Chapter - IV

SEARCH FOR TRAGEDIES IN SANSKRIT AND
A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE THEORY

Ramayana and Mahabharata the two great epics of India are fully tragic in nature. Ramayana ends with the disappearance of Sitā into the belly of mother-earth and she never unites with her husband again. Ramayana, hence is the first Kavya in Sanskrit literature and its origin is also equally pathetic. The great sage, Vālmiki saw the death of a bird, when he was about to take his bath in the holy waters of the Tamasa river in the early dawn. He was shocked by this cruel incident and his heart melted out of pity. He utters the following verse unknowingly:

मा निपाद प्रतियां त्वमाम: शाश्वती: समा: ।

यत्रायस्मिन्यानादेकमभ्री: काममोहितम् ॥ (I.ii.12)

"O hunter! you will never be respected in this world, as you have killed a śrīṅ bird, which was in passionate love-sports." Thus, the pity of the sage was expressed in the form of a curse unknowingly. That it is with reference to this the phrase "शोकः श्रीङ्कृत्त्वाम: ।" is expressed.

Similarly like Draupadi, Bhima etc., all the major characters of Mahabharata suffer to a greater extent in one way or the other. Even after winning the great war, Yudhiṣṭhira is not happy for there is no one to share the joy and victory, except his own brothers. These two epics form a significant basis for Sanskrit dramas. Most of the Sanskrit dramas have drawn their themes either from Ramayana or Mahabhārata. Naturally the spirit of all these dramas is fully pathetic in nature.
Gayatri Verma throws more light in this matter in the following words: "It is said that the sweetest songs are those that tell of our saddest thought. *Raseṣu Karuṇo Rasah* (रसेषु करुणो रसः) is a well known saying. The first Kāvyā in Sanskrit rose out of the sense of pity. Bhavabhūti seems to say that there is one Rasa 'Karuṇa' and that it assumes the different forms - Śriṅgāra etc. as the same water assumes the forms of whirl, bubbles etc."¹

Bhavabhūti says -

एको रसः करुण एवं निमित्त मेंद्रात्
भिन्न: पृथविक पृथ्विवाश्रयते विवर्तनाः ।
आचर्य बुद्ध तथापर्यान विकारान्
अभो यथा सहिन्धेय तु तत्समस्तम् ॥ U.R.C.III.47

Thus, Bhavabhūti considers Karuṇa the only sentiment and all other sentiments are its different forms. This Karuṇa or pathetic sentiment is the basis of tragedy.

Henry W. Wells while discussing Poetic Drama in England and India says "By and large, Western drama deals with struggle to attain unity or, in other words, with images of forces competing for dominance; Eastern drama celebrates the imagined attainment of unity. What appears stimulating to one culture seems dissonant to the other; what seems harmonious to one, seems insipid to the other. The aims of the two civilizations are different and so are the images in which each finds satisfaction."² It is clear from the above statement that due to different cultures and

civilizations the approach to literature also differs. He further argues that "Although Sanskrit poetic drama observes a certain decorum, avoids tragedy, and shuns indignity, it can not be strictly described as optimistic. The play must, to be sure, have an happy ending and even at its most serious be tragicomedy. Yet it is much more revealing to observe not that the ending is fortunate but that the entire work is of a piece and connotes spiritual composure. The Sanskrit drama begins and ends with prayer, a petition for human welfare. Yet the most illustrious of the plays, Šakuntalā, ends with the petition that the speaker, who comprehensively personifies the dramatis personae, the actors as individuals, and the entire audience, shall not be born again on earth. This petition expresses, at least from the Western point of view, an outlook far from optimistic. Emphasis falls not on optimism but on composure. This is the mode of Karna in Bhāsa's great play. Karna's Task, where Karna is depicted as the hero, following strictly in the steps of the Bhagavad Gītā, walking serenely to his doom. Death impends but with it neither tragedy nor transfiguration, neither calamity nor apotheosis. Tragedy signifies purgation achieved through images of strong suffering having a more or less violent impact on the audience. Tragicomedy as commonly practised and understood in Europe implies an optimistic ending. Indian drama embraces neither conception. It is all of a piece, from beginning to end, circular as a flower is circular, and connotes spiritual peace. Its serenity is religious and austere, not sentimental or romantic."

Henry W. Wells put forth the idea that "Indian drama has neither the salt of Attic comedy nor the gall of Attic tragedy. Clearly, its province is

not to present the uglier facts of the life. Philoctetes' wound, Cassandra's
madness, Hercules' torment, are all unknown. No hero envelops himself in
a poison robe or is consumed in a raging fire. Not only does no hero die
on the stage; none dies off the stage, as in Greek tragedy." 4 But further
he argued that "A too casual western reader may grossly mistake Hindu
idealism for romantic sentimentality, for the belief that all's well with the
world. The reader educated in the naturalistic tradition observes the conduct
of a Sanskrit play and promptly declares it a deceitful flattery of life, a
puerile evasion of the harsh facts of existence. But, as previously urged,
the Indian play-wright never proposes to report the facts of life. He
proposes, as the author of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, to show a discipline by
which man as a contemplative being rises superior to the sordid realities
of existence." 5 Thus, the socio-cultural and philosophical background that
prevailed in India is mainly responsible for the form of Indian dramas.

Let us now turn our attention towards the observations made by Dr.
R.N.Rai in his well known work Theory of Drama. "Let us first take up
Aristotle's concept of tragedy as a form of drama and try to find out
whether is any one of Bharata's ten types of drama which comes very
close to it. Aristotlian concept of tragedy has much in common with
Bharata's concept of *Nāṭaka* and *Prakāraṇa*, though many Indian
commentators like Prof.Baldeo Upadhyaya and G.K.Bhat are of the opinion
that no tragedy has ever been written in Sanskrit drama. The very concept
of tragedy, they say, is alien to our Indian philosophy, as we never
conceive of an unhappy ending of human life. Life is, of course, a

continuous process of birth and death, till it attains salvation. Death is only a temporary phase in the continuous life of man. Moreover we believe that God is just and impartial and hence good will ultimately prosper and evil destroyed. If man suffers, he suffers on account of his misdeeds or sins in his previous life. Suffering is a means to the test of man's character and his integrity. There is nothing disastrous in it."6

He is of the opinion that commentators have misunderstood the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. That is why Dr. Rai strongly argues that "He (Bharata) never thought of drama either to be a tale of sorrow or to be a story of pleasure exclusively. His nataka is a fine combination of the two as it reveals the sorrow as well as pleasure in proper prospective. There is no unhappy ending in Sanskrit nātakas* and that is why most of the Indian commentators firmly assert that no tragedy has been written in Sanskrit drama. What we feel is that they have misunderstood the concept of tragedy, at least the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. A.C. Bradley's book on Shakespearean Tragedy has created some confusion regarding Aristotelian theory of tragedy. Some critics consider Bradley's views on tragedy to be the Aristotelian concept of tragedy though Bradley has categorically stated in the preface itself, that he does not intend to study Shakespeare's tragedies in the light of Aristotelian theory. Bradley's book gives an impression that unhappy ending is an essential requirement of tragedy, though when we scrutinize Aristotle's poetics meticulously, we find that Aristotle nowhere mentions that. While discussing plot-construction in


* It is interesting to note at this juncture that there will certainly be tragic incidents, events etc. throughout drama. But the end will have to be a happy scene as per our theorists.
chapters XIII and XIX of his Poetics Aristotle clearly says that a drama with an unhappy ending may be moving to the spectators on the stage but unhappy ending is certainly not an indispensable element of tragedy. When he refers to the construction of a complex fortunate plot and considers the plot of Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris* as the best one, it is quite obvious that the unhappy ending is not an essential requirement of tragedy as *Iphigenia in Tauris* ends with the reunion of Iphigenia with her long lost brother Orestes.7 Further Dr. Rai put forth the view that "If we are clear on this issue that tragedy imitates the action of the noble and exalted people and it does not necessarily lead to an unhappy ending, we may have no hesitation in accepting this fact that there are so many Sanskrit plays which are very close to the Aristotelian concept of tragedy."8

