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Shakespearean tragedy

William Shakespeare as a dramatist is famous for his tragedies. He is well known for Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth. It is said that he would be as much popular today if he had only written these four tragedies. Here we will discuss some of the major characteristics of his tragedies.

The protagonist of the Shakespearean tragedy belongs to the upper strata of society. He would either be a king, queen, prince or an official of the highest rank. In the play *Macbeth* we have Macbeth, the general of the Scotland's Army and he is a kin of the king. In Shakespearean tragedy the hero faces a downfall at the end. In this way Shakespeare tries to show that if a person from high rank can fall then a layman is no exception.

In Shakespearean tragedy the hero suffers from a weakness in his character. A. C. Bradley calls it "tragic flaw" and Aristotle calls it *hamartia*. It is due to this tragic flaw or hamartia, the hero falls from the ladders of fortune to meet a tragic end. The tragic hero has all the good qualities except one weakness. This weakness leads him to his catastrophe.

In Shakespearean tragedies we find character is destiny. Before Shakespearean tragedy it was propagated through Greek tragedies that destiny is character. A man is a puppet in the hands of destiny. But Shakespeare established this notion that our present actions decide the future outcome of our lives.

Supernatural elements such as ghosts, witches are an integral part of the Shakespearean tragedy. In *Macbeth* we have three witches, Ghost of Hamlet's father

in *Hamlet*, magical handkerchief in *Othello* etc. Shakespeare used supernatural first in order to please the groundlings (gentry) of the Elizabeth era and secondly to show the truth beyond the reality of the mortal world.

In Shakespearean tragedy we find *comic relief*. A comic episode amid the serious happenings. In a tragedy there are a lot of intrigues, criminal activities, plottings so in order to relax and to get them ready for the more serious actions ahead he puts a comic episode in his tragedies. Porter Scene in *Macbeth*, Fool in *King Lear* provides comic relief. These episodes not only entertain us but also gives an insight about the future actions in the Play.

In Shakespearean tragedy we find *tragic waste* - meaning the killing of the innocent characters. The characters who have not done any offence to anyone get murdered.

Shakespearean tragedies do not follow the three unities proposed by Aristotle. Aristotle proposed that a tragedy must follow the unity of place, the unity of time, the unity of action. Shakespearean tragedy do not follow this strict pattern.

In Shakespearean tragedy we do not find poetic justice. Poetic justice means the reward and punishment of a particular character in accordance with his merits or demerits. We find innocent characters getting murdered.

Note: There is a lot that can be written about Shakespearean tragedy. This is my humble attempt to put some of the characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy.