

CONCEPT OF FEAR IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

Prof. A. SHAFEE AHMED KHAN

Assistant Professor & Head (UG), PG & Research Department of English
Mazharul Uloom College, Ambur – Vellore District, Tamil Nadu – India



Article Received :30/10/2014
Article Revised:10/11/2014
Article Accepted:12/11/2014

ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare, the icon of English literary world and dramatist par excellence, has used the concept and notion of fear and horror in his famous tragedies like Macbeth, Othello, Lear and Hamlet. The intentions of committing the sins have brought lot of horror in the lives of the heroes of the tragedies. These heroes have feared before and after committing the sinister acts in their lives. The heroes and villains of the tragedies have face lot of horror when they thought about their sinful, iniquitous, immoral, spiteful, harmful and malicious acts. These heroes have found a kind of taste and solace in committing the abominable sins and thus without any hesitations, inspite of warning and fearing, committed the blunders in their lives. They commit one sin after another to become more dangerous in the eyes of the people and also show adamancy and stubbornness in the commitment of sins in their lives. They made their lives sour, bitter and unpleasant by committing more sins and thus horror of sins does not teach them any lessons or restrict them from doing sins. People avoid sins as they fear the consequences of sins and thus fear restricts them from committing any sins in their lives. The same fear we can find in the tragedies of Shakespeare but the tragic heroes have chosen the way of damnation, uncaring the horror and warning which they get in their lives. Here the lives of only two tragic heroes have been taken to describe the concept of fear in Shakespeare's famous tragedies. The painful, dreadful and awful tragic heroes Macbeth and Othello have felt horror in their lives, but they continue to commit the sins instead of adopting the good way accessible and presented to them.

Key Words: Fear, Horror, Sin, Punishment, Damnation, Awe, Dreadful, Terror, Adamancy, Stubbornness, Malicious, Immoral and Harmful.

INTRODUCTION

The word "fear" stems from the Middle English *feer, fere, fer*, the old English *f r* for 'calamity, danger' (and its verb *f ran* 'frighten' but also 'revere') is related to the Proto-Germanic *fera* 'danger' the Proto-Indo-European ' *per* ' – to attempt, try, research, risk (Wictionary -2014). Fear is a strong, uncontrollable, unpleasant, emotion caused by actual, tangible, corporeal or perceived danger in the lives. The tragic heroes never care about that danger and try to find solace and relief in committing the sins. Fear means a phobia, a sense of fear induced by something or someone and thus the heroes have feared a lot before and after their immoral acts. It also alerts us to the presence of danger and is divided in to two stages, biochemical which is universal and emotional which is highly individualized. The fear differs from person to person and also it is highly dependent on situations. The heroes of the tragedies are very bold in their lives, as Macbeth is a great military general, Othello is a great soldier and governor, Lear is a great King and Hamlet is a great prince and thus the fear of sins never shakes them or warns them to restrict their hands from committing the sins.

The doer of any sin has to face a kind of uncertainty and prick of conscience in the life. The fear of the evil doers is not only restricted to theology or philosophy or religion, but also we can find such fears in the stories, fables, allegories, fictions and plays. It is the reality of the world that the sinful acts prick our conscience when we commit them and definitely any person who commits the sin understands its consequences. The person who commits sin must not be left to enjoy its fruits and thus the sins bring destruction and annihilation of the life. The fear of sin restrains persons to leave sins but those gallantly commit sins have to face its retribution. The fear of punishments for any sin restricts a person from sins in future and thus society is saved from the sins. The fear does the work of cleaning the society from sins otherwise people commit more sins and convert this earth in to hell and only anarchy prevails on the earth if there is no check for sins. Many people restrict from sins not due to morality, righteousness, honesty, decency or goodness but due to the fear and punishment. The effects of boomerang of sin and fear of punishment have become the important factors to keep the society away from the sin.