In concluding part of his book Dr. Rai, again strongly affirms the view that there are good examples for tragedes in Sanskrit, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, he gives the example of Bhasa's *Pratimanatakam* and Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacaritam*. In the course of his analysis he says "There has been a good deal of controversy over the issue of resemblance between the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, and some of the famous Sanskrit plays. The 'happy ending' of Sanskrit plays has led some of the Indian critics to the conclusion that there is no similarity between the tragedy and the Sanskrit plays. They believe that tragedy means 'unhappy ending' and that is why they have translated 'tragedy' in Hindi as *duhkhnata nāṭaka*, whereas our impression is that tragedy is a serious type of drama and does not necessarily end unhappily. It is in fact a tale of

8. Ibid., p.242.
suffering either physical or mental resulting from the protagonist's firm determination to fight against the forces which are hostile to him. Aristotle himself considers Euripide's *Iphigenia in Tauris* to be an ideal tragedy, as in his opinion the best plot in tragedy is the complex fortunate plot where the tragic deed is contemplated but the revelation takes place before an irreparable damage is done. Iphigenia is fully prepared to sacrifice the life of her own brother Orestes but before the tragic deed takes place; she recognizes her brother and spares his life. In the tragedy *Electra* also there is a happy ending predicted for Orestes and Electra by the end of the drama. In Poetics Aristotle has clearly stated that the tragedy with unhappy ending is no doubt deeply moving but the tragedy with happy ending is most satisfying to our human emotions."

P.L. Bhargava in his article 'A comparative Study of the Sanskrit and the Greek Dramatic Theory' compares the characters and plot of Greek and Indian dramas and says that "best Indian dramas are certainly not comedies as they have been hitherto called but tragedies pure and simple, while the only types of Indian play which can be given the designation of comedy are the *Prahasana* and the *Bhāṇa.*" He concludes his article with the remark that "There can be no greater travesty of truth than to use the word comedy for the Sanskrit *Nāṭaka* or *Prakarana.*"

Robert Antoine a scholar in this field, holds the view: "Like the Greek, Sanskrit drama draws most of its themes from the epic tradition.

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Between Aristotle's definition of tragedy as 'an imitation of action and life' and Dhananjaya's definition of नाय as 'avasthanukṛtir nātyam', there is an unmistakable affinity.\(^\text{12}\)

Tragedy raises the question of the ultimate meaning of human existence. Most of the Indian Dramas also deal with the same problem. Hence, we need not hesitate to analyse some of the Sanskrit dramas on the lines of Greek tragedy.

R.L. Singal, holds the view "This Sanskrit play, a solitary composition of its kind, comes very close to Greek Tragedy. The central idea of Greek Tragedy is that man learns through suffering, and it is through suffering that he becomes modest and humble. Man realises the futility of ambitions and accepts his own insignificance. But before he learns this lesson, he has to pay heavily for it; having done that he becomes a nobler and purer soul. That is what happens in \(\text{Urubhaṅga}\).\(^\text{13}\) T.R. Henn in his famous work *The Harvest of Tragedy* says, the greatest fruit of tragedy is self-knowledge through suffering.\(^\text{14}\) Hence, Singal considers \(\text{Urubhaṅga}\) of Bhāsa a technical tragedy.

While discussing 'Tragic pleasure or the enjoyment of the pathetic sentiment' Prof. Nagendra observes that "just as the mixture of the bitter improves the taste of the drink, in the same way the mixing up of the tragic or the pathetic enriches the ultimate aesthetic experience. This explanation is more pragmatic than philosophical. But it contains the germ

of the famous 'Interest Theory' of Western Criticism. Human life is a mixed pattern of pleasure and pain - both of them are equally inevitable and the human mind is naturally interested in both: the funeral engages our attention as much as the marriage, may be a little more. By the same logic man is attracted towards a tragic play, his interest in the inevitable gloom of life invariably draws him to a tragedy. It is not for the lighter entertainment or the pleasure but for the inherent interest in life in all its vicissitudes, that he loves to read or witness a tragedy. This is the central theme of most of the famous Sanskrit plays like *Pratimānatakām*, *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, *Mṛcchakāṭikām*, *Nāganandam*, *Uttararamacaritam*, *Caṇḍakauśikām* etc.

Philosopher Dr. S.Radhakrishnan is of the opinion that though we do not have technical tragedies in the Western sense, we have serious tragic situations in our literature. The basic reason for this kind of literary practice is the faith of Indians in the ultimate victory of good over the evil. He remarks - "Though we have the conflict between good and evil the Indian view does not adopt a Manichean dualism, which believes in the ultimacy of the opposites of good and evil. Good is bound to triumph. Truth will triumph. Suffering is not the final end of life. That is perhaps why we do not have tragedies. There are tragic situations where man is at grips with fate, where there is an inter-play of character and circumstance, but there are no tragic endings. For the writer has faith in the ultimate decency of things."16

15. Prof.V.Raghavan and Nagendra (Eds.). *An Introduction to Indian Poetics*, Madras, 1970, p.133.
C.S. Lewis in his article 'Death in Hamlet' writes about the nature of death committed by the tragic heroes in Shakespearean tragedies. He says "The sense in which death is the subject of Hamlet will become apparent if we compare it with other plays. Macbeth has commerce with Hell, but at the very outset of his career dismisses all thought of the life to come. For Brutus and Othello, suicide in the high tragic manner is escape and climax. For Lear death is deliverance. For Romeo and Antony, poignant loss. For all these, as for their author while he writes and the audience while they watch, death is the end: it is almost the frame of the picture. They think of dying: no one thinks, in these plays of being dead." 17

In Indian Dramas characters like Karna, Rama, Hariscandra, Šakuntala, Sita or Draupadi face severe adversities in their life, no body thinks of putting an immediate end to their life. They face the adversities with courage and confidence. They are optimistic and confident of seeing better days in their life. Hence it is said, 'पूर्ण जीवनतमानसः नरं कर्पशतादवि' (वामीयक्रि) This is the Indian way or approach to life, whereas Western approach to life is altogether different and when they face severe complexities in their life, they think of putting an end to their life. For them death is the liberation from the serious problems of life. Perhaps, this difference in outlook towards life is one of the main reason for the happy-ending in Sanskrit dramas.

he examines his past and feels distressed in spirit, unsure of himself, pulled this way and that. He becomes embittered, sick unto death. He is haunted with a sense of mystery, has the feeling of being weak, incompetent, frail, ignorant, evil, unholy. This unhappy being, whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, is terribly alone, struggling not with external forces but with himself. This divided, riven being, tormented by fear, at odds with himself, is weighed down by despair. There is no unhappiness greater than that of division."¹⁸ Perhaps, this kind of disappointment and despair is the root-cause of tragedy of human-beings. This is true with the most of the heroes of Greek and Shakespearean tragedies. King Oedipus, Ajax, Othello and King Lear etc. are good examples for this.

Dr. Radhakrishnan in his another well known work *The Hindu View of Life* discusses the theory of *Karma* and elaborates it in the following words - "The law of *Karma* encourages the sinner that it is never too late to mend. It does not shut the gates of hope against despair and suffering, guilt and peril. It persuades us to adopt a charitable view towards the sinner, for men are more often weak than vicious. It is not true that the heart of man is desperately wicked and that he prefers evil to good, the easy descent to hell to the steep ascent to heaven.

Unfortunately, the theory of *Karma* became confused with fatality in India when man himself grew feeble and was disinclined to do his best. It was made into an excuse for inertia and timidity and was turned into a message of despair and not of hope. It is said to the sinner, 'Not only are you a wreck, but that is all you ever could have been. That was your

pre-ordained being from the beginning of time.' I have said enough to indicate that such a philosophy of despair is not the necessary outcome of the doctrine of *Karma*.

