

Sophocles' and Kalidasa's Conception and Reflection in the Plays "Antigone" and "Vikramovarsiyam"

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Abstract

Sophocles is one of the most renowned dramatists of the ancient Greek literature and likewise Kalidasa too is one of the most reputed poets and dramatists of the ancient Indian Sanskrit literature. Sophocles' "Antigone" is a world famous tragedy. Kalidasa's "Vikramovarsiyam" is also a widely reputed romantic play. The art of plot construction of both the playwrights provides us an opportunity to study their skill of constructing plots of their dramas. Their conception and reflection as reflected in their plays.

Key words: Conception, Reflection, Destiny, Plot, Burial, Royal Order, Divine Order, Moral duty, Punishment, Death, Love, Romance, Curse, Child, Drama

Introduction:

"Antigone" is one of the greatest tragedies of the classical Greek period, composed by Sophocles, during the 5th century B. C. It is about moral conflict of the female protagonist of the play, Antigone. Her inner and outer conflict is the 'heart' of the tragedy. The whole play reflects the playwrights' conception of life, struggle, morality, destiny and human responsibilities. "Vikramovarsiyam" is one of the three romantic plays composed by Kalidasa, the ancient Indian Sanskrit dramatist and an Epic poet. It is a typical Sanskrit play where we come across the creation of various relish (RASA). It also reflects Kalidasa's conception of love, life, happiness and society.

"Antigone"

"Antigone" is one of the most famous tragedies of the world literature. It has brought tremendous reputation and popularity to Sophocles as a tragedian. It follows the literary rules of the Attic tragedy.

Antigone, the chief female character of the play, is faced with tormenting moral conflict. Her struggle between the royal order and divine duty is the major issue of the tragedy.

Antigone, the younger daughter of Oedipus and the sister of Eteocles and Polyneices, has decided to bury her dead brother, Polyneices' body, against the royal order of the king, Creon. It is Antigone's misfortune that she has lost both of the two brothers. More tragic element is that both the brothers have killed each other in the combat. Creon utters,

"Now, since they perished,
Both on one day, slain by a two-edged
fate,
Striking and stricken, sullied with a
stain
Of mutual fratricide."

Sir George Young's translation of Antigone' lines 170 to 174.

Unfortunately Creon had provided state funeral to Eteocles and declared Polyneices

a traitor and so he has issued a royal order to not to provide any kind of burial to the deceased .He declares,

“It has been promulgated to the city
No man shall bury, none should wail
for him;
Unsepulchred, shamed in the eyes of
men,
His body shall be left to be devoured
By dogs and fowls of the air. Such is
my will.”

But going against the royal order and following the divine order, Antigone decides to execute burial to her brother. Doing so she is caught and punished. But before that she boldly says to Creon,

“Because it was not Zeus who ordered
it,
Nor justice, dweller with the Nether
Gods
Gave such a law to men; nor did I
deem
Your ordinance of so much binding
force
As that a mortal man could overbear
The unchangeable unwritten code of
heaven.”

Destiny is reluctant to provide any opportunity to Antigone to smile. It arouses the feelings of pity and fear, a typical feature of the attic tragedy. Haemon, Creon’s son, who loves Antigone, along with a prophet, Teiresius, tries to convince his father, king, Creon to alter his decision to bury Antigone alive in a cave. But Creon is not ready to change his decision. Later on the king melts a little, may be due to parental feeling. But prior to that the world of Antigone and Haemon has changed. Because the Messenger provides an information that,

“Found we her, as she had been
hanged by the neck,
Fast in a strip-like loop of linen; and
him
Laid by her, clasping her about the
waist,
Mourning his wedlock severed in the
grave,
And his sire’s deeds, and his ill-fated
bride”.

It should be noted here that in the attic tragedies scene of death was reported only. The messenger deepens the tragic impact of the drama by providing information to Creon’s wife, Eurydice that both Antigone and Haemon are dead now. Here comes reporting by the messenger of one more death,

“Soon as she heard the raising of the
wail,
For her son’s death, she stabbed
herself to the Heart”.

As now Creon is left alone, tormented by death of many kin, it turns to be his tragedy. He longs for death.

