M.A. (ENGLISH) PART-I **COURSE-II**

SEMESTER-I **CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA**

UNIT NO. I

Department of Distance Education
Punjabi University, Patiala

INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

LESSON NOs.

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1.2 : (a) Development of Drama
(b) English Drama : Renaissance and Elizabethan

ARISTOTLE : *POETICS*
OR
ON THE ART OF POETRY

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NOTE : Students can download the syllabus from website of department **www.pbidde.org**

LESSON NO. 1.1

DRAMA : CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN

DRAMA : ORIGIN

Introduction to the Study of Drama

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1.1 Study of Drama

Dear student, there are many basic terms and concepts related to drama and theatre, knowledge of which always helps us in understanding a drama whether we are reading it or watching it being played. In this lesson, we shall discuss those important terms pertaining to drama which are prescribed in your syllabus for study.

1.2 Definition and Essence

The genre of drama is different from the other genres of literature, e.g. poetry, or prose and novel, because in the other genres of literature the writer mainly depends on the words, but drama is a multiple genre, using words, scenic effects, gestures, actors and the organizing talents of a producer. It is a literary form designed for the theatre where actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action and utter the written dialogue. Marjorie Boulton defines it a "three dimensional genre", a literature that "walks before our eyes."

The dialogues in a drama can be written in poetic form also which is called Poetic Drama. Many dramas in English are written in heroic couplets (iambic pentameter lines rhyming in pairs). There is another form of drama writing also called Closet Drama which is written in the form of drama but is intended to be read rather than to be performed in the theatre e.g. Milton's *Samson Agonistes,* Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron's *Manfred.*

1.3 Essence of dramatic art

In order to understand the definition of the term 'drama', we must understand the meaning of the words 'drama' and 'dramatic art' i.e. the essence of the dramatic art, which is different from arts of poetry and fiction writing. In order to understand the essence of this art, we have to define those particular qualities which distinguish it from other arts.

1.3.1 Drama is a reflection of truth

First of all, drama is a copy of life, a mirror of the world, "a reflection of truth." It is a mirror in which human nature is reflected. But this does not mean that drama is only an imitation of the real world. The dramatist with his imagination tries to present the things as life-like as possible. S. T. Coleridge rightly says that "the drama is not a copy but an imitation of nature." A dramatist takes a hint from nature orders what he has observed and organizes them in a compact whole.

1.3.2 Recognition of will

The second characteristic of drama is the "recognition of will". It is the action of a will, conscious of itself which brings obstacles in the total action of the protagonist and brings the elements of conflict. In fact, drama arises when any person or persons in play are consciously up against some antagonistic persons or circumstances or fortunes.

1.3.3 Presence of the audience

Another thing which marks the art of drama/theatre is the presence of the audience. In fact, "we cannot conceive of a play without an audience." While poetry is the particular art of expression, usually in rhythmic terms, and the fiction—the art of expression by means of a story in prose, drama is the art of expression by means of a story told to an audience assembled together in one place.

1.3.4 Human factor and machinery

The dramatist, more than any other artist, is dependent on the human factor and on machinery. He has to keep in mind, while opening his lines, the characters as actors who have to perform a particular action on a stage. Thus "a play without an audience to interpret it and actors to perform it, is inconceivable."

1.3.5 Physical endurance and capability of the characters

A dramatist unlike a poet and a novelist has to write a drama with thought of the theatre, the physical and material problems of theatre. He has to keep in mind the physical endurance and capability of the characters who have to perform the action and also of the audience who have to watch the action performed. The bindings of the time are to be observed. For purely material reasons the dramatist has to submit to a general but unwritten

law that his play should not presuppose a time of action greater than about three hours.

1.3.6 One character must occupy the stage

Along with it, since the dramatist works with the human material, he must normally take care that one of his characters remains on the stage the whole time.

1.3.7 Drama should create an illusion of reality

The dramatist, while organizing and presenting life-like scenes, should be able to create an illusion of reality and for this purpose, the style, the diction of the dialogues should be as far as possible like the real speech of people in life.

1.3.8 Element of surprise and shock

The element of surprise and shock in a dramatic art is the essence of its success as a drama. The drama is at once the most peculiar and the most enthralling of all the types of literature.

1.4 Drama Vs. Novel

On the basis of these peculiar characteristics of drama, we can differentiate between a drama and a novel.

Though a drama and a novel both deal with story and an action from beginning to the end with a middle and there are many characters who come into contact with one another, have various relations and conflicts, action ends either on a happy or sad note, yet there is a lot of difference between both the literary forms, the ways in which the human material is arranged and presented in them.

1.4.1 Action not narration

First of all, whereas in a novel, mainly the action is told/narrated by the writer himself and even if the characters are made to converse with each other, wherever required the writer/novelist gives the comments on the whole action and takes the action further. In a drama the whole action is known through the conversation/dialogue of the action and being told, here the action is shown as it is going on. The dramatist keeps himself away from the action and the characters.

1.4.2 Characters reveal themselves in drama

Whereas in a novel, the characters are revealed and commented on by the novelist in a drama, the characters reveal themselves either through their dialogue or their action.

1.4.3 Dialogues are spoken by the characters

Since in a drama, the dialogues are to be spoken by the characters, the language and sentences of the dialogues should be such as not to make the whole thing monotonous and not presentable on the stage. But in a novel, the novelist can make the dialogues and speeches as long as he wants to convey the things in detail. Whereas in drama consciousness and relevance of dialogues are very necessary, there is no bar in a novel.

1.4.4 Stage directions

A dramatist, while writing a drama has to keep in mind particular stage directions and dramatic conventions but a novelist is not bound by any such theatrical requirements.

1.4.5 Performance in limited period of two to three hours

In a drama, the physical endurance and capability of the characters/actors and audience are to be taken care of and this makes the dramatist limit the performance of action in two or three hours. In a novel, the span of the action can range from even one generation or more.

1.4.6 Drama can be written in verse as well

A novel is a narrative, generally written in prose, the drama can be written in verse also.

1.4.7 Incidents, episodes and subplots

In a novel, it is possible to have many incidents, episodes and even subplots. Sometimes, the separate stories incorporated into the book have long evaluative comments. A drama cannot afford to incorporate these loose and irrelevant things as this will mar the unity of action and coherence of the plot in a drama.

1.4.8 Requirement of visual imagination

The reading of a drama makes demand on our visual imagination and we visualize the whole action being performed and the dialogues being spoken before our eyes but the narrative of a novel does not make any such demand. We read things and comprehend them.

These are some of the elements on the basis of which two genres are distinguished but in the twentieth century many novelists have incorporated the elements of drama also in their novels.

1.5 Drama and Theatre

Drama is distinguished from the other literary forms in the way that it is written with a design for performance in a theatre. The theatre is a place where men come to see as well as to hear. The physical action, accordingly, is absolutely demanded on the stage and those plays which are suitable for physical action are theatrically more successful and

popular. Therefore, the full effect of a written play comes only from its theatrical representation. Schlegel in his book, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* writes, "the form of dramatic poetry, that is, representation of an action by dialogue without the aid of the narrative, demands the theatre as its necessary complement. Visible representation is essential to the dramatic form… Therefore, a dramatic work must always be regarded from a double point of view, how far it is poetical and how far it is theatrical."

There are many written dramas which are poetically very weak but theoretically very strong. For example, a melodrama of the early nineteenth century, though it might lack grace of style and even of proper characterization yet it possesses all the qualities to be staged in a theatre. *Charley's Aunt*, a highly popular farcical comedy by Brandon Thomas, though it cannot be called a great piece of literature, yet it is an excellent play of its kind. We also find, on the other hand, that a play may be lacking almost every theatrical requirement yet possesses the most glorious poetry, e.g., Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is not a good theatrical piece, as it is merely a stretch of episodes but it excels in lyricism.

What is required is that there should be maintained a balance between these opposing qualities i.e. poetry, beauty of diction and requirements of the stage performance. Since the play is meant for being 'played' and performed, the theatrical quality and necessity should be kept in mind by the dramatist while writing a play, and arranging and framing his plot, giving dialogues to his characters, writing long poetic speeches, and portraying his characters.

The dramatist should devise and find an excellent plot, and out of this plot i.e., framework, he should frame an equally excellent scenario, and plan the situations in such a way that they should be thrilling, effective, coherent, well knit and logical. He should arrange the exits and entrances with a sure knowledge of the stage craft.

Similarly, while writing, the consideration in drama should not be to write a poetic dialogue, but the poetry is to be kept subservient to dramatic necessity. The dramatic language is subordinate to character and should be eminently suitable for historical enunciation. The dramatist, while writing a drama, with a view to make it a theatrical success, puts himself in the place not of a series of living characters but of a company of actors each of whom is taking a certain part in his play and who at the same time has ability to prevent his own personality from intruding into what should be the dialogue of another. There may be much poetry and much lyricism in a drama but that poetry should not seem to be poetic speech of one man and it must be subordinate to these essential requirements of the stage performances.

1.6 Origin and Growth of Drama

The dawn of the European theatrical art started in ancient Greece and Rome; and many Greek tragedies and comedies were written by the dramatists like Sophocles, Seneca, Aristophanes and many others. The best amphitheatres were established by the Romans in England for the production of plays. But with the departure of Romans, the theatre also stopped flourishing. In the middle ages, the art of action was revived not with the plays but with the individual players, jesters, clowns tumblers and minstrels.

Later on, the Church brought back drama into England by the tenth century though earlier the Church itself had condemned the theatre of the Roman empires because of its spectacles and scenes. Many biblical incidents and Easter celebrations were dramatized by the priests themselves and the choir boys. Along with these dramatic representations, many liturgical dramas also developed dealing with the celebration of May Day, Harvest time, the birth of Christ. At first, the liturgical play was only a part of the Church services, but by the thirteenth century it had grown and every part of the church was used in an action which converted the whole edifice into one stage, with the audience present and actors performing.

By and by the dramatic element in the whole performance became stronger than its religious purpose, and between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the drama became secularized, and the medium of dialogue was now English and not Latin. The proper dramatic scripts were written. Drama now became a social activity, a cooperative enterprise, and instead of priests, proper actors with skilled craftsmanship and with their own companies staged dramas. This was a significant development in the growth of drama and the dramatic activity was widespread. Along with these religious 'plays' there also developed morality plays in which the characters were vices and virtues and some of the authors of the morality plays were able to make real and contemporary characters as vices and virtues. The best known examples of morality plays are *Mankind* and *Everyman.* Though the characters in these plays are abstractions; they have relationships which are human though the whole action is controlled by the lesson which is to be taught, the play has a natural development, often a genuine realism, with a direct and sincere pathos.