Let us now turn to the practical side of Hinduism. Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. While it gives absolute liberty in the world of thought it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life. Hinduism insists not on religious conformity but on a spiritual and ethical outlook in life. 'The performer of the good and not the believer in this or that view - can never get into an evil state', *na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścit durgatim tāta gacchati* (*Bhagavadgītā* VI.40). In a very real sense practice precedes theory."¹⁹ Thus, it is clear from the above statement that, when there is a conflict between good and evil, ultimately good is bound to triumph. Man prefers truth and goodness and performer of the good-deeds will never get into an evil state. This is the central theme of Indian philosophy and way of life. This kind of belief is also equally responsible for the 'happy ending' in Indian dramas.

*Mahābhāṣya* of *Patañjali*, which is an exhaustive commentary on *Pāṇini'*s grammar composed nearabout 150 B.C. mentions about the performance on the stage of two plays, *Kamśavadhā*, 'the slaying of Kamśa' and *Balibandha*, the binding of Bali’ by the actors called as 'Śobhanikas'. The *Harivamśa* refers to the staging of the *Pralamśa-vadha*, 'the slaying of the demon Pralambā' and of the *Cāṇūramardana*, 'the crushing of the demon Cāṇūrā'. Though, we can not say any thing about

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the structure and plot-construction of these old plays, because none of them has survived today, but one can infer that the actual performance of these dramas indicates, during second century B.C. slaying of these evil-personalities on the stage was actually observed by the audience. Bharata prohibited the presentation of death and war on the stage (NS, GOS, XVIII-38 & 39), but perhaps, during pre-Bharata period it prevailed.

It is equally interesting to note the view of Bharata, where in he says "Drama is a representation of all the happenings of the world, of all the moods of the people, happy or unhappy. Here you have now a religious rite (Dharma), now some festivity or even frivolity, now peaceful serenity; then again laughter or a fight, or a love-making or a death." Thus, it is clear that Natyaśastra does not prohibit death on the stage. Thus there are instances for and against the presentation of death on the stage in Natyaśastra.

**Directions of Dramaturgists for the depiction of Pathetic Sentiment (करुण रस)**

There is a close connection between the concept of tragic consciousness and the pathetic sentiment. Hence, an idea about the theoretical aspects of Karunā rasa as elaborated by the Indian canonists is helpful for a better understanding of tragic concept.

"Bharata states that the pathetic sentiment proceeds from the permanent mental state of sorrow (Śoka). It grows from determinants (Vibhava), such as affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss

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of wealth, death, captivity, flight, accidents or any other misfortune. This is to be represented on the stage by means of consequents such as shedding tears, lamentation, dryness of the mouth, change of colour, drooping limbs, being out of breath, loss of memory and the like. Transitory states connected with it are indifference, langour, anxiety, yearning, excitement, delusion, fainting, sadness, dejection, illness, inactivity, insanity, epilepsy, fear, indolence, death, paralysis, tremor, change of colour, weeping, loss of voice and the like. According to Śaṅkuka, Karuṇa (pity or sympathy at the worldly level) is the heart-felt compassion. The same is called Karuṇarasa when it arises in the heart of the aesthetes who infer grief in the actor from its expressions which constitute reason for the inference."²²

Śaṅkuka is of the opinion that Karuṇa is pity which includes a desire to help another who is in suffering and distress.

"Dhanañjaya and Dhanika agree with Bharata and as stated by them the pathetic sentiment, with the permanent state sorrow or grief (Śoka) as its essence results from loss of something cherished and from attaining something undesired. In consequence of it, there occur heaving of sighs, weeping, paralysis, lamentation etc. and the like, and the transitory states, sleeping, epilepsy, depression, sickness, death and so forth."²³

The VI Chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra deals with pathetic sentiment or Karuṇarasa. It goes like this:


²³ Ibid., p.259.
The III part of Natyadarpana of Ramacandra and Guñacandra defines Karuñaras (करुण रस) in the following words:

अथ करुणः

"मृतु-धन्य-प्रतापस्य-शाप-व्यसन-सम्भवः

करुणोऽभिनययतास्य, शाप-वैवर्ण्य-निन्द्यः || १४ ||

शापोऽभिन्नस्यहेतृतिध्वन्यभाववत आक्रोशः || व्यसनमध्यः || अनेन देशोद्भावस्यां बिमुखजाति रहस्यानि ||