“Bring my days’ final date
Fill up their sum!
Come quick, I pray;
Let me not look upon another day!”

There are many themes in the play like, love, parent children relationship, justice, royal duty and moral duty. Antigone’s firm decision to follow moral order is the key element of the tragedy. Whatever she suffers is due to this strong moral decision. Her tragic doom is also due to this decision to walk alone on the path of divine law. This makes her one of the strongest female characters not of the attic tragedy only but the world’s drama too. It is a typical

Sophoclean tragedy. It bears the stamp of unique style, lucidity and strong characters ultimately meeting tragic end. Antigone's struggle is two folded one against fate and the other against mortal tyrant. She sacrifices her life but refused to bend towards unjustifiable royal order.

“Antigone” is that type of a play of Sophocles that has accumulated for him great reputation as a tragedian not only that but he was also able to create enviable social and political impact in Greece.

“Vikramovarsiyam”

Kalidasa, who is known as the Shakespeare of India, has like Shakespeare, borrowed stories and themes from various available sources—history, epics, legends etc. Kalidasa had explored ancient Indian literary treasure- Vedas, Upanishads, epics and Puranas. The way in which he has dealt with the borrowed stories is exemplary. The story of the play “Vikramovarsiyam” has its roots in ‘Rig-Veda’, ‘Vishnupurana’ and ‘Matsyapurana’. It is perhaps the second play of his literary career but by no means substandard. The play commences with an invocation to Lord Shiva

वेदान्तेषुयमाहुरेकपुरुषं व्याप्य स्थितं रोदसी
यस्मिन्नीश्वर इत्यनन्यविषयः शब्दोपथार्थाक्षरः।
अन्तर्यं च मुमुक्षुभिर्नियमितप्राणादिभिर्मृग्यते
स स्थाणुः स्थिरभक्तियोगसुलभो निः
श्रेयसायास्तुवः ॥१॥

After the introductory dialogue between the director and his assistant we see a very indicative first line

परित्रायतांपरित्रायतांयः सुपरक्षयस्यवाम्बरतले गति
रस्ति।

Translation in English

(Save, save, who is morally good and who can move through air)

It is a shouting scream by the group of nymph as their friends, Urvashi and Chitrlekha have been kidnapped by a demon named Kashi, a resident of Hiranyapur, when they were returning after offering their worship to the Lord Kuber (treasurer of wealth). The shout prepares a way for the dramatic entry of the protagonist of the play, Pururwa, the king of Pratishtanpur. He follows the demon, defeats him and returns in a heroic manner with the kidnapped nymphs. Here we observe a very attractive introduction to both the major characters of the play, Pururwa and Urvashi. The chief male character is introduced directly whereas the major female character is introduced indirectly. The hero, Pururwa's entry is dramatic as well as heroic. It should be like that only because he is the king. He returns to the mountain 'Hemkut' in his victorious chariot along with the kidnapped nymphs. Urvashi is unconscious and when she returns to her consciousness she comes to know that she has been rescued by the king Pururwa, she soliloquizes

(राजनमवलोक्य।) (आत्मगतम्) उपकृतं खलु
दानवैः।

Translation in English (Demon's has graced/benefitted me). It is an indicative soliloquy. It expresses Urvashi's love (at first sight) for Pururwa. The infrastructure of the play is almost ready because the king also expresses his love for Urvashi in the following manner, praising the magnetic outer appearance of Urvashi,

वेदाभ्यासजडः कथं नु विषयव्यावृत्तकौतूहलो
निर्मातृप्रभवेन्मनोहरमिदं रूपं पुराणो मुनिः ॥८॥

Translation in English (She must have been created by either extremely impressive moon or by the god of love whose only interest is decorum or by the season spring who blossoms flowers. How can a sage who has become emotionless due to his study of 'Veda' and whose curiosity has been vanished from sensuous elements, create such a magnificent beauty)?

Shoot of love has come out in the heart of both the major characters but Urvashi has to return to the heaven with Chitrarath as it was a summons by Indra. The gesture of Urvashi to turn back to have a glimpse of Pururwa is a dramatic beauty of Kalidasa's technique. Pururwa is a married person. His wife, queen Ousinary, doesn't like her husband's affection towards Urvashi. But she is unable to prevent her husband. Pururwa meets Urvashi regularly who has to come from heaven. She comes through air, can be invisible to others because she knows the skill to be so. It is known as 'TiraskariniVidhya'. (Knowledge to remain invisible) She also has strength to read the minds of others, after all she doesn't belong to the earth but to the heaven and so she possesses super human power. Urvashi is summoned by Indra to perform in the play 'Laxmiswayamvar' to be performed in the heaven. This is a very significant incident as far as concerned with Kalidasa's art of plot construction. While performing in the drama Urvashi makes a mistake in speaking dialogue. She is playing the role of Laxmi. She makes a mistake by uttering

तत्स्तयापुरुषोत्तमइतिभणितव्येपुरुषवसीतिनिर्गता
वाणी।

साखलुशसोमाध्यायेन।महेन्द्रेणपुनरनुगृहीता।

The meaning of the sentence is that she loves Pururwa. As a result she is cursed by

her teacher (Guru) that her place would not be there in the heaven but fortunately she was helped by the king of heaven, Indra who said that she could stay with Pururwa up to the moment he sees the face of their child. This curse and Indra's marginal reversal of that curse is going to play a very vital role in the play, later on. Meanwhile the queen, Devi Ousinary, observes a 'vrata' (observance of religious vow), 'Priyanupasad' (special offering for the loved one). She concludes the fast amidst a beautiful moonlit night and declares—

अद्यप्रभृतियांस्त्रियमार्यपुत्रःप्रार्थयतेयाचार्यपुत्रस्य
एगामप्रणयिनी तयासहमया
प्रीतिबन्धेनवर्तितव्यमिति।

It is a magnificent gesture of Devi Ousinary that throws light on the situation of female in the royal palace. So now Pururwa and Urvashi satisfy their long awaited sensuous desire. They enjoy their honeymoon on 'Gandhamardan' mountain. On one occasion Pururwa gazes Udayvati, Urvashi gets angry, leaves the place and enters the prohibited (for women) area, known as 'Kumar van' and immediately transformed in to a creeper. This episode is followed by fantastic description of Pururwa's situation, wondering in the forest addressing animals, trees and birds. This reminds us of King Lear wandering bonnet less in his debatable mental situation in Shakespeare's "King Lear." Ultimately pururwa gets 'Sangamniyamani' and with the help of that 'mani' reunites with Urvashi, transformed back to her real form. The play does not come to an end here because of that curse and Indra's promise.

The vulture episode introduces Aayush, Pururwa and Urvashi's son. (It should be noted here that Urvashi is not a human

character and she was able to hide her pregnancy. Let us see what Vidushak says when Pururwa talks on the same topic

माभवान्स्वर्तमानुषीधर्मदिव्यासुसंभावयत्तु। प्रभावन्ति
खड्गानि तासांचरितानि।

Aayush, after his birth, was handed over to Satyavati by Urvashi to be brought up in the hermitage of sage Chyavan (Urvashi has done so, with an idea to prolong her stay with Pururwa). Here we require to apply Coleridge's theory of 'willing suspension of disbelief'. The vulture has flew away with the 'mani', during night. Someone has shot the vulture dead with arrows on which the name 'Aayush' is carved. The sage of the hermitage, Chyavan, could not tolerate such a violent action of the child Aayush, orders Satyavati to give back the boy child to his mother. Now according to the words of Indra, the moment Pururwa observes their son, Urvashi has to go back to the heaven. Pururwa is so much disturbed by the uncontrollable and hopeless situation that he decides to exile after the coronation of Aayush. But Narad (a very famous sage in

the Indian mythology who works as a prophet, a messenger and well-wisher of all and a sage with solution of problems), arrives, announces that Indra needs Pururwa's help in the forthcoming war between gods and demons. After the completion of the war pururwa and Urvashi would be allowed to live together. Narad performs the coronation ceremony. The play ends with a very significant slogan by Bharat, known as 'Bharat vakya'.

The play is an embodiment of Kalidasa's art of plot construction, characterization and his ability to describe nature. His use of similes, as usual, is wonderful.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude my article by mentioning that both the great ancient dramatists have constructed their plays in a marvelous manner. There is a clear difference between these two playwrights regarding their conception and reflection.

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