has not only modified the stories but also recuperated the noticeable qualities of the historical and epical characters.

On the other hand, in English Classics, 'Paradise Lost' stands at the threshold of western classic literature. It is the only epic of English literature in which Milton eminently unfolds the story of human kind. In this epic, Milton's advocating idea about the Reformation time and his use of literary form to narrate the story is profoundly significant in manifesting the lofty theme. It was published in 1667. Milton wrote it more than three centuries ago yet it constantly

attracts the scholars and researchers of literature and theology for the socio-political, literary or theological study. The poetic dexterity of Milton here is intermingled with nationalistic idea and religious temperament. Like Homer and Virgil of Greece and Rome, Milton is also unquestionably regarded as the epic poet of the English Nation. In 'Paradise Lost', Milton records religious history of the original sin of mankind and the ultimate consequences.

Satan, as many critics believe, is the hero of the epic poem (Book I) because he has been given a heroic status by Milton. The character of the Satan predominantly leads the action of book I. As William Blake remarks:

The reason Milton wrote in fetters  
when he wrote of Angels and God,  
and at liberty when of Devils & Hell,  
is because he was a true Poet, and of  
the Devil's party without knowing it.  
(Blake, 1433)

The story revolves around the character of Satan from beginning to the end. Throughout the book, his mighty fall from heaven seems to be a tragic fall. A glorious but ambitious archangel's expel from heaven to hell, his transformation to a fallen angel, his new transplantation at the sulphuric burning hell, all these collectively makes the story of Satan more pathetic but more heroic at the same time.

The title of any text signifies central idea. In this regard, the title 'Paradise Lost' (Book I) signifies Satan's fall from heaven. Satan's fall is, in fact, a loss of Paradise. And the reason behind this loss is God. In this way, the action of losing the Paradise, ultimately justifies the title 'Paradise Lost'. In the same manner, the

title *Urubhangam* is justified by the action of 'Breaking of Thighs'. In *Urubhangam* also hero suffers because of God. *Bhasa's Duryodhana* is more trained and skilful in mace-fight than *Bhima*. But it was Lord *Krishna* who signed *Bhima* to hit at the thighs although it was against the rules of the fight. *Bhima* did so and as a result *Duryodhana* was defeated. Conceptually, it wasn't *Bhima* who defeated *Duryodhana*, but Lord *Krishna*. In this way, the action of the play 'breaking of thighs' aptly serves the suitability of the title *Urubhangam*.

Milton's description about the physical size of Satan, his shield and spear objectifies Satan as a gallant figure. Milton's use of epical similes formulates the character of Satan as a huge and gigantic creature. His arms are long and large with enormity of size and weight. His massive shield looks like moon which is seen through a telescope. His spear is of the equal size of a tallest pine tree, holding it, Satan stands in front of his followers like a colossal mast. Milton, here, delineates the physical grandeur of Satan by comparing him with the ancient massive heroes like Titans and Giants who fought against, chronically, Uranus and Jove. The comparison of Satan to Leviathan, the greatest sea-monster, is very noteworthy. The epical simile describes;

..... or the sea beast

Leviathan, which God of all his works

Created highest that swim the ocean stream. (Milton, 201-3)

Thus, Milton elevates the character of Satan with the most elaborative physical description. With epical similes, the

character of Satan dominates the poem. Throughout the book I, Satan holds the flux of the epic poem and pervades a rebellious tone that might also be regarded as poetic persona's voice to manifest political temperament of the Reformation time.

In the great Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, the character of *Duryodhana* has been described as an evil and envious. But in the play *Urubhangam*, *Bhasa* has structured him with the heroic qualities that subsequently add to the beauty of a tragic character. The play concentrates on the event which is the cause for the death of the protagonist. As Dr. G. K. Bhatt remarks;

*Duryodhana* is great because he harbours a soul, which is capable of profound emotion, in the manifestation of which he touches an exceedingly noble level.....

...A respectful son, a proud and noble husband, an intensely loving father—that is what *Duryodhana* is. (Bhatt, 38)

*Bhasa's* adroitness of creating epical similes presents the character of *Duryodhana* with a new spirit. As Milton in his *paradise lost* book I presents Satan with some heroic qualities, *Bhasa* has also described *Duryodhana* with enormity of size and structure.