एक्ते विमुखेऽव्यः शोकस्थायी करुणो रसः सम्भवति || शाप-वैवर्ण्यां निन्द्याद्-प्रतापोऽध्वनिनुभावः सुविचारः || निन्द्यमात्राः शापयन्यात्र चोपारः || अनेन देशस्त्रदर्शनानि गृहिते || व्यचित्रावश्यः निन्द्यः-प्रताप-शाप-वैवर्ण्य-व्यचित्रावश्यः || २४ ||"
Reputed scholar, Surendra Nath Shastri elaborates the *Karunā Rasa* in the following words - "Grief (*Soka*) arising from the loss of a kindled, or huge wealth, or from some insurmountable difficulty assumes the form of the pathetic sentiment when manifested by means of its *Vibhāvas*, *Anubhāvas* and *Sañcāri-bhāvas*.

The substrata (the *alamābana vibhāvas*) of the pathetic sentiment are the deceased kinsman, the lost object or the worst calamity on the one hand, and the sufferer on the other.

It is aroused by some reference to the lost person's merits, some talks about him, the sight of the articles of his use, a visit to his residence, the occasion where his presence is missed, the days of anniversary, offering libations to him, and similr commemorating scenes. These are some of the facts which serve as the excitants (*uddīpana*) of the pathos.

The squalor of the sufferer, his shedding of tears, shouting, dullness, and choking of throat are the consequences (*anubhāvas*).

Disgust, swoon, sadness, anxiety, uneasiness, moroseness and stupor are the ancilliary feelings that prevail in the *Karunā rasa*.

Paleness, shiver, change of voice and stupefaction are the self-existent states that become visible on the person of the aggrieved."26

Let us turn our attention towards the prohibitions made by dramaturgists regarding the presentation of death on the stage. Bharata, in the XVIII chapter of *Natyaśastra* says-

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As stated in verse number 39, Bharata forbids the death of a hero who is always supposed to prosper. Commentator Abhinavagupta explains it in the following words:

Mārṣṭva kāṁ nīryāmāṇya kāṁ bānabāyanāṁ, tato nāṭyaprayōgī-samastabhañgraṇātgrāhīya vilayeś: samajānāna nirvāh-pratipātīrītī tū sārvadhī māṇya samānāṁ nātma vā bharatamāṇya va jātayā cākṣyaḥ.

Dāsarūpakakāra Dhananājaya also forbids the presentation of scenes like travelling of long distance, murder, fight, revolution, attack, taking food, bath, intercourse, applying of cosmetics, dressing etc. He says:

Dūrañcī cāṁ yudhāmarṣṭyāśadārśādāvāayaḥ || III-34

Sārobiṁ bojanāṁ śtanāṁ yuḍāṁ chañchnapatam ||

Ampar gūrūdāṇīṁ pratyakṣaṇaṁ n niṣṭhirastam || III-35 ||

Further he says:

Nādhikāraṁ cāpya śrayyamānāyaṁ n c Ṛ III-3628
Death of the main character or of the hero should not be shown in the development of the plot.

Viśwanāth, author of Sāhityadarpāṇam recorded:

विषम्भनोत्स्वपि नी च बाच्योऽपिष्ठित: ||
अन्योन्येन निर्भावानं न कुर्यात्मवस्तनो: || VI-316

Thus, according to Sāhityadarpanakāra the death of a hero should not be shown even in interludes.

Though theory says like this, there are instances of presentation of death on the stage, directly or indirectly. Daśaratha in Pratimanaṭakam dies on the stage. Death of Jimūtvāhāna in Nāgāṇandaṁ, is also directly presented on the stage. In Īrubhaṅgam, Duryodhana is shown dying on the stage. Death of Karna is also suggested at the end of Karnaṁbharam. Thus, there are good number of examples of the depiction of sad and sorrowful situations, presented directly on the stage where the tragic consciousness of the poet has worked superbly. Let us take up certain important dramas for analysis in the forthcoming chapters.