2. Fear in Tragedies

Shakespeare has used the concept of fear in his tragedies and thus instructs the people of the world to restrain themselves from sins. The tragedy is a type of drama that deals with the concept of sins, fears and blunders. The hero in accomplice with the villains, commit sins and due disasters are brought both on the heroes and villains. "A. C. Bradley remarks that the calamities of tragedy do not simply happens nor are they sent, they proceed mainly from the actions and those are the actions of men"(6). The tragedies show the conflict involving the sacrifice of good and the punishment of the evil. The Greek tragedians believed in destiny for the sins of man but, Shakespeare has no such ideologies. The external forces or the antagonistic forces or the internal passions within individual are responsible for sins. The sins are committed by the individual and that individual holds responsibility of the sins.

Fear makes any person to leave the sinister life and thus it protects people from sin and invariably protects the peace of the earth. "The great critic Campbell says that when passion is very intense, the power of reason may be lost altogether and the hero sins due to the command of inordinate movements of passion or in falling to check them"(100). The person who commits sins has lost his reason and thus any reasonable, logical, rational and sensible person will not commit sins. The heroes and villains who commit the sin have the audacious ambitions, and are endowed with indomitable faith in sins and their advancement towards vice make them fearful being in their lives.

3. Sin of Tragic Heroes

The tragedies of Shakespeare are real embodiment of fears and their punishments. "The critic Puttenham says that the tragedy deals with the doleful falls of unfortunate and afflicted heroes, for the persons remanding man of mutability of vicious life"(Ahuja 12). Every man good or bad has a desire towards sins but the fear of punishment restricts that man from committing any sin in the life. The sin is the transgression of law and the "Bible remarks whoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: as sin is the transgression of law" (I John III 4).

Shakespeare has produced many good and bad characters in his plays. Good characters are duly rewarded and bad characters are punished grievously in his plays. The four great tragic heroes Macbeth, Othello, Lear and Hamlet have committed the grievous sins in their lives and every minute they fear to carry

out their nefarious and despicable sins. The villains Lady Macbeth, Iago, Edmund, Goneril and Regan have committed the unpardonable sins and thus they fear a lot in their lives. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fear a lot before committing the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth sees a bloody dagger before the murder of King Duncan. Othello fears that his consort may deceive him by choosing another handsome man as the Venetian women are not faithful to their consorts.

4. Fearful Tragic Heroes

Shakespeare has portrayed the characters who commit sins intentionally and fear does not change their intention of the sins. The hero or villain is solely responsible for his sins and behaviors and thus he falls from his high position to the low position. Cassio says to Brutus in the play Julius Caesar.

- *Men at some time are masters of their fates*
- *The fault, dear Brutus is not our stars,*
- *But in ourselves, that we are underlings.* (I ii 139 - 141)

The man has the free will to change his destiny and the person before and after committing the sins has the prick of conscience and the reasoning also tells him that it is the sin even though he does it and thus he is solely responsible for his sins. Every man is responsible for his sins and one must avoid sins to make his life a heaven as sins lead to fear and convert the life into hell. Every tragic hero is solely responsible for his sins and thus his life becomes testimony to the actions he does in his life. He becomes horrific, atrocious, dreadful, terrible and horrendous after committing the heinous sins.

The two great tragic heroes Macbeth and Othello reject the plea of the conscience and show adamancy in committing the sins and thus fear does not warn them. "A.C. Bradley says that Macbeth's thoughts is translated into action and is transformed into opposite of itself. And whatsoever the dreams of doing, he achieves that which he least dreamed of his own destruction. Othello agonizes over an empty fiction and meaning to execute solemn justice, butchers innocence and strangulates love. The things, which they have designed to wrong others, ultimately return to plague them and these heroes fall in their own intrigue which they practiced to ruin others"(20). The fear has not controlled their passion towards the sins. They have brought catastrophe in their lives by neglecting the horror of the mind. "A.C. Bradley contends that there is a moral order in the universe that will resist or react against evils. Hence, the tragic hero is confronted with conflict and catastrophe in his life. The hero has some mark of imperfections or defects like irresolution, precipitancy, pride, jealousy, ill-ambition, credulousness, excessive simplicity, vanity, excessive susceptibility to sexual emotion and the like and thus these abominations lead the hero towards a devastating life and they will soon descent into hell"(25). These sins will never leave the doers to enjoy the benefits of the sins and thus they have suffered a lot. Ambition of Macbeth makes him a murderer and only first murder he committed for the sake of ambition but later fear has made him to commit more sins and murders. Jealousy of Othello has made him to leave the pleasure of life and he never understands the true love due to the fear that his consort, the noble Desdemona may deceive him in future.

4.1. Dreadful Macbeth

The Bellona's bridegroom and gallant military general of Scotland, Macbeth has committed a series of murders to satisfy his nefarious ambition. He wants to rule Scotland unethically and immorally and thus plans in an immoral manner. The wife in the entire situation has supported him. He has developed a vaulting ambition that makes him a butcher in his life. He has possessed a heart, which always devised the horrible thoughts. His ambition makes him to design many wicked thoughts in his mind.

Macbeth decides to murder the king only, but in order to hide that murder and out of fear of the exposure of his heinous acts, he commits the murder of guards. Then to save his kingdom he commits the murder of Banquo and the assassins whom he has assigned the duty of murdering his friend, gallant military general of Scotland Banquo and his son Fleance, who is the future king of Scotland according to the prophecies of weird sisters. He commits the first murder due to ambition and then series of murders due to fear. He sees the bloody daggers and fails to say amen, but does not stop his heinous murders. "Campbell says that from the murder of King Duncan onwards, no ambition but fear terrorizes its victims into action. In the play, we find the word 'fear' is used 'forty two times' and 'ambition' only 'three times'"(223). It is the drama of fear rather than a drama of ambition as fear plays a very vital role in the play.

Macbeth is a primordial criminal and his deeds have a chain of consequential deeds each one is as

horrible and heinous as the other and all leading to his destruction and damnation. "Marilyn French rightly says that the World of Scotland has been made bloody by Macbeth everywhere we can see brutality"(Alan Sinfield 15). Macbeth echoes the Christian myth of Fall and embodies certain aspects of Satan. Satan shares with Macbeth the paradoxical mixture of criminality, heroic, but vain and contemptible acts. As Satan does not heed to voice of his conscience and careless about the consequences of the fear committed more sin, Macbeth too is heedless and unmindful of the horror of his life. "Marilyn French further remarks that the World of Scotland gone insane and lack balance and thus murder follows murder until the entire country is a death camp"(Alan Sinfield 20)". Satan violates the natural law and also Macbeth does the same mistake as he violates the natural principle.

Macbeth fights his doomed ridiculous, magnificent battles with God. Macbeth the wanton violator had said these words when he was informed that the English soldiers were marching towards Scotland. Macbeth finds no meaning in the life and all his struggles are in vain like Satan.

- *I am sick at heart*
- *When I behold!- Seyton, I say!-This push*
- *Will cheer me ever or disseat me now.*
- *I have live long enough; my way of life*
- *Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;*
- *And that which should accompany old age,*
- *I must not look to have; but in their stead,*
- *Curses, not loud but deep, mouth – honour, breath*
- *Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.*
- *Seyton! (V v 23-28)*

Macbeth in relation with Dr. Faustus and Captain Ahab, whose black, destructive rage against a natural world has brought much sufferings and damnations. Macbeth's cry about his red hands is the very pinnacle of his fear.

- *Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood*
- *Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather*
- *The multitudinous seas incarnadine.(II ii 59-61)*

Milton's Satan cries in the pinnacle of horror as Macbeth cries when he sees his bloody hands. Both Macbeth and Satan have shown their cry as terrible and thus both share the same misery. Satan cries:

- *Horror and doubt distract*
- *His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir*
- *The hell within him (Paradise Lost Book IV 18-22)*

Further he pleads as he fears his heinous actions and thus the fear of murders makes him to say the following:

- *Stars hide your fires!*
- *Let not light see my black and deep desires.(I iv 148)*

Macbeth's mind is full of scorpions as he becomes a colossal criminal and thus he is subjected to terrible dreams and restless ecstasy. He wants peace but he does not get it as he cries in utter chaos:

- *Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep*
- *In the affliction of these terrible dreams*
- *That shake us nightly (III ii 16-18)*

Macbeth is afraid of the blood on his hand and also on his conscience. "Ram Bilas Sharma says that he is afraid of contemplating what he has done"(15). Macbeth often fears about the hands that stretching towards him and as he cries:

- *What hands are here! Ha! They pluck out mine eyes... (II ii 58)*

Macbeth in chaos and utter fear cries as he does not like to think what he has done and every instant of his action he fears a lot and also he fails to understand his sin and thus he says:

- *To know my deed't were best not know myself (II ii 77)*

Even before committing the murders he gets the horrific life but he fails to understand when he is pricked by his conscience and also the fear of warning and thus he contemplates:

- *Whose horrid image both unfix my hair*
- *And make my seated heart knock at my ribs*
- *Against the use of nature? (I iv 134-135)*

Then he prepares himself to face the challenge of the time and forget all the horrific symbols which he gets in his life and consoles his heart through these words:

- *Time and the hour runs through the roughest day (I iv 148)*

He knows about the foul act but cannot leave this foul act. He considers witches as mortal and says that they know mortal knowledge when he burned in desire to question them further they made themselves air, but it kindles the fire of ambition in his heart which is already there. Macbeth has the ambition even before he has met the witches as they have provided fuel to the fire and he has dreamt to rule Scotland. When he hears:

- *Our eldest Malcolm, whom we name here after the prince of Cumberland...(I v 38-39)*

Now prepares to do the horrible deed and decides that his masked face must conceal the treachery in his heart. When he commits the murder of Duncan he faces the first curse which makes him fearful and dreadful:

- *...I could not say 'Amen'*
- *When they did say 'God bless us! (II ii 29)*

The second curse is when he hears a horrible voice:

- *... sleep no more!*
- *Macbeth does murder sleep; the innocent sleep (II ii 33)*

Third curse is bloody in nature as it makes Macbeth suffers and fears a lot:

- *Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? (II ii 59)*

Macbeth has been cursed in these ways and thus uncaring the horrible warning goes on committing the sins. Macbeth is led to commit more sins after this because the first murder, instead of giving satisfaction gives him fear, anxiety, sleeplessness, a guilty conscience, despair and eventually death. When he commits the murder of two guards, he says that the expedition of his violent love has outrun the pauser reason, but actually his greed and ambition have outrun his reason when he has committed the murder. "A. C. Bradley says that Macbeth is no longer *infirm of purpose*, becomes domineering, even brutal, or he becomes a cool pitiless hypocrite. Whenever his imagination stirs, he acts badly. It so possesses, and is so much stronger than his reason, that his face betrays him, and his voice utters the most improbable untruths or the most artificial rhetoric"(John Wain 264). In the reign of Macbeth the country has become a hell and many innocent people are murdered day in and day out.

- *..... each new morn*
- *New widows howl, new orphan cry, new sorrows*
- *Strike heaven on the face that it resounds*
- *As if it felt with Scotland and yell'd out*
- *Like syllable of delour. (IV iii 5-8)*

Thus, Macbeth never cares any horrible signs, goes on committing the most heinous sins, and at last singly dies in the battlefield. Thus, the great hero and Bellona's bridegroom and his spouse face damnation and punishment. They play embodies the fear of the hero leads to the horror of the people.

4.2. Frightful Othello

Othello as a Moor has such hot temper that mere trifles stir him to anger and thoughts of vengeance. His immature mind and premature reasoning make him to lead a horrible and fearful life. He blames those who are really good out of fear and fails to realize that it is he who is to be blamed. "The great critic Campbell remarks that Othello is the perfect choice for a study of the passion and fear"(151). He blames his wife for adultery, which has no base except his own suspicion of her relationship with Cassio and also his fear that Desdemona may deceive him based on his sooty posture. "As Wilson Knight sees in Othello, the tremendous reversal of extreme ugliness. Othello becomes idiotic and ugly when he endures loss of control"(104). Othello takes a sacred vow of vengeance in a reverential manner, which is more akin to pagan cult than Christian.

Othello takes the vow to strangle his wife only due to fear of her deceiving him in future. Iago works successfully on his extreme fear otherwise he would not be successful in kindling his jealousy. "As Ribner finds in

the play the Christian view of mankind's encounter with evil the forces"(Campbell 106). He takes away the life of a lady whom he loves, as he fears that he cannot endure of losing it to anyone else.

Othello has become a victim of his jealousy and wild passion. "Campbell says that jealousy is not a simple or elementary passion but a derivative or compounded passion. It is a species of envy, which is in turn a species of hatred"(148). Jealousy brings distress, grief, fear, horror and pain to the mind. Othello is envious of Cassio being fair compared to his own black colour and often fear that his wife may be attracted towards the fair and handsome Cassio leaving him. Jealousy may come by reason of pleasure, passion of property of right and honour. In Othello we see it works out from his racial inferiority and out of fear. Thus, "A. C. Bradley finds Othello as the most painfully exciting and the most terrible hero"(143). Othello's jaundiced and horrible eye sees the virtuous Desdemona as an immoral woman. He has become the slave of his passions due to the apprehension that he will be deceived by the people around him.

Othello loves himself more than he loves his consort as self love is the mother of all vices. It breeds destructive ways and leads to devastation. The evil forces which are ingrained in Othello are jealousy and self-love and that are deep-rooted in him due to fear of despair. Othello in his rage foolishly demands a proof against an angel, Desdemona:

- ...No. Iago;
- I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt; prove
- And on the proof, there is no more but this,
- Away at once with love or jealousy (I iii 189-192)

Othello has committed a sin and a calamitous mistake to throw away a pearl richer than all his tribe. There is an element of dishonesty in his *bragging and telling her fantastical lies* (I ii 78), which has attracted Desdemona towards him. Desdemona loves him through hero-worship, due to his gallant adventures. Othello believes her to be a woman of rare intelligence who understands him and takes pity on him. "As Ram Bilas Sharma remarks that Othello is jealous by nature and the important thing is that there is a deep sadistic and masochistic strain in his nature"(114). He further blames Othello that Iago like witches in Macbeth, eggs him on to crime, but he is quite capable of it even without his help". He is responsible for his acts and his fury is roused by the imagined whoredom of Desdemona. The fury is unrestrained, horrible and self-destructive. "A.C. Bradley says that Iago's plot is Iago's character in action and it is built on his knowledge of Othello's character and could not otherwise have succeeded"(179). Thus Iago knows well about Moor's character so his intrigue successfully works on the Moor as he says these words.

- *It cannot be long that Desdemona should continue her love to moor... it was a violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration... These moors are changeable in their wills... The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as acerb as coloquintia... (I iii 235-342)*

Thus "Campbell remarks that insistence upon the passion which makes men try to take the place of God and by private revenge execute the laws of God"(170). He does not know revenge is a wild justice and it breeds only dissatisfaction and ultimately he loses his peace of heart as he is of passionate and thus he cries out of extreme horror.

- *The passions which impels to revenge*
- *Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge*
- *Had stomach for them all (V ii 75)*

He condemns himself in revenge and even his revenge does not satisfy his soul.

- *O, that the slave had forty thousand lives!*
- *One is too poor, too weak for my revenge (III i 443-444)*

Thus Othello robs out of fear and makes the play a painful and horrible. "A.C. Bradley remarks that the sum of reason in his life is 'collided' blacked' and blotted out into a total eclipse. He is self-reliant and decides to act instantaneously. Thus Bradley finds him the most painfully exciting and most terrible personality"(143). Othello's ego and emotions have disrupted his noble soul. He speaks in the accents of Macbeth but his heart is stirred by cruelty instead of accepting the warning of fear he precedes his sinister activities and thus leads a very horrific life.

5. Consequences of Fear

Macbeth, a hero whose brandished steel smoked with bloody execution unseam'd his enemies from nave to chaps, later bath himself in reeking wounds commits heinous murders. He sees the whole Neptune Ocean converts into blood through his bloody hands. He finds the vision of bloody dagger and holds a bloody scepter and his country is bleeding and receiving every day a new gash in her body. All these signs have clearly showed how horrible the life of the great hero becomes; he leads a very dirty and horrific life. He sees blood everywhere as he commits the most sacrilegious murders. Lady Macbeth too fails to enjoy her life as a queen of the country. She suffers a lot in her life as a queen and thus faces death at the last. Her disease in which she walks naked in the street is very horrible. Thus, both husband and wife commit the murders that have made them bloody, their minds is full of scorpions, and their tragic thoughts lead them to plunge in the wild and violent sea of crimes. Their vaulting ambition gives them only a devastating life and they have been thrown from the main stream of life.

Othello too fears that in future he may face the catastrophe and considers his present life without any sin is blissful. Even though he has a clear understanding of the consequences of the sins, he commits sins and accepts the words of the villains. He narrates his sufferings that he never has the peaceful and contended life. He has the fear that his wife may deceive him in future. Such pessimistic anticipations have made his life very terrific and horrible. Thus by taking the vengeance he has destroyed himself and shows a very pessimistic and dirty character in the life due to fear. The act of suicide is very horrible part of his life.

These heroes consider that life where they did not commit any sins was a blissful to them and through the sins; they have converted their lives into hell. Their sins lead them to much devastations and unrest in their lives. Thus, all these horrible persons have brought their devastation in their lives by foregoing the previous blissful life. They cry out of fear as:

- Now, "Not Poppy nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to sweet sleep (III iii 332-335)

CONCLUSION

The dramatist Shakespeare has the ability to present every good and bad character in his plays. He has written plays only to please the people not to instruct them but he has taught many lessons from his plays. "Schlegel says that Shakespeare in strength a demi-god, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a guardian spirit of higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority and is as open and unassuming as a child"(Kenneth Muir 239). The mortal dramatist has shown every type of the aspects of lives in his dramas. He is talented enough to teach the human weaknesses and capable of portraying the real human psychology through his immortal writings. "Arthur Compton says that in Shakespearean drama almost every phase of the age is mirrored, from the particular craze and fashion of the moment to the broad, general characteristics of the national life"(134). The concept of fear is clearly shown in all his tragedies. He has used his tragedies as a media to communicate the concept of fear and their due punishments. He has left the eternal concept that fear always lead to grievous and horrible lives. Thus, fear may caution the doer of the sin that this act is a bad one and it is punishable in nature. Fear cautions a man to restrict his hand from small and capital sins.

REFERENCES

1. Bradley, A.C. Shakespearean Tragedy. London: Macmillan & co., Ltd., 1950
2. Campbell, B. Lily, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes. London : Barnes & Noble, 1961
3. Compton, Arthur & Rickett, A History of English Literature from Earliest Times to 1916, New Delhi: Universal Book Publications, 1988.
4. Dowden, Edward. Shakesperare – A critical study of His mind and art. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1875. Rep – 1948.
5. Granville-Barker, Harley. Prefaces to Shakespeare – Othello. London: Batsford, 1974.
6. Granville-Barker, Harley. King Lear and Macbeth. London: Batsford, 1974.
7. Granville-Barker, Harley. Prefaces to Shakespeare. London: Batsford, 1968.
8. Kenneth Muir & S. Schoenbaum, Shakespeare Criticism: Dryden to Bradley - A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
9. Marlowe, Dr. Faustus: An Academic Guide. Ed. R. L. Ahuja, Jullundar : New Academic Publishing

Company, 1972.

10. Sharma, Ram Bilas. Essay on Shakespearean Tragedy. Agra: Shiva Lal Agarwala & Company, 1965.
 11. Sinfield, Alan. Shakespeare's Tragedies. London: Sussex Publication, 1979.
 12. Staunton, Howard. The Complete Illustrated Shakespeare, Newyork: Park Lane Publisher, 1979.
 13. The Holy Bible, New King James Version. Newyork: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1979.
 14. Wictionary (2014). "fear – Wictionary, The Free Dictionary" Retrieved 13 February 2014.
 15. Wain, John. Macbeth: A Selection of Critical Essays, London: Macmillan & Co., 1964.
-