Chapter – 5

SUMMING UP

The idea of the universality of artistic vision sounds true in the similarities seen in the underlying philosophies of *Hamlet* and *The Gita*. The thesis tried to make a comparative study of the predicaments of Hamlet in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. It is an interesting exercise to re-read Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the light of the Gita. There were quite a few homogeneous elements, similar philosophical undertones and the subtle difference in the characters that help them retain the identity and uniqueness.

The stark similarities one finds in these literary works are the resemblances found in the social status and the kind of responsibility entrusted with these heroes. The heroes face equivalent state of dilemma demanding their outright responses as the responsible heirs of their kingdoms. A marked degree of similitude is found in the behavioral patterns and thought processes of these heroes during their passive and active phases of their lives culminating in a similar kind of retaliation.

The similarity found in the exposition of the problem, the initial circumsttitude of the heroes and their final resolution is striking. According to
Radhakrishnan in *Indian Philosophy* the action performed in the spirit indicated by the Gita finds its completion in wisdom, by eliminating egoism and kindling a sense of divine in oneself (572). In *Hamlet*, the first act exposes the conflict in the play and the subsequent second, third and fourth acts express the conflict in the mind of Hamlet, which is a product of his imperfect self, mutilated by the *gunas*. The meeting between Hamlet and Fortinbras’ takes place in the Act IV Scene iv provides Hamlet an opportunity to see actual performance of the right action expected from him. The ultimate reality of being a human being is understood in the graveyard scene which subtly exposes the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. The effect of these realizations propel the hero to execute his duty in the Act V Scene ii of the play. A similar progression of action is found in the first chapter in the *Bhagavadgita* termed ‘Arjuna Vishadayoga’ which opens with the vivid description of the panic-stricken Arjuna who got desperately caught within the web of confusion and ignorance. The subsequent chapters of the Gita present the sacred counsel Arjuna receives from the Godhead which liberates him from his ignorance and sin until he proclaims the attainment of his ultimate realization in chapter XI. Arjuna expresses the newly dawned self realization in him: “The supreme mystery, the discourse concerning the Self which thou hast given out of grace for me – by this my bewilderment is gone from me (XI.1).

Sri Krishna provides the philosophical as well as ethical advices to Arjuna regarding the proper way to perform one’s duty in order to satisfy one’s body and soul, to attain worldly success and ethereal salvation. The inspiring discourse leads to the enlightenment in Arjuna which mentally nourishes him for the crucial combat of his life. The regained spirit of ultimate reality is revealed in the lines:
ARJUNA: Destroyed is my delusion and recognition has been gained by me through Thy grace, O Acyuta (Krsna). I stand firm with my doubts dispelled. I shall act according to thy word (XVIII.73).

The uniqueness of the heroes is retained by the contrasting destiny assigned to the heroes. The impact of actions performed by the two heroes are leading to contrasting results in their lives: The advices received in the battlefield motivates Arjuna to take up selfless action free from ulterior desires against the Kauravas and be victorious in the war, whereas Hamlet’s selfless act ultimately proves fatal for him because of his failure to abide by the parting advice of the ghost of his dead father: “Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother […]” (I.v.85). Arjuna and his kinfolk gain victory over the miscreants who had unlawfully possessed their kingship and kingdom. The warfare proves beneficial for Arjuna since he attains victory in the terra firma and terra in cognito through his active and rightful participation in the battlefield. Hamlet on the other hand is not fortunate to claim such a twin advantage because Hamlet suffers from the temporal point of view, since his status is dwindled from an heir apparent to that of a procurator who suffers an untimely death.

An analysis of the two characters in the light of the Bhagavadgita undoubtedly marks the prominence of Hamlet as a humane tragic hero with an indelible image of a martyr who has attained the wisdom on ultimate reality through self introspection and experiences. The sacred mission undertaken by Hamlet gets derailed by his rash murder of Polonius, a motiveless murder caused by his anger and lack of self control which taints his conscience, leads to the death of Ophelia, and makes him a victim of Laertes’s revenge. But the greatness of the Shakespearean
hero is in his readiness to lay down his life for a noble cause with a thorough understanding of his entire actions and their consequences.

The Bhagavad Gita is the sacred scripture of India, the one book that all masters depend upon as a supreme source to spiritual authority. Bhagavad Gita means “song of the spirit”, it is the divine communion of truth – realization between man and his Creator and highly regarded as the essence of the ponderous four Vedas, one hundred and eight Upanishads and the six systems of the oriental philosophy. Swami Chinmayananda comments that Gita summarizes the high tenets of Vedanta and “[...] as a scripture, provides us with an intellectual approach to all our problems – be it our personal, social, national or international life”(The Art of Man making 19). Talking about Arjuna’s dilemma Chinmayananda rightly puts it: “The ‘Arjuna disease’ is universal – it is common at all times, in all places, to people of all races, classes and creeds and cultures. It is a human disease, natural to any man of action” (39). The present study established that Shakespeare’s Hamlet also is a victim of Arjuna Vishada, and applying Gita philosophy to the study of Hamlet it is clear that Gita offers a solution to all problems of humanity.

In the play Hamlet the hero is presented as a Christian hero, highly concerned about morality which makes him contemplate deeply on the teachings of the two texts of the Holy Bible: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The hero appears to have failed in imbibing the true spirit of the New Testament which upholds virtues like peace, love and forgiveness as the corner stone of Christianity. When the play is read from the point of view of the Christian philosophy the conflict in the mind of the hero; whether to suffer patiently or to take up arms against the wrong doers, ensues from his confusion in the inner conscience whether to follow the
policy of revenge of the Old Testament or the new policy of peace and forgiveness of
the New Testament. Hamlet selects the path of revenge advocated by the Old
Testament which is manifested in the following lines from the Bible:

You have heard that it was said,

‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a
tooth.’ But I say, Do not resist
one who is evil. But if anyone strikes
you on the right cheek, turn to him the
other also; [...] (Matthew 5.38-39)

Being a Christian, Shakespeare’s plays have an irrefutable influence of the
myriad principles of Christian philosophy. The thought patterns of Shakespearean
tragic heroes in a way mirror the playwright’s moral trajectory since the revenge
theme of Hamlet is firmly based on the feudalistic principle professed in the Old
Testament which favours ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. Hamlet does
not express an iota of preference for the saturated principle of the New Testament
which upholds forgiveness and forgetfulness of others sins with absolute forbearance
as observed in the mellowed character of Prospero in The Tempest. Hamlet’s action
can be however justified or better explained with the help of Bhagavad Gita.