Apart from the morality plays there also existed short plays called *Interludes* which were neither religious plays nor allegorical like moralities, rather these interludes were amusing in nature and aimed at a connected series of entertaining speeches, supported with a minimum of characters or plot.

In the Renaissance, (i.e. Sixteenth century) the form of drama developed and there was revival of interest in the classical drama. The dramatists like

Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare enriched the various genres of drama by following classical forms as well as by inventing new elements in the form of tragedies and comedies, and also brought out many dramatic forms like tragic-comedy, chronicle and history plays. They dealt with the current conflicting and realistic problems of their times through their plots and characters, and performance of the dramas in theatre was also widened. The dramatists of the times brought variety in the diction of dialogue using both poetic as well as the prose language in drama.

A contemporary of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, through his down to earth realistic comedies satirized the vices prevalent in London society and highlighted the moral purpose of drama.

In the seventeenth century, the realistic element in drama was pursued, and a general vein of romantic sentimentality was combined with it by Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Beaumont and Fletcher. During the first forty years of the seventeenth century, many new kinds of tragedies were written by John Webster and Cyril Tourner, called the revenge tragedies which developed with a disregard for the motives of good and evil and in defence of the moral order of being. A few dramatists of this period like Thomas Middleton and Philip Massinger excelled in the art of comedy writing also with an aim of pinpointing the commercial classes. Other dramatists of this period like John Ford and James Shirley, though they dealt with the earlier themes yet they brought the excellence of poetry to drama.

In 1642 theatres were officially closed by Puritans and the onset of civil wars brought a setback to English drama. Only masques were being played for the entertainment in the courts of Public. The masque was a dramatic edifice into which poet and stage designer met to make an entertainment with dances, music and elaborate scenic devices but the national spirit in drama had disintegrated.

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the theatres were reopened. The drama after this period did not represent the whole of the age, rather it became only an entertainment of the court. A distinctive kind of comedy called the comedy of manners was written by the three dramatists named Etherege, Whycherley and Congreve. From this comedy all the romantic elements were excluded, and there was a witty portrayal of the eloquent ladies and gentlemen of the day in their conversation and their amorous intrigues.

Another form of drama called 'heroic drama' was popularized by Dryden in which the characters were given grand status, and themes of love and honour were dealt with.

In the eighteenth century, not much of drama was written. Some sentimental comedies were brought out by John Gay, Richard Steele,

Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumbeland. The dramatists like Oliver Goldsmith and Sheridan brought the realism and brilliance of the Restoration dialogue into comedy and saved the comedy from sentimentalism.

In the early nineteenth century, the genre of drama did not grow as much as the genres of poetry and novel did. The popular things were regular spectacle, melodrama, and farce. Most of the romantic poets tried their hands at drama writing but were not much successful. There was no queen or courts of the 16th, 17th and 18th century to encourage the talent of drama. Moreover, the comedies written during this century were relatively unrelated to the life of the times.

In the second half of the century, a new life was brought to English drama and theatre by Ibsen, G. B. Shaw, Oscar Wilde and many others whose dramas were more subtle in stagecraft and profound in thought. In the twentieth century, there was a tremendous growth in the talent of drama and the dramas of the times written by H. Granvile Barker, John Galsworthy and John Ervine. They explore the contemporary social problems in their plays. In the thirties of this century, a significant development was made in verse drama by T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Christopher Fry.

After the First World War, many new themes and techniques were developed in drama, and the genre drama has grown much after the first two decades of the twentieth century.

1.7 Dramatic Action

By dramatic action, we generally mean what the characters do and are made to do by the dramatist. It is the basis of an act or deed, which may be pursued with words or physical movements. An action may also be purely mental but the number of mental actions in a drama must be limited if the audience is to follow what is happening on the stage.

There is another meaning of the word 'action', the sense in which Aristotle used it in his *Poetics* in his famous definition of tragedy. For him, an action was the thing which drama imitated. "Tragedy", then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude." In this sense, the word action means the doing, i.e., "the one large action, the objective which constitutes the whole play. Ideas of intent and will are the definite components of this main action, i.e., "objective", but an "objective" or action written in an actor's script only becomes an "action" for use when it forms a part of the actual performance of the deeds undertaken to accomplish that objective. For this purpose, immediate actions are needed which make the major "action" work.

Now the nature of presenting an "action" introduces physical materials which must be organized i.e., the action must take place in some space; people are also present as visual elements and the movements or its lack will be noticed. No other art contains many different materials to structure

it by the rules of art as does drama. In elaborating an action the structures of other arts like music may organize their materials in their own typical ways, but the organization of the nature and workings within dramatic structure requires much skill and craftsmanship on the part of the playwright, both in the matters of writing it, perfectly for the purpose of coherent reading as well as for the purpose of action. The further division of action that will make the central action to be earned requires not only the systematic organization of plot but also allotting the proper roles to the actors, dialogues, etc. Even the allotment and performance of the smallest action by a character should be very appropriate to bring out the successful effect of the dramatic action. The playwright creates his dialogues with the imaginative grasp of purpose and given circumstances, which the actor uses to direct a physical manifestation of actions. The dramatic situations are also created with proper imaginative grasp, and the element of suspense is also maintained throughout to keep the reader and audience alert and waiting for future action. All the individual actions in a drama should have significance; although they are rarely seen as separate, and the greatest significance of action in drama must come from their relations to one another and to the parts and the whole of the play.

1.8 Elements of dramatic structure

1.8.1 Plot

Generally, the action, i.e. "objective" of a play is conveyed through a story which is systematically structured and is called "plot".

The plot in a dramatic work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered towards achieving particular, emotional and artistic effects. There is a great variety of plot forms. For example, some plots are designed to achieve tragic effects and others to achieve the effects of comedy, romance or satire; and there is further infinite variety of plot patterns. But the component elements of plots include the chief character of a work around whom our interest centres and he is called a protagonist or hero and he is pitted against an important opponent, who is called antagonist and the relation between them is of conflict. In addition to the conflict between individuals, there may be the conflict of a protagonist against fate, or against the circumstances, that stand between opposing desires or values in a character's own mind.

As a plot progresses, it arouses expectations in the audience or readers about the future events. This anxiety about what is going to happen to the characters next is known as suspense and if, what in fact happens violates our expectations, it is known as surprise. The interplay of surprise and suspense is a prime source of the magnetic power and vitality of an on going plot. There is also an element of Dramatic Irony in a plot, which is a kind of suspenseful expectation when we as readers/audience foresee the oncoming disaster or triumph but the character in the play does not see it.

A good plot also has a unity of action, which makes it "an artistic whole," if there is a single, complete and ordered structure of action, and all are directed towards the intended effect and in which, none of the component parts, or incidents is unnecessary. Aristotle also said that all the parts are "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoint and dislocate the whole."

In many plays, the structural unity of the plot can also be achieved with double plots. There is a subplot also in a drama, a second story, that is complete and interesting in its own right, introduced into the play, and if it is skilfully managed, it serves to broaden our perspective on the main plot. Those underplots or subplots may have either the relation of analogy to the main plot or of counterpoint against it.

The order of a unified plot is a continuous sequence of the beginning, middle and end. The beginning initiates the action in a way which looks forward to something more; the middle presumes what has gone before and requires something to follow, and the end that follows what has gone before. At the end, we are satisfied that the plot is complete.

The traditional pattern in a five act play consists of a rising action, climax and falling action, i.e., first there is a clarification, and rising actions reaches the climax of the hero's fortunes. Then comes crisis or turning point in the fortunes of the protagonist. This inaugurates the falling action and the whole action is brought to a close by some final discovery, i.e., "unknotting" of the action or decision. This is called "denouement" i.e., untying of the plot.

1.8.2 Acts and Scenes

There are also divisions made in the action of the play by dividing the play into various Acts and Scenes. An act denotes a major division in the action of play. Such a division was introduced into English drama by the Elizabethan dramatists who structured the actions into five Acts. In the present century, we find the plays with three Acts, two Acts and there are many one Act plays also. This division is mainly conceived as convention which is a slicing up of the play, dividing the progress of the action.

Acts are often subdivided into smaller units which we know as Scenes which usually consist of units of action, in which there is no change of place or break in the continuity of time. In some recent plays, there is no division in acts and these plays are structured as a sequence of Scenes or episodes. In many plays there are only scenes.

1.8.3 Dialogue

In a drama what character converses/says/speaks is called "dialogue". In fact, a play is basically a dialogue and though a play can be conceived without good plot and character yet it cannot survive if the dialogue is non-speakable and over-formal. The main reason of the dialogue being so

important and central to the success of a play is that a play is to be acted and performed with the characters speaking to one another and the things have to be conveyed to the audience by someone. The dialogue can be in verse or prose, varying from writer to writer and character to character.

While writing a play, the playwright should bring out the dialogue in such a way that the actor can speak his lines without stumbling, stopping for break wherever required and convey to the audience everything in proper intonation. Moreover, the writer should keep in mind that the diction of dialogues changes with each type of drama. For example, there is required abundance of wit in comedy, glory of diction in tragedy, lucidity and speed of argument in drama of ideas, human probability and individual idioms in speech given to different characters, originality of phrase and vocabulary, and vividness of description.

Since unlike a novelist, a dramatist cannot step in with his explanation and comment on what the characters mean to say and what is happening in the minds of characters by telling us directly, and the reader and the audience have to learn by listening to the conversation between the characters, hence the dialogues and the speech given to the characters should be self-explanatory. Moreover, the conversation and the dialogue are often more concise and devoid of irrelevancies. Another important aspect of dialogues is that the speech of every character is differentiated, and normally, every speech is characteristic of the speaker.

Moreover, the tragic or serious treatment of individual speech is concerned mainly with imagery and quality of imagination and these aspects of speech show something of the inner personality. In comedy, we find that the differences are more than the superficial distinctions of mannerism.

Another important aspect of dialogue is that the dialogue between two or more characters should resemble to the real conversation. The conversation should cerate an impression of the living scene.

There are certain conventions of stage dialogue which make it opposed to real life. For example, the use of soliloquies (the long speech) through which the character is not conversing with others, but by speaking aloud to himself, reveals himself and his real intention. Another convention of stage dialogues is the 'aside' which is a way of showing inner thought as opposed to outward expression. In the 'aside', a character, in the process of conversation, says something which is not meant to be heard and known to the persons present on the stage or the person with whom he is talking on the stage, but for the reader and the audience. Though by the standards of realism it sounds quite idiotic yet 'aside' is accepted on the stage as a means of showing that what one character says to another is insincere or has a double meaning.

Apart from the conventions of 'stage dialogue', another aspect is the handling of the dialogue by the dramatist which modifies the speed of

drama. For example a scene with a few long speeches seems to move in a slower and steadier manner than the one in which speeches are short and come in quick succession. Generally, the dialogue of comedy moves more quickly than that of a tragedy, though in comedy there is often less action or at least less momentous action.

Though the dialogues in a play should be to the point and very relevant, and should bring in some information vital to the development of the play yet we also find that a play often contains number of great set speeches in prose or verse. Though these are dictated by the passion and creative joy of the writer yet these are brought forth by the writer to give the great actors an opportunity to show skill and fervour in the handling of emotion.

Thus, we see that the writing of dialogues should be suitable to the needs of conveying the information and carrying on the plot along with fulfilling the function of pleasing by the beauty, wit or oddity. The beautiful combination of these is a mark of the greatness of any good play and of a playwright.

1.8.4 Characterization

Since a play deals with the particular events in the life of human beings or issues related to these, and the action is carried on by human agents, who become the most important elements who are called the dramatis personae or characters. These characters are persons endowed with the moral and dispositional qualities that are expressed in what they say i.e., the dialogue and what they do i.e. the action. A character may remain essentially stable or unchanged in his outlook and disposition from the beginning to the end of the play, built around a single idea or quality. Such type of character is called a “flat character”. A character may also undergo a radical change through a gradual development, or as a result of an extreme crisis, and is more complex in temperament and motivation. Such a character is termed as a round character. The required quality of a character, whether he is stable or changes, is “consistency”, i.e., he should not suddenly break off and act in a way not plausibly grounded in his temperament.

The portrayal of a character in drama differs from that of a character portrayed in a novel. Though in both the genres, the characters reveal themselves in the process of communicating through dialogues and through their action, yet, whereas, in a novel the author himself intervenes authoritatively in order to describe, and often to evaluate the motives and dispositional qualities of his character, in drama the author merely presents his characters talking and acting, and leaves the reader to infer what motives and intentions lie behind what they do and say.

There is also a different in our knowing about a character in a drama and in what motives and intentions lay behind what they do and say.

There is also a difference of our knowing about a character in a drama and in real life. For example, whereas in real life, it is never possible to know a

person fully even if we have lived with him for years, but while reading or watching a drama, we learn much more about a character and the details of his personality in two/three hours. By following certain conventions and through certain techniques, the dramatist with rapid communication reveals many facts of the personality of a character. These methods can be enlisted as follows:

1. A character may explain himself more or less directly to the audience in a *soliloquy*, i.e., alone aloud speech which is intended to be a direct and sincere expression of the speaker's real thoughts, i.e., his mental conflict, or his real intentions that he does not want to share with others.
2. The information about a character can also be conveyed by the use of the 'confidant' in whom one character, mainly the protagonist, confides his innermost thoughts which he wants to hide from others.
3. We learn about characters in the play mainly by their actions at the moments of crises when they make decisions.
4. We also learn about characters from what other people say about them and this gives us different views of people about a single character.
5. Of course, we also learn much about the character from the comments and interpretations of the people when that character leaves the stage, i.e., through the different reactions of the readers.

This is to be kept in mind that in almost all the plays there are major characters and minor characters, flat characters and complex characters, and the dramatists portray not only the major characters with interest but the minor characters are also portrayed well. The mark of good characterization is whether the dramatists can show us different kinds of people and make them all equally convincing while they are on the stage, and create them in such a way that they seem to live like real human beings, provoke discussions and linger in our memories. The *diction* allotted to them should be appropriate to their roles and ranks.

16.8.5 Stage Directions

Since every drama is written with an objective of performance, the dramatist wants it to be performed in a particular way. How a stage director knows the original intentions of the author, the way he wanted the action to be performed, is done through the mention of stage directions at every step, to carry out the action it implies. These stage directions are very necessary to bring out the proper effect and meaning of drama.

In the plays of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the stage directions are mostly implied in the dialogues and also mentioned in the parentheses. If this is not realized and directions are not obeyed, the speech may lose much of its interest.

With the help of an example from William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* we can see how the stage directions are given and implied in the dialogue, and how the dramatist wants the actors to dress, behave and act.

We come to know that the dramatist has given the directions for the actor: Rosalind is to give the chain to Orlando, and then talk to him. After this, Rosalind has to look towards Celia and address her, "Shall we go, Coz?"

Another example of stage directions can be taken from Act IV Scene III (line 159) of *As You Like It* where after hearing from Oliver, the news of Orlando's encounter with a lioness and the injuries suffered by him, Rosalind is to faint and she faints and the direction for this is given by the dramatist within parenthesis (Rosalind swoons) and then Celia says, "Why how now Ganymede my Sweet Ganymede!"

Thus we see that with the help of the characters present on the stage, the writer throws hints for the further action to be performed. But the extra stage directions given are the minimum. Though we have actual stage directions, how the characters are to proceed in actions yet the dialogue mainly implies the course of action.

As compared to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, modern playwrights use more stage directions in their scripts so that it is perhaps easier to grasp the significance of the modern play in the silent reading of the script. These stage directions throw much fresh light on the contemporary play production. For example, in John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* there are many stage directions given in parentheses at every step in the action, how the characters have to speak, move and behave.

In the middle of Act I, when Alison and Cliff are talking, Cliff goes out. The dialogues and directions follow as given below:

Cliff : I'll just pop down the bathroom and get some. Are you sure you're all right?

Alison : Yes.

Cliff : (Crossing the door). Won't be a minute.

Exit

(She leans back in the chair and looks up at the ceiling. She breathes in deeply and brings her hands up to her face. She winces as she feels the pain in her arm and she lets it fall. She runs her hand through her hair).

Alison: (In a clinched whisper) Oh, God!

Cliff : It's this scented muck. Do you think it'll be alright?

Alison : That'll do.

Cliff : Here we are then. Let's have your arm/

(He kneels down beside her, and she holds out her arm.) I've put it under the tap. It's quite soft. I'll do it ever so gently. (Very carefully, he rubs the soap over the burn). All right? (She nods). You're a brave girl.

Alison : I don't feel very brave. (Tears harshening her voice). I really don't Cliff. I don't think I can take much more (Turns her head away). I think I fell rather sick.

Cliff : All over now (Puts the soap down). Would you like me to get you something?

Thus we see that John Osborne has given very minute and continuous directions in the script very frequently for the reader to know the tone and expression of the dialogues as well as giving guidelines for the theatre people to follow the gestures and movements to bring out the intended effect in understanding action.

1.8.6 Dramatic conventions

Drama, like other arts, has its own conventions and rules. In fact, the art of drama writing requires the following of certain conventions both because it is poetic genre of a special kind as well as it is to be performed and enacted before the spectator and the audience and has to create the illusion of reality before them. There are certain conventions that are determined by the requirements of technical devices of particular types of staging, by the arrangement in the auditorium, and even by the circumstances in which the audience come to witness the plays. But these conventions are related to particular age and style of play house, hence they change from time to time. For example, the kind of theatre and the stage requirements that were available in Shakespeare's times have certainly changed now, and the dramatist of each period keeps in mind these changes while following the stage conventions. No doubt, in the designing and the division of the plot, in the handling of characters, in the writing of dialogues, and in the presentation of action, the playwright has to follow particular conventions but each playwright uses his own individual themes and skills in these matters.

Another dramatic convention that has to be kept in mind in order to make a drama successful both as an art form as well as an enactment of the illusion of reality is the observance of three unities i.e., the unity of time the unity of action and the unity of place.

Aristotle in his *Poetics*, while differentiating between the genre of epic and tragedy remarks that as contrasted to the epic, the action of a tragedy has a circumscribed fictional time i.e., the epic might deal in lengthy period of time whereas drama normally confines itself to a short period. Aristotle also emphasizes the desirability of preserving some kind of unity in the action i.e., the plot organization should be systematic and not a series of loose episodes and this unity must be organic which could not be secured by the mechanical device of

making some one man the centre and the cause of the plot a mere series of incidents relating to one person, not in themselves containing dramatic unity. Aristotle suggested these two unities, and the convention of the third unity i.e., the unity of impression is also added by the critics of drama.

Though the writers and critics of drama since the time of Aristotle to the present day, have observed and interpreted three unities in their own ways yet these have generally been followed by them.

1.9 Important terms pertaining to Drama and Stage

In the foregoing discussion, we have seen that drama and theatre are mutually dependent on each other. Since drama is written with an aim of staging it in a theatre, and whatever is written in the script of drama in the printed form is a kind of recipe which is cooked on the stage, in the way the directions are given in recipe. Therefore, all the terms discussed till now, like Action, Plot, Act, Scenes, Characters, Dialogue, three unities, Stage Direction, Tragedy, Comedy etc. pertain to drama as well as theatre. There are a few other terms also which have not been covered till now. We shall discuss these briefly here:

1.9.1 Comic relief

It means the use of humorous characters, speeches, or scenes in a serious or tragic drama. Such elements were very common in Elizabethan tragedy and were included and made an integral part of the play with a purpose of relieving tension and adding variety, by pluck and luck, and the stock boy meets the girl in a story.

1.9.2 Pathos

Pathos means passions and deep feelings of tenderness, pity or sympathetic sorrow to be evoked from the audience by designing a scene or passage in a particular way such as unexpected misfortunes meted out to a very gentle and noble man.

1.9.3 Soliloquy

Soliloquy is a dramatic speech uttered by one character while he is alone on the stage or while under the impression of being alone. The soliloquist thus reveals his inner thought and feeling to the audience, either in supposed self-communication or in a consciously direct address. Soliloquies have often appeared in the plays since the age of Shakespeare, notably in his *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The Elizabethan theatre used it regularly and brought the device to its excessive height. Although the modern theatre, communicating for the most part by the conventions of relations, has made little use of soliloquy, yet in many plays we find this device effectively used.

1.9.4 Aside

Aside is a short speech or remark by a character in a drama. It is either directed at the audience or at another character, which by convention is supposed to be inaudible to other characters on stage. William Shakespeare used this device very effectively in his plays. But this device has rarely been used since the end of the nineteenth century when it was prominent in melodrama.

1.10 Suggested Readings

1. C. Carter Colwell, *A Students' Guide to Literature* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968)
2. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms (9th edition)*
3. Gagan Raj, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Terms (Arnold Publications, 1990)*

M.A. (ENGLISH) Part-I **COURSE-II**

SEMESTER-I **CLASSICAL AND**

ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

LESSON NO. 1.2

ENGLISH DRAMA : RENAISSANCE AND ELIZABETHAN

12.2. The Renaissance and the Reformation

12.2.1 Meaning of Renaissance

The word Renaissance meaning rebirth is commonly applied to the movement or period which marks the transition from the medieval to the modern world in Western Europe. Renaissance began in Italy in the 15th century culminating in High Renaissance at the end of the century and spreading to northern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, it may be mentioned that in England, Renaissance reached when its spirit was in decadence in Italy and France.

12.2.2 The Renaissance man caught the glimpses of classical culture

In medieval society, man's interests as an individual were subordinate to his function as an element in social unit. In medieval theology, man's relation to the world about him was largely reduced to a problem of adapting or avoiding the circumstances of earthly life in an effect to prepare his soul for the future life. But the Renaissance man caught glimpses of classical culture, a vision of human life, quite at odds with these attitudes. The Hellenisic spirit had taught him that man, far from being a grovelling worm, was glorious creature capable of infinite individual development in the direction of perfection, and set in a world that was not to despise, but to interrogate and explore and enjoy. And the full realization of his capacities as an individual depends upon a balance development of mind and body. The individualism implied in this view of life exerted a strong influence upon English Renaissance life and literature. Many other facts and forces, such as the Protestant Reformation, the introduction of printing press leading to a commercial market for literature, and great economic and political changes, leading to democracy—all had their influence on the literary spirit of the age. Moreover, the revitalized university life, the courtly encouragement of literature, the new Geography, the new astronomy and the growing new scene, which made man and nature the result of natural and demonstrable law, all enhance the spirit of individualism which was the central aspect of the entire Renaissance. However, break remains an essential thing about Renaissance and the change when completed was radical one.

12.2.3 Characteristics of Renaissance gave rise to truly national literature

The Renaissance showed in England almost all the characteristics which it had throughout Europe. At the same time the Renaissance had in England certain additional characteristics which were sop special that they gave rise to a truly national literature. The historians say that the renewal affected literature later and more slowly in England as compared to Italy and France. After the death of Chaucer in 1400 no writer of genius was born till Spenser's work in 1579. The result was that Chaucer's accurate and sure versification ceased to be understood soon after his death. So far as prose was concerned it lacked a strong tradition. It is significant that the two books which appeared in England in this

period and attained to European fame—Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* (1620) were both written in Latin. As already pointed out English literature had its true flowering in the Renaissance spirit when literature in Italy and France was in decadence. But this late flowering enabled the English to draw upon the riches of both France and Italy.

12.2.4 Poetry and Literature came out of the church and religion

The state of English literature at the beginning of the Renaissance was marked by some major and significant trends. Poetry came out of church and religion. The content was didactic. The secular literature was gradually making a place for itself. Humanism which had come to characterize the Renaissance spirit was soon opposed by religious Reformation. Along with Renaissance which came to influence the literature of the day was another movement known as *The Reformation.* The Reformation was the great religious movement of the 16th century.

The religious reformation was the outcome of a controversy which at the outset started on the issue of the translation of *Bible* into English and of the dissolution of religious houses.

The objective was to reform the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome. The result was the establishment of the various Reformed or Protestant Churches in Central and Western Europe. The Reformers advocated the general use and authority of the scriptures and justified faith also but at the same time they repudiated the doctrine of transubstantiations, the worship of Virgin Mary and the supremacy of the Pope.

In literature, the Renaissance and the Reformation had a considerable influence both on language and literature. However, it must be mentioned that so far as poetry was concerned it was less influenced by the Reformers because of its secular complexion. The Reformers also kept themselves aloof as they considered poetry frivolous.

12.3 The Sixteenth Century

12.3.1 Introduction

The Sixteenth Century literature displays a marked shift. The Renaissance spirit affected the literary works of this century. The popular literature continued to develop, but its tone began to change. The note of Puritanism came to underline the works. The English "moderns" of the sixteenth century were quite unlike the medieval of the fifteenth century. Their poems had the true flavour of the lyrics and they were brief, intense and personal. They forsook allegory and didactics. The endeavour to establish English as a poetic language, as an equal to Italian and French prompted much of the experimentation, and exercise went on in the Elizabethan literature.

12.3.2 The Elizabethan Age or the Age of Shakespeare

The sixteenth century is commonly termed as *The Elizabethan Age* or *the Age of Shakespeare.* The period extending from the accession of Queen Elizabeth includes *The Jacobean Period (1603-1625)*, an age of Great Nationalistic expansion, commercial growth, and religious controversy. It saw the development of English Drama to its highest level. It was also a period of great outburst of lyric song and a new interest in other forms of literary creativity. Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare flourished; and Bacon, Ben Jonson and Donne first stepped forward. It was justly called the Golden Age of English Literature.

12.3.3 The Publication of *The Shepherd's Calendar*

The publication of *TheShepherd's Calender* in 1579 marked Spenser's formal entry as the new poet. He emerged as a great poet musician, who excelled his predecessor who made us of the English language for harmonious combinations of sound. *The Shepherd's Calender* is a pastoral poem, wherein the poet follows the models set by the late Greek poet, Theocritus, it is divided into twelve parts one for each month of the year, presenting his unfortunate love of certain mysterious Rosalind. The underlying note deals with moral questions and discusses the religious issue of the day, from the stand point of strong Protestantism. Another popular poem *Astrophel* (1586) by Spenser is an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney. Spenser, like all great artists, felt the form and pressure of his time conditioning his writing. He had the ambition to write in English, poems which would be great and revered as the classical epics of Homer and Virgil had been. Spenser's poetry is a fusion of the traditions from the Golden age of medieval English poetry and the Latin and Greek classics. His earlier works tend to be analysed in the perspective provided by the *Fairie Queen.* The first three books of this poem appeared in 1590 and the books four to six were published in 1596. Through the subject of the *Fairie Queen* Spenser highlights glory in the abstract and Queen Elizabeth in particular. She figures in the poem as Belphoebe Mercilla and Gloriana. The poem has been written in the Stanza invented by Spenser, popularly known as Spenserian stanza, in which a ninth line of the twelve syllables is added to eight lines of ten syllables, rhyming ab ab bc bcc. Usually known as a "Poet's poet", Spenser inspired later poets, such as Milton and Keats, through his wonderful sense of beauty and pictorial power. As a representative poet of the Elizabethan England, the texture of his poems displays the combination of the spirit of Renaissance with the spirit of Reformation.

12.3.4 Sonnet as an art form

The Sonnet, which was the protégée of the thirteenth century Italian poet, Petrarch, entered the English literary scene in the sixteenth century. The first Elizabethan sonneteer to make a popular reputation was Thomas Wastson (1557-92) who is also known to have translated Petrarch's sonnets into English. Sir Philip Sidney (1544-1584) is a more prominent sonneteer, whose collection known as *Astrophel and Stella* was written between 1580 and 1584 and

published in 1591. Sidney's sonnets are a real contribution to English poetry. Besides him, Henry Constable in the *Diana* (1592), Samuel Daniel in *Delia* (1592) and Thomas Lodge in his *Phillis* (1593) have greatly contributed in some way to the anthologies of English sonnets. Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) is another name that cannot be left out of the list of Elizabethan writers of verse. Though very few of Raleigh's poems were printed during his life time, the important among his works are *Azores, This Last Summer (1591), Discoveries of the Large Rich and Beautiful Empire of Gulana with a relation of the Great and Golden City of Minoa* (1596).

During Elizabethan times, there was a constant growth of prose literature. The growth of the printing press was one reason for the development of prose works. The varied interests of the time were well represented in the prose literature of writers such as John Lyly (1549-1606), Robert Greene (15600-1592) and Francis Bacon (1561-1621). The literature of travel also flourished at this point of time. The spirit of adventure surfaced in works such as Richard Hakluyt's the *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589).

12.4 Origin and Rise of Drama in English

12.4.1 The origin of drama associated with liturgical performances

The characteristic and most distinguished form that literature assumed during Renaissance was drama. It surpassed in range, variety and power, the drama of any other century. The origin of drama can be associated with the liturgical performances. In England it reached its height around the fourteenth century from which time onward at the festival of *Corpus Christi* in early summer.

12.4.2 Miracle plays

Miracle plays were presented in nearly all the large towns. There are records of cycles of miracle plays in many regions of England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as well as into the sixteenth. Almost complete cycle of miracle plays survived from Chester, York and Wakefield. The Chester Cycle contains twenty five plays, beginning with the fall of Lucifer and ending with the original cycle of fifty four. The "Wakefield Master", the anonymous author of five outstanding Wakefield plays is known to be the first English writer of realistic comedy,. According to David Daiches the literary merit of the Wakefield plays is higher than that of any of the other cycles which have survived.

12.4.3 Morality plays

While the miracle plays were still in their hey-day, another medieval dramatic form emerged—a form which has more direct links with Elizabethan drama. This is the *Morality Play* which differs from the miracle plays in that it does not deal with biblical or pseudo biblical story but with personified abstractions of virtues and vices who struggle for man's soul. There are references to morality plays in the fourteenth century but the fifteenth century seems to be the period of its full development. The common theme running through these plays is the struggle of

virtues and vices over man's soul. The earliest extant morality play is known to be *The Pride of Life* followed by *The Castle of Perseverance*. There are two other lists of morality plays which are available. These date from the mid fifteenth century. One out of these has no title in the text but is generall7y known as *Wisdom* and the other is *Mankind.* The best known and in many ways the most appealing of surviving fifteenth century morality plays, is *Everyman.*

Towards the end of fifteenth century, there developed a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general moral problems. However, there are some realistic and comic elements in this kind. This kind of play is known as the *Interlude.* The earliest "Interludes" sometimes are not regarded as morality plays at all but as dramatised versions of fabliaux. But the later kind of "Interlude", the secular morality play develops its comic and realistic side and by 16th century comes to include scenes far removed from the theme and atmosphere of the medieval morality.

12.4.4 Secular drama

The growth of drama from miracle, morality and interlude to secular drama reveals clearly that there was a continuous dramatic tradition which began with native drama and later absorbed foreign influence to become more secular and more sophisticated.

Henry Medwall is the first secular playwright. His *Fulgens and Lucreces* was written at the end of the fifteenth century. Besides Henry Medwall, Johan Rastall and John Heywood belong to a group of earlier Tudor playwrights. John Rastall's interlude, *The Nature of Four Elements* published anonymously early in the sixteenth century falls in the tradition of Humanist morality play. John Heywood's interludes were often written as part of an evening's entertainment at a nobleman's house and emphasis is more on amusement than instruction. *Witty and Witless, the Play of Love* and *The Play of Weather* are amusing presentations. His other works namely, the play called *The Four P's. A Merry Play between Johan Johan Johan, The Husband and his Wife and Sir Johan and Priest's Play* are examples of his mature art. These playwrights (Henry Medewall, John Rastall and John Heywood) were associated with Sir Thomas More. The More-Heywood group of Tudor dramatists spanned two generations and their work bridges medieval and Elizabethan drama in *Tudor Plays.* John Bale (1495-1583) wrote a number of Protestant propagandist plays the most famous being *King Johan.* Bale's other plays include three on Biblical themes in the manner of miracle plays and one using allegorical figure in the morality tradition. All are strongly Protestant in tone. Another theme which became popular at this time was the ethico-political theme. Skelton's *Magnificence* is an example of this trend. However, it must be mentioned that the Allegorical, Biblical and Historical and Morality plays existed side by side in the middle of the sixteenth century. *Republica* written by Nicholas Udall, performed in 1533 mingles the other kind of religion with new political themes. A decade later, plays which handled Biblical stories of Protestant propagandist point of view seem to have been popular. At the same time classical influences were making themselves felt, providing new themes and new sense of

structure. A few years later after the publication of Nicholas Udall's *Republica* and *Ralph Roister Doister* written under the influence of Roman playwright Platus Miles Glorious came Stevenson's *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. The chief characteristic of threes plays is that the dramatic interest is focused on an individual. The interest in the fate of an individual initiated possibility for more exciting and more profound exploration of human predicament. Thus new conceptions of both comedy and tragedy opened up.

12.4.5 Use of Prose in English drama

Prose made its appearance for the first time in English drama in Gascoigne's source, that of Ariosto's *Gli Auppositi* (Italian source). Gascoigne's play reveals that the native popular tradition of English drama was now to be modified both by classical influence and by the tastes of moral sophisticated audiences at the inns of court, the Universities, the country house of noble patrons, and the court of Queen Elizabeth.

12.4.6 Influence of Seneca

The English drama of the century has been tremendously influenced by a Roman playwright, Seneca. There were no tragedies among either the miracle or the morality plays. It was only under the influence of Seneca's *Gorbuduc* that the tragedy came to be written in English drama. With the progress of the sixteenth century, drama became more abundant and varied. A group of writers known as "University Wits" turned to playwriting to make a living and in doing so they made Elizabethan popular drama more literary and in some respects more dramatic. It could perhaps be said that they were the first to associate English drama permanently with literature. The "University Wits" were professional men of letters and they set the course for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and in particular paved the way for Shakespeare. The group consists of John Lyly, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe. Out of these George Peele was the one who innovated "Romantic Tragedy".

12.4.7 Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and some minor dramatists

Shakespeare, the most luminous figure of English drama, owes much to the "University Wits" and especially to Christopher Marlowe. Shakepeare is famous for the comedies like *As You Like It, Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, A Mid Summer Night's Dream* and tragedies *Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello* and the history plays *Henry VI, Richard III and Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V.* Whatever Shakespeare chose to write on, we see in his work an original genius transforming nearly everything he touched and created by his inventions the great features of a great age of drama.

Shakespeare's age was marked by tremendous dramatic activity and the list of his contemporaries in the annals of the stage is a very long one. Among these most important is Ben Johnson (1573-1637). He began his career as a dramatist

in 1598 with his satiric comedy, *Every Man in His humour*. His plays fall into three groups—court masques historical tragedies and comedies. His best plays are *The Alchemist, Volpone* and *The Silent Woman*.

In Elizabethan and Jacobean times, the drama was the most popular form of expression. Even the writers who did not possess much talent for drama tried to express themselves through this medium. George Chapman (1559-1634), John Marston (1557-1634), Thomas Dekker (1570-1641), Thomas Middleton (1570-1627) and Thomas Heywood (1570-1650) are some of the lesser known dramatists of this time. A few other important names in the field of dramatic literature are Beaumont (1584-1616), John Webster (1580-1625), John Ford (1584-1639) and James Shirley (1596-1666).

12.4.8 The Elizabethan and Jacobean drama

The above survey of the dramatic literature from its earlier beginnings to the Jacobean and Caroline age reveals that the age of Queen Elizabeth was the glorious age so far as the growth and development of English drama is concerned. The theatres came up, children actors were encouraged, academic drama flourished, the two universities contributed a lot in the development of drama. Court, Masque and Pastoral Plays made a special appeal to the Renaissance audience who had a special fascination for the pictorial art. But from 1567 onwards many frontal attacks were made against the players, play houses, actors and theatres. On the 2nd September, 1642, The Long Parliament ultimately passed an Ordinance abolishing all play houses and further Ordinances were made in 1647 and 1648 ordering plays to be whipped and viewers to be fined. The curtain had fallen for ever upon the English dramas of Shakespeare's predecessors and his immediate successors. A long romantic tradition was broken and when theatres reopened, they found a teased and acrimonious world in which the great universal spirit of Shakespeare was gone, never to return.

12.4.9 The Age of Milton

Another important phase of this age was the Age of Milton. This was the time when the growth of Puritanism as a moral and a social force established itself as the controlling power in the state. The period was also marked by the religious and the political struggles. During the reigns of James I, Puritanism started showing its impact and by the time of his successors, this emerged as a great national influence. Soon it became a political as well as a moral and religious force. After a stormy period of Civil War, it triumphed with the triumph of Oliver Cromwell. During the few years of Commonwealth, it was supreme. John Milton (1608-74) came to be known as the greatest product of Puritanism. However, in his works and genius, the moral and religious influences of Puritanism are combined with the generous culture of the Renaissance. It was this combination of elements which gave a distinctive quality to his greatest poetry. His earlier learning and age of Renaissance and the Puritan element was at first quite subordinate, but it gradually gained in strength the depth till it became at last the dominant element.

12.4.10 Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (Tragedy)

Marlowe's place in English drama of the Elizabethan age is next to Shakespeare. His works were created in the spirit of the Renaissance. He is a complete product of the Renaissance in every sense of the term. He imbibes in himself a complete Renaissance spirit—a spirit of secularism, unconventional morality and restlessness. And like the author, his characters too display the Renaissance spirit. They have ambition, a hankering after adventure and power and desperate spirit that is unsatisfied with small achievements. Thus whereas Marlowe's life and work reflect major characteristics of the Renaissance, he is ahead of his times in being an innovator and trend-setter in both style and subject matter. *Doctor Faustus* remains Marlowe's most famous play. The story of this play derives from the story of an actual man John Faust who lived in Germany in the early 16th century.

Faustus, a German scholar of theology, law and medicine, feels bored as he realises the limits beyond which he cannot pursue his studies. So he begins to learn magic which he hopes will help him to acquire more knowledge and power. Faustus, bestowed with highest gift of necromancy summons Lucifer and his deputy Mephistophilis. Through Mephistophilis Faustus strikes a deal with Lucifer according to which Faustus will surrender his soul to Lucifer after twenty four years. But for that duration Lucifer must fulfil every desire of Faustus. The bargain is struck and is sealed in his own blood. Mephistophilis is put on permanent duty to look after the needs of Faustus.

Faustus begins by acquiring the knowledge of both the temporal and the spiritual worlds. But then he uses his power for frivolous ends and when Faustus reaches the end of his twenty four years, his soul is taken away by Lucifer and his Devil.

Doctor Faustus is the first great poetic tragedy in the English language. The tragedy revolves round the theme of sin and redemption. Faustus is proud and arrogant. Swollen with self-conceit and with impatient scorn he rejects philosophy, medicine, law and divinity because they do not "make man live eternally" or raise the dead to life again. Faustus rejects the human arts because they "do not puff up enough." He perverts both divine and human values by asking each art and knowledge how well it serves his "self/conceit." But his ambition alone takes him to his outer damnation. Marlowe has drawn Faustus poignantly. The appearance of good and bad angels heightens the moral split of Faustus. But some critics find the play loose in structure especially because of the comic effects Marlowe tries to create. But, these do add to the totality of the impact. Because the play in its final analysis brings forth the idea that passion for knowledge is a virtue, but diverted from the service of God it threatens to become negative and destructive.

LESSON NO. 1.3 **AUTHOR : DR. B.R. RAO**

CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

ARISTOTLE : POETICS
OR
ON THE ART OF POETRY

Early Greek Literary Theories

Theories of poetry are almost as old as poetry itself. The earliest poets of the West regarded poetry as being divine in its origin. Homer begins his famous epic the *Iliad,* with an invocation to the Muse. Other Greek writers of antiquity, writers like Solon, Simonides, Pindar made various critical observations on poetry. Poetry was defined by some as a speaking picture. Others considered poetry as an art to be mastered through conscious effort, or simply as the product of inspiration.

The earliest piece of **DRAMA** from classical antiquity available to us is to be found in the well-known play by Aristophanes, *The Frogs*. It was probably written in 405 B.C. The play is in the form of an *"agon"* or a debate regarding the merits of Aeschylus and Euripides as poets. Dionysus, the patron of The Theatre Festivals, goes to Hades to bring back from the dead, Euripides, who had recently died. But in Hades some question the superiority of Euripides as dramatist. They argue that Aeschylus is superior to Euripides. In the heated discussion that follows, many shrewd and witty remarks are made about the weaknesses of Aeschylus and Euripides as writers. Aeschylus's fondness for magniloquence and Euripides's fondness for introducing lame beggars on the stage are satirised. To settle the dispute, Dionysus uses the scales. One line from Aeschylus is weighed against one line from Euripides and Aeschylus 'outweighs' Euripides. In a half-humorous and half-satirical manner, *The Frogs* represents the first available critical exercise in **DRAMA** in the Greek language.