At the outset of the play *Urubhangam*, the narrator (*sutradhar*, a traditional character in ancient Sanskrit plays) is astonished by sudden change in climate. The other narrator informs him that it is not the sound of thundering clouds but the great war between *Duryodhana* and *Bhima* has started. Thus, at the very opening scene, *Bhasa* has made

*Duryodhana* a giant warrior. The description follows as;

*Bhimsyorasi charukajjnshilapine  
pratirkalite*

*Bhinne vasavhastihastkathine  
dhuryodhanansthale. (Bhasa, 16)*

In the mace-fight, *Bhima's* colossal chest glitters like a golden plate and is smacked by *Duryodhana's* soldier which is of the size like a trunk of *Indra's* elephant. The thunderous crash across the globe is heard due to the collision of the two mammoth maces of *Duryodhana* and *Bhima*.

The imagery that describes *Duryodhana* fighting with *Bhimsena* in the battlefield reflects *Bhasa's* poetic vision of elevating the character. The imagery describes; *Duryodhana* stands in the battlefield lifting his mace, his eyes burning with anger, shrugs his body in order to stall the tricks of his rival, and lifts the blood stained mace as if it were the thunderbolt of *Indra* made of the *Kailasha* Mountain.

Like Milton, *Bhasa* uses epical simile to describe the tools of the war between *Bhima* and *Duryodhana*. Here, *Bhasa* magnifies the mace of *Duryodhana* with wonderful imagery of thunderbolt of *Indra* made of the *Kailasha* Mountain. The blood stained body of *Duryodhana* is also compared with the giant serpent *Vasuki*, the serpent used for the *Samudramanathan* (churning of the ocean).

In the following *sloka*, *Bhasa* describes how skilfully *Duryodhana* attacks on *Bhima* as we know that *Bhasa's* *Duryodhana* is well trained in mace-fight.

*Bhima gadam kshipti garjti  
valgmanh*

*Shighram bhujam harti tasya krutam  
bhinati*

*Chari gatum praacharti  
prahartyabhikshan*

*Shikshavinto narpatibalvanstu  
Bhimah (Bhasa , 19)*

In the mace-fight, *Duryodhana* jumps from side to side and roars, giving circular motion to his body, he makes *Bhima's* tricks failed and with counter attack he proves himself well trained in mace-fight. *Bhima* is stronger but *Duryodhana* is well trained and fit for the mace-fight.

Thus, *Bhasa's Duryodhana* enthral the readers and audiences as well. His ultimate failure is heart rendering. More to this, *Bhasa's* poetic language also subsequently adds to the beauty of a tragic hero. The metaphor expressed by *Dhritrastra's* at the end of the play is very remarkable. *Dhritrastra* mourns for his son. He says;

*Yah, kanchanstan Bhasa mpramano  
loke kilaiko vasudhadhipendra*

*Kruth sa me bhumigatstapsvi  
dwarendrakilardha sampramana  
(Bhasa, 45)*

The only king of universe who had the body no less than a golden pillar, now, lies in the battlefield like a broken bolt of a door, alas!

Milton compares his Satan with moon while *Bhasa* compares his *Duryodhana* with the reddish setting sun, the red colour of blood. *Ashvasthama* (the son of *Drona*), looking *Duryodhana* laying on the ground with blood stained body, describes him as;

*Bhatyastamastkashi latlsainivist*

*Sandhyavgadha iv  
pachchimbalsuryah (Bhasa , 59)*

Blood spills from the deep bruises caused by the mace attacks, the whole body of *Duryodhana*, looks like sun setting between two yellowish rocks.

Thus, *Bhasa* like Milton tries to elevate his central character by giving him heroic status. Apart from the physical description, both the characters can also be juxtaposed in the matter of feelings for their followers. Envious and angry though they are, but they are not devoid of human feelings. Satan is kind and caring towards his followers. He sympathises them for the fall because of his fault. He revitalises the spirit of the fallen angles. In the same way, *Duryodhana* also cares for his followers. He has great respect for *Ashvasthama* and *Karna* being on his side. In a way, Satan and *Duryodhana* Both are great leaders. Both are famous for their determination and unconquerable will. Satan knows the consequences as he rebels against God even though he is ready to fight. On the other hand, *Duryodhana* also knows that the Lord *Krishna* favours *Pandvas*, even though he fights till his last.

Thus, two great classics of two different nations and cultures have some commonality in the presentation of central character. Both the texts, represents race milieu and moment and invariably cater the possibilities for human kind to be anticipated and serve the purpose of art. In the field of literature, for a writer, his or her character becomes a spokesman of the temperament. In this regard, Milton's Satan manifests socio-political time frame while *Duryodhana* in the play *Urubhangam* proves *Bhasa's* highest

poetic creativity among the ancient Sanskrit dramatists.

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