Plato on Poetry

Plato, the famous philosopher and the teacher of Aristotle, is generally regarded as the first great commentator on Poetry in the West. Although Plato never devoted his whole attention to the study of poetry, innumerable "Dialogues"

that he wrote are full of comments and observations on poetry. As a philospher, Plato was interested in defining the good, the true and the beautiful in philosophical terms. He also shared with many other philosophers, who came before and after him, a deep-rooted distrust of poetry. One of the paradoxes with regard to Plato is that he writes with the brilliance and imagination of a great artist but he consistently maintains a critical and very frequently hostile attitude towards poetry. His famous disciple, Aristotle, writes in a cold, analytical manner and defends poetry.

Ion, an early dialogue of Plato, was probably written in the first decade of fourth century B.C., a few years after the death of Plato's teacher, Socrates. The *Ion,* is in dialogue form. The two major characters in the dialogue are Socrates and *Ion,* the rhapsode, who has just then returned from Epidarus after winning a prize at a festival in honour of Asclepius. A rhapsode was a well-known figure in Greek society in those days. He used to recite in public passages from well-known works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and he used to give lectures on morality. He was enormously popular with the general public. And if what Plato says in the **Ion** is true, sometimes as many as twenty thousand people used to listen to the rhapsode at a single sitting.

Socrates, characteristically enough, pretends to be ignorant of poetry, and in the dialogue, *Ion* Socrates asks many uncomfortable questions, which Ion finds difficult to answer. One of the statements made by Socrates and accepted by Ion is that the poet and the rhapsode speak only when they are possessed by a "madness" or "inspiration" or "enthusiasm", a word which in Greek meant, "to be possessed by a "theos" or a god". In a very well-known passage, Socrates says, " For the poet it is a light and winged and holy thing and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses and mind is no longer in him; when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles"(*Ion* 5346, Jowett's Translation). Although Romantic poet-critics like Shelley used similar agruments in defence of poetry, he comes to the conclusion that poets compose poetry not because they are wise but because they have a nature of genius, "which is capable of enthusiasm." Plato, through the figure of Socrates appears to be suggesting that the poets should not be regarded as fountainheads of wisdom, if wisdom means" a power of rational analysis conducted in strict accordance with definite intellectual principles." The poet may be compared to a magnet radiating a mysterious power. He may be called a "winged and holy thing". But through his merciless cross-questioning of Ion, Socrates drives home his arguments that the poet does not possess a thorough knowledge of any of the things he writes about. And although the dialogue does not end with an open condemnation of poetry, enough doubts are raised by Socrates to make it clear that Plato is far from being a sympathetic critic of poetry.

There are, however, some commentators who argue that Plato was not really hostile to poetry. For example, R.G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*(Oxford, 1938), argues that Plato was a friend of the arts. These commentators refer to such platonic dialogues as the **Meno** in which Plato conceded "right opinion" to "all poetic persons" and also to **Phaedrus** in which Plato places the poet in the ranks of the elite of the society. But these stray observations do not alter the general view of poetry that Plato held throughout his life. He did disapprove of poetry.

It is in **The Republic**, a work of Plato's middle period; and in the **Laws** which was produced in Plato's old age that Plato's distrust of poetry is most clearly expressed. Almost all commentary on Aristotle's **Poetics** refers to Plato's **Republic** because Aristotle's commentary on poetry is generally regarded as his reply to Plato's attacks on poetry. In his **Republic**, expecially in Books II, III and X, Plato spells out, in very unequivocal terms, his well-considered objections against poetry.

In the **Republic**, Plato's aim is to present his own ideas on ideal society or "Republic". He discusses at great length the composition of his ideal society, the duties of the citizens of this ideal society, the principles on which this society is to be established, the duties and the rights of "guardians" of the society and finally the place of the arts in general and of poetry in particular in such an ideal society.

The charges that Plato levelled against poetry in the **Republic** may be categorised for the sake of convenience, under three different heads. The **first** set of objections is on the basis of morality. Plato believes that the function of any art should be to place before the people examples of right conduct. Any tale or fiction "which is good" must be accepted and that which is bad must be unceremoniously rejected, Plato expressed the view in the **Republic** that much of Greek poetry placed before the readers is unedifying example of the undignified behaviour of men and women, and of gods and goddesses. Works of art which present petty squabbles, battles and stories of treachery and human degradation, Plato states, should be censored and rejected outright by the guardians of "Republic". Socrates says in Book II of the *Republic*, "Then we shall be right in getting rid of lamentations of famous men," Gods being good they should not be presented as being the authors of evil. Such stories should be banned because, as Socrates puts it rather humorously: "Neither ought our guardians to be given to laughter." Hence poetry as a whole is condemned on the ground of morality. Plato finds the subject matter of Greek Poetry and the "divine" Homer as either trivial or immoral. Poetry, thus, had a bad effect

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1. *The Dialogues of Plato*, Translated by Benjamin Jowett, p. 433

on the future guardians of the ideal "Republic". Only "guided" or censored writings would be permitted to be read in society. This objection against poetry on grounds of morality has been frequently raised by the opponents of poetry. For example, during the Restoration period, writers like Dryden and Congreve had to face trenchant criticism of Jeremy Collier on the profanity and the immorality of the Restoration Drama. In the Nineteenth century the novels of Hardy, especially works like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* were condemned by the Victorian clergy who found them to be immoral. In the twentieth century, writers like D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce had to face similar charges.

The **second** charge Plato levels against poetry in the **Republic** relates to the effect of poetry on the readers. Plato was quite aware of the fact that the arts like Music and Poetry, had a very profound impact on the people. While discussing Music in Book III of the **Republic**, Plato argues that mixed melodies like the tenor Lydian and relaxed and soft melodies like the Ionian must be banished from the "Republic" because they are not of any military use. Only melodies like the "warlike" Dorian and "prudent" Phyrgian should be allowed in the "Republic". Anything that weakens or softens the guardians of society is to be rejected. The ideal citizen, so far as Plato is concerned, is one who keeps a tight check on his emotions, is always serious and dedicated and never wastes his time on undignified activities. The guardians are not permitted to laugh even because " a fit of laughter which has been indulged to excess produced a violent reaction."[1]

Turning to poetry, Plato discusses the effects of poetry – epic and tragic on the audience. A poet imitates the voluntary or the involuntary actions of men and women, actions which lead to a good or a bad result. Such actions, when imitated properly make the audience emotional. Here, Plato has referred to the effect of plays on the audience. Through a willing suspension of disbelief, the Greek audience so much identified themselves with the characters on the stage that they laughed and wept with them. Thus, the dramatic or the epic poet makes men and women emotional. So, Plato concludes, "Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made nor is his art intended, to please or affect the rational principle in the soul, but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper which is easily limited."[1]

This passage is characteristic of Plato who believed that an ideal citizen of his ideal "Republic" should allow himself to be guided only by the rational principle. He should not allow himself to be mastered by his emotions and feelings.

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1. *The Dialogues of Plato*, Translated by Jowett, p.433.
2. ibid., p. 433.
3. David Daiches , *Critical Approaches to Literature*, p. 12.

Although in Book X of the **Republic** in which the above mentioned passage occurs, there is no thorough discussion of the subject, it becomes clear that Plato views the emotions with a great deal of mistrust; so long as an individual keeps a tight check on his emotions, he is a fit member of the "Republic". Anything that disturbs or upsets this check is to be rejected. The poet, instead of strengthening the rational principle, "awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reasons. "Thus, poetry is positively dangerous and a serious threat to the stability of the society and the well-being of its members. In a very famous passage in Book X of the *Republic*, Plato writes, "poetry waters and feeds the passions instead of drying them up. She lets them rule although they ought to be controlled if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue."[2] This passage makes it clear that watering and feeding the passions is the wrong way of dealing with them. The proper way is to "dry them up." Only by starving and suppressing the emotions can mankind hope to increase its happiness and virtue, says Socrates. Thus, poetry is rejected because it has a harmful effect upon the readers.

The **third** and the most potent charge levelled against poetry relates to a theory of knowledge of reality that Plato presents. The word "philosopher" literally means a lover of "sophia" or wisdom. As a philosopher, Plato attempts to define reality. In Book X of the *Republic* while talking to Glaucon about poetry as imitation Socrates comments at length on the nature of reality and the relationship between poetry and the "essence" of reality. This particular section of the **Republic**, in the words of David Daiches, constitutes a major document in the history of criticism and is the fullest statement of an approach to imaginative literature which is natural to some kinds of philosophic minds."[3]

Socrates begins by defining poetry as "mimesis", with all the pejorative connotations that the word carries with it. "Mimesis" is defined as a "likely thing" - that is a true or faithful picture of something else. To make his idea of "essence" as clear as possible, Socrates takes up for illustration "the beds and tables in the world." Socrates's argument is that all the beds and tables in the world are simply "imitations" of "only two ideas or forms of them: one the idea of a bed, the other of a table." Extending this argument further, he says that all life and all existence are merely copies or imitations of the idea of life or existence. The ultimate idea, or reality, or essence is created by God who is "the maker of all the works of all other workmen." Thus, for Plato, an idea or essence comes first and existence comes next.

After thus defining his theory of the ultimate essence in terms of which all existence has to be measured, Socrates takes up for discussion the work of

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1. The Dialogues of Plato, Translated by Jowett, p. 331.

2. Wimsatt and Brooks, Classical And Elizabethan Drama : A Short History, p.22.

3. *David Daiches, Critical Approaches to literature, p.26.*

the painter of a bed. As Socrates puts it, "Beds then are of three kinds, and there are three artists who superintend them; God; the maker of the bed; and the painter." The painter is thus an imitator of a bed which is in turn an imitation of the bed. Thus, the painter does not lead us towards the idea or the essence. He takes us away from the essence because the painting which is simply a copy of the idea of a bed can never be as 'real' or valuable as the idea or the essence of the bed. Since all poetry is thus a form of imitation it is thrice removed from the bed, truth." Poetry, painting and imitation in general are all far removed from the truth and hence they have no "true or healthy aim." Thus, philosophically speaking, poetry is not true but false. So Socrates, with a great deal of humour and irony, says that when any of those poets, whom he calls, "these pantomimic gentlemen" comes to the ideal "Republic" we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State, as such, he is not permitted to exist; the law will not allow him. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city."[1] Thus, poets and poetry are banished from the ideal Republic although some censored or "guided" writings in which "the style of the virtuous only is imitated would be permitted."

Plato's objections against poetry are, thus, based on a variety of approaches to poetry. His view of poetry may be said to be a mixture of the moral, the effective and the epistemological approaches to literature. From the point of view of the moralist, poetry is condemned. In terms of its effect on the audience, poetry is found to be a serious threat to the health of the society. And from the point of view of the philosopher, poetry is found to be false because it is merely the "imitation" of the "essence."

Aristotle's Answer

Poetics of Aristotle is considered by almost all the commentators as a reply to Plato's attack on poetry. Cleanth Brooks and William K.Wimsatt argue, "The **Rhetoric** and the parts of **Poetics** are of a larger answer to Plato."[2] David Daiches states that Aristotle in his full-length discussion of Tragedy, "comes to grips with the nature of imaginative literature and in doing so finds a way out of Plato's dilemma"[3]

However, one of the curious features of **Poetics** is that nowhere in the book is the **Republic** mentioned. Plato's name does not figure even once in the whole of **Poetics**. If the book is Aristotle's reply to Plato's attack on poetry, it is but natural to expect that there would be in the book some specific reference to Plato's famous attack on poetry. One possible, and not a wholly satisfactory,

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1. Wimsatt and Brooks, Classical And Elizabethan Drama : A Short History, p. 22.
2. Lascelles Abercrombile, Principles of Classical And Elizabethan Drama, p. 71.

explanation of this curious feature of the **Poetics** is that the book is a fragment and is in the form of lecture notes. Since Aristotle was a pupil of Plato and since Aristotle's philosophy was considerably influenced by the philosophy of Plato himself, it is but legitimate to assume that the **Poetics** is a reply to Plato's attack on poetry. As Wimsatt and Brooks put it, "Plato is a teacher and an opponent who often appears, or is often just out of sight in the arguments of Aristotle."[1] Lascelles Abercrombie remarks, "Aristotle never says that his theory is an answer to Plato, he never mentions Plato in the **Poetics** and never even alludes to the Platonic objections against poetry." But his whole argument is exactly planned to invalidate Plato's argument at every point.[2] From the many comments that Aristotle makes on poetry in the early sections of the **Poetics** and from his lengthy discussion of tragedy, it is possible to build up arguments in defence of poetry which may be construed as Aristotle's answer to Plato's attack.

In the sixth section of the **Poetics**, while defining Tragedy, Aristotle states that Tragedy brings about a "Katharsis" of the emotions of pity and fear. In the later section of the *Poetics*, Aristotle occasionally refers to 'the specific pleasure of tragedy' - a phrase by which Aristotle is obvioulsy referring to the kathartic effect of tragedy. There is an unending debate among scholars and critics over the meaning and significance of the word 'katharsis'. However, a considerable number of scholars are of the opinion that 'katharsis' refers to some kind of therapeutic effect that a tragedy has on the audience. They also regard this theory of katharsis as Aristotle's reply to Plato's comment on the effect of poetry on the audience.

Plato, as has been seen, argued that poetry nourishes the passions and thus contributes to the corruption of the individual. Aristotle appears to offer entirely different view of the effect of tragedy on the audience. Certain passages in another work of Aristotle, enlisted in **Poetics** make it clear that Aristotle does not regard any kind of emotions and feelings as being bad. While Plato believes that emotions are in themselves bad, and that it is the duty of a rational human being to starve and suppress the emotions, Aristotle has a totally different view of the place of emotions in human life. Aristotle does not regard the emotions as being bad in themselves. Aristotle suggests that the excess of emotions may upset the emotional health of the individual. Plato asserts that the tight control that the individual has over his emotions is relaxed when he responds to poetry. Aristotle suggests, that the balance between the different emotions in the individual is not disturbed by poetry. When an individual comes to witness a dramatic performance, the emotional equilibrium has already been upset and certain emotions are present in excess of what is necessary or warranted. When such an 'emotional' individual witnesses a tragedy, he identifies himself with the characters on the stage, and weeps

and laughs with them, he is giving a harmless expression to the excess of the emotions in him. Art in this manner tempers the emotions and brings them to just measure. Art thus, does not nourish and water the passions. It provides them with a safe outlet, brings about a katharsis of the excess of emotions. It is not through suppression but through expression and by a removal of the excess of the emotions that the individual regains his physical and psychological well-being. Aristotle's views on the place of emotions in the life of the human being have a great deal of similarity with the ideas of Freud regarding the sublimation of the suppressed urges in the unconscious depths of the individual. Thus, Plato and Aristotle disagree on the effects of poetry on the audiences. For Plato, poetry is socially subversive while for Aristotle poetry performs a very valuable social function.

The epistemological objections of Plato are dealt in an entirely different manner by Aristotle. Plato had defined art as a "mimesis" of life. But in Plato's usage, the word "mimesis" has very limited and pejorative connotation. **Poetics** begins with a brief discussion of the arts in terms of the medium of imitation, the objects of imitation, and mode of imitation. All the arts, says Aristotle, are modes of imitation. It is not the use of metre that makes a man a poet, it is 'mimesis' or imitation that distinguishes poetry. Aristotle then gives a brief account of the origin of Poetry. He argues that the instinct of imitation is deeply rooted in human nature. Man learns through imitation and he finds pleasure in imitation. Even painful and disturbing aspects of life when properly imitated, are a source of pleasure.

But what does the poet imitate? For Plato, poetry is only a copy or a very unsatisfactory reflection of the distant and imperishable essence. But so far as Aristotle is concerned, an artist is not necessarily limited to the immediate and the accidental. Art is an imitation of life. And an artist can imitate life as it is, being worse than it is, or as it ought to be. Thus, in the second chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that the poets need not confine themselves to the imitation of the sensible and the particular. An artist is as much concerned with the real world as a philosopher himself. The argument is elaborated in the eighth chapter of the *Poetics*. Comparing poetry with history, Aristotle states that history is concerned with and limited to the actual and the accidental. The poet, on the other hand, deals with the universal and the unchanging aspects of life. The poet perceives the universal and the general in the particular. Poetry is not 'false' but true. Plato in the *Republic* begins with the definition of the ideal and in terms of the definition, he judges and condemns poetry. He proceeds from the hypothetical to the actual. Aristotle, characteristically enough, begins with the actual. He recognizes that poetry exists in its own right. He tries to discover the essential nature of poetry. Through analysis and argument, he comes to the conclusion that poetry is concerned with universal and unchanging aspects of life. Thus, Plato's

epistemological objections are effectively countered by Aristotle's ontological justification of poetry.

The third objection of Plato that from the moral point of view poetry is to be condemned, is equally, effectively rebutted by Aristotle. Plato assumes that the function of poetry is to instruct and to edify. Aristotle does not believe that poetry should be defended in terms of non-literacy criteria. He would have agreed with the observation of Coleridge that a thing must contain in itself the reason for its existence and justification . Aristotle views with suspicion any work of art in which the artist has attempted to trace a pattern of crime and punishment that is of virtue being rewarded and vice being punished. Such an outrageous attempt to flatter and please the audience, Aristotle condemns, as being inartistic. Art is not merely a reflection of life. It is a reorganization or restructuring of life. Life may be chaotic but art must have symmetry and proportion. As Aristotle puts it, every work of art must have a beginning, a middle and an end. This is why he prefers the "probable impossibility" of art to the improbable possibility of life. The 'fiction' of poetry conveys a more profound truth than the factualness and truthfulness of life or history. As such, Aristotle has no sympathy for the objections of the moralist that poetry is to be condemned because it does not instruct.

Thus, the **Poetics** is the earliest and one of the most important defences of poetry. Aristotle not only rebutted the arguments of his great mentor Plato, he also anticipated, in his characteristically brilliant manner, many of the later arguments against poetry, with remarkable flexibility, astuteness and thoroughness, Aristotle presents in the **Poetics** a defence of poetry which in many respects is as relevant today as it was in the Greece of fourth century B.C.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1.	G.Saintsbury	:	*History of Criticism*
2.	David Daiches	:	*Critical Approaches to Literature*
3.	Wimsatt and Brooks	:	*Classical And Elizabethan Drama : A Short History*
4.	F.L. Lucas	:	*Tragedy*
5.	Humphry House	:	*Aristotle's Poetics*

M.A. (ENGLISH) PART-I (SEMESTER-I) COURSE-II
CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

LESSON NO. 1.4 AUTHOR : DR. B.R. RAO

CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA
POETICS : INTRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS

Aristotle : Life and Works

Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers that the West has produced, was born in 383 B.C. at Stagria in Thrace. His father, a distinguished physician, was appointed as the court physician to Amyntas, the grandfather of Alexander the Great and Aristotle spent a part of his childhood at Pella, the capital of the kingdom of Macedonia. His parents died while he was still young and he was brought up by Proxenus, a friend of his father. At the age of seventeen, Aristotle was sent to Athens to study at the famous Academy of Plato. There are many stories about Aristotle's eccentric behaviour and his strained relations with some of his teachers at the Academy. It was complained that Aristotle dressed foppishly and was fond of speaking with affected lisp. Plato was said to have been so annoyed by Aristotle's behaviour that he once remarked that Aristotle paid more attention to his clothes than was appropriate for a philosopher. But in spite of all this, Aristotle was a very good student and he impressed all his teachers with voracious appetite for knowledge. Plato, it seems, used to remark humorously that his Academy consisted of two parts – the body of his students and the brain of Aristotle.

From 367 B.C. to 347 B.C. Aristotle stayed at the Academy, first as a student, and later as a teacher and writer. The works of Aristotle written during this period reveal the strong influence of Plato's thought on Aristotle. Plato died in 347 B.C. and Speusippus, his nephew, was appointed as his successor. Aristotle had hoped that he would be allowed to succeed Plato to the headship of the Academy, but Aristotle was an 'outsider', not an Athenian and so he was not appointed as the head of the Academy. Aristotle left Athens in the company of a fellow-member of the Academy, Xenocrates. After spending three years at Assos, and two years at Mytilene in Lesbos, he accepted an offer from Philip of Macedon, his childhood friend; to become a tutor to his son, Alexander. According to some scholars, the *Poetics* was written by Aristotle during this period when he was teaching Alexander. In 335 B.C., Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his school 'Lyceum' which was located in a grove dedicated to Apollo, *Fykeis* hence the name *Lyceum.* Aristotle used to

walk through the groves teaching and discussing and so he came to being called *'Peripatieni'*, the walking philosopher.

The meteoric rise of Alexander the Great was a source of great fear to the citizens of Athens and since Aristotle had once been a teacher of Alexander, the Athenians suspected that Aristotle was a Macedonian spy. And after the death of Alexander at the age of thirty-three, there was a very real danger of Aristotle being arrested and charged with corrupting the youth- as Socrates was in 309 B.C. Remembering the fate of Socrates, Aristotle left Athens, for the last time saying that he would not give the Athenians "a second chance of sinning against philosophy." He settled down at Chalcis on the Island of Euboea and there he died a year later of a disease of the stomach at the age of sixty-three.

Aristotle was a myriad-minded genius, and he wrote nearly four hundred books on an astonishing variety of topics. His works covered almost every aspect of human life. Among his most famous works are : *158 Constitutions, On Monarchy, The Customs of Barbarians, Natural History, Organon or The Instruments of Correct Thinking-Logic, Nicomachean Ethics, Physics, Politics and Poetics.*

The originality and brilliance of Aristotle is displayed in everything that he wrote. He always adopted a cool, rational and scientific outlook. He was objective and adopted a judicial and impartial view of the subject. It is this scientific temper of his which marks him as one of the seminal minds that the West has produced. Not given to any enthusiasm, always in perfect control of himself, whatever the area he surveyed and whatever the subject studied, he looked solely and steadfastly at the subject. It is this quality of his mind that is reflected in the *Poetics* which is even today regarded as one of the greatest works of *Classical And Elizabethan Drama*.

The Poetics : An Introduction

It is not known when the **Poetics** was written. The text, as available to us today, is a fragment. And what is available of the book is written in such a terse and epigrammatic style that commentators are of the view that it must have been the lecture notes of Aristotle himself or the notes taken down by a student of Aristotle. But this much appears to be certain that this work is Aristotle's own.

Very little is known about the first seventeen or eighteen hundred years of the existence of the *Poetics*. The poet Horace knew something about the *Poetics,* probably at second hand. In the third century A.D. Diogenes Laertius included the *Poetics* in his list of Aristotle's works. But he wrote that the *Poetics* consisted of two books. It was later translated into Syriac in the Sixth century A.D. Most probably in the tenth century, the Syriac version was translated into Arabic. The Arabic version is still available and is the earliest available text

of the *Poetics.* In the eleventh century, a Byzantine scribe prepared a Greek text of the *Poetics.* In the fifteenth century, the Greek text became well-known in Italy. Several copies of the Greek text were made and a Latin translation of the book was printed later.

During the Renaissance, the Italian writers showed a great deal of interest in the *Poetics.* The Italian commentator, Castelvetro wrote a lengthy commentary on the book. It was during this period that a large number of misreadings of the *Poetics* came to be accepted as Aristotle's own pronouncements. The most notorious of these misreadings was the one concerning the "Three Unities." Although in the *Poetics*, Aristotle is concerned with the unity of Action, he very briefly touches upon the Unity of time, and does not say anything about the Unity of place. The learned commentators of the Renaissance asserted that the Three Unities were the principles recommended by Aristotle himself. Even Ben Jonson, a fine classical scholar, accepted these unverified beliefs. During the eighteenth century , Thomas Twining published his well-known English translation of the *Poetics*. However, it is only during the last hundred years or so that a serious and scholarly study of the *Poetics* has been made both in England and in America. Butcher's translation and his explanatory essays of the *Poetics*, Bywater's translation of the text which is in many respects a very brilliant translation, the other translations of modern scholars like Warrington, L.J. Potts, Else, and Dorsch and the valuable insight into the *Poetics* offered by brilliant commentators like Else and George Whalley, have all facilitated a new view of the work. The Chicago critics who are sometimes referred to as the Neo-Aristotlelians have also made significant contributions to Aristotlelian studies. Many of the past misreadings have been corrected and an objective view of the greatness and the limitations of the *Poetics* has been made possible.

The text of the **Poetics** that is available, as already pointed out, is a fragment. It is written in a terse and telegraphic style. Quite a few sentences in the original Greek are incomplete and some keywords are missing. And because of the fragmentary nature of the text, many of the issues and controversies raised by the text can never be satisfactorily resolved. For example, Aristotle in the *Poetics* frequently states that each kind of poetry gives its own specific pleasure. But while he repeats a number of times that the specific pleasure of tragedy is the pleasure of the katharsis of the emotions of pity and fear, he says nothing about the specific pleasure that epic poetry and comedy convey, There is no discussion or even a simple explanation of the meaning of the word 'katharsis'. Again, in the fifth chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle states that he would discuss Comedy and Epic poetry later in the book. But in the last few sections of the book there is some discussion of Epic poetry but nothing is said about Comedy. This is why critics are of the view that in the missing

second book of the *Poetics* (Diogenes Laertius in the third century A.D. had written that the *Poetics* was in two volumes), Aristotle must have discussed at length Comedy. Thus, because of the terse and fragmentary nature of the text, *The Poetics* is even today a controversial document. However, if the value of a work of criticism is to be measured in the terms of attention it attracts or even the hostility it generates, then undoubtedly the *Poetics* is very important work. No single work of criticism has been so extensively translated, annotated, interpreted, challenged, distorted, grossly overpraised, and equally violently denounced as this early study of Greek Tragedy. The *Poetics* is the first work of *Classical And Elizabethan Drama* in the West available to us. Thus, historically it is important. It is also a great work because in this work one discovers a uniquely modern view of literature. This is why the book is relevant even today.

Poetics — An Analysis

The text of the *Poetics* is divided into 26 chapters. An analysis of the contents of these chapters is quite fascinating and revealing. The first four chapters are devoted to a discussion of the arts in general. Then he discusses the nature of poetry, the different forms of poetry, the origin of poetry, and the development of Greek Tragedy. Chapter five, a brief and incomplete chapter, gives a very brief sketch of comedy and its origins. From chapter six to the end of chapter nineteen, Aristotle at great length discusses Tragedy as an art form. He enumerates the six different parts of Tragedy, and discusses in detail each part of the Tragedy. The bulk of this part of the book is devoted to a discussion of 'mythos' or plot because for Aristotle, plot is the most important aspect of a Tragedy. The next three chapters- chapters 20, 21 and 22- discuss language in general, parts of speech and poetic diction. From chapter 23 to the end of the book, Aristotle compares and contrasts Tragedy with Epic poetry and concludes this discussion with the assertion that Tragedy is superior to Epic.

In the following pages, an attempt would be made to analyse the text of the *Poetics* and to discuss the most important aspects of the work. The text referred to is S.H. Butcher's well-known translation, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* because this is the most easily available traslation of the book. Whenever there is any doubt or controversy about Butcher's translation on certain key passage in the text, references would be made to other translations of such distinguished Aristotlelians as Bywater, Warrington, Dorsch and L.J. Potts.

The opening paragraphs of the *Poetics* are very characteristic of Aristotle's approach to the study of poetry. As an objective critic, Aristotle recognizes and respects the ontological status of the arts. He does not go into the philosophical questions regarding what constitutes reality as Plato did. Aristotle takes for granted the existence of poetry and analyses it to discover its

essence or its distinguishing features.

At the very outset, Aristotle states that his aim is to treat Poetry in itself and of its various kinds, noting the essential quality of each. And so he begins with the valid generalisation that all the arts are in their general conception modes of 'mimesis' or 'imitation'. Thus, for Aristotle, 'mimesis' or imitation is the characteristic feature of all arts. The arts, however, differ from each other in three respects: in terms of the **medium**, the manner, and the object of imitation. By 'medium' Aristotle means the employment of **rhythm, harmony** and **language** used singly or together by the arts. Thus, in dancing rhythm alone is used, in music, rhythm and harmony are used. But in poetry, the medium of imitation is language alone. And by poetry Aristotle means literature. It is here that Aristotle makes a very perceptive observation. According to him, not everyone who employs metre can be called a poet. It is not metre that makes the poet but 'mimesis or imitation'. The poet is thus a 'maker' - in Greek the word 'poet' means a 'maker' and thus, the essential feature of the poet's activity, according to Aristotle, is 'mimesis'. A writer like Empedocles who wrote a text-book on Physics in verse with 'mimesis' as the essence of all the arts Aristole explains that he cannot be called poet. Thus, the opening chapter identifies **'mimesis'** as the essence of all the arts.

The second chapter discusses very briefly the object of imitation. The objects to be imitated are men in action and men may be of a higher type, or a lower type. Thus, Aristotle says that a poet may represent men as being better than in real life, and this is what a Greek epic or tragic poet does. The poet may represent men as being worse than they are in real life as was done in lampoons, and sometimes, in comedies. And finally , men may be presented as they are, as was done by the painter, Dionysus.

This apparently shows that the division of human types into three clear-cut categories has had very startling repercussions on the practices of later writers in the West. Aristotle was simply basing his observations on the practices of the Greek poets of his own day. But these observations later solidified into rigid conventions from which very few dared to deviate. Even when a poet like Pope attempted a 'mock-heroic epic' or as Fielding wrote a 'comic epic in prose', both took it for granted that their readers knew enough about 'conventional' expectations to enjoy the writer's deviation from convention. Aristotle's establishment of this convention regarding the connection between an art form and the subject matter appropriate to it was convenient for the writers who came after him. And in England but for some rare exceptions like Shakespeare, most writers adopted his categorization of subject matter until the end of the eighteenth century. It is only with the Romantics that an organised attempt is made to put a new kind of subject matter into traditional art forms or to pour new wine into old bottles. Thus, the second chapter of

the *Poetics* is of considerable importance in the history of Western Literature.

The third chapter discusses the manner of imitation. Aristotle here discusses the different 'manners' of imitation - either through narration as the Greek epic poets normally did, or by speaking through the characters and presenting them as living and moving before us as the dramatists did. And Aristotle makes it clear that in his view the manner of imitation of the dramatist is a superior way - a judgement which has been proved to be right. It is in this section that Aristotle digresses a little to discuss the name and the origins of drama. But even this digression has its own significance and relevance. To settle the claims of rival groups in Greece regarding the invention both of Tragedy and Comedy, Aristotle refers to the evidence of language, i.e., through etymology. He tries to reach some tentative conclusions regarding this controversy. Here, once again, is demonstrated Aristotle's scientific outlook. Although he was writing in the fourth century B.C. Aristotle adopts a scientific and refreshingly modern method. He does not offer any religious or metaphysical argument to resolve the controversy. Another important observation that Aristotle makes is regarding the etymology of the meaning of the word 'drama' that is derived from the verb 'dran' which means 'to do' or 'to act'. So, the word 'drama', argues Aristotle, suggests that action is the essence of a play. This explains to a certain extent his 'preference for–action' and his emphatic assertion that there can be a play without character but there cannot be one without plot.

The next chapter, a fairly lengthy one, discusses the origins of poetry and the development of Tragedy. Once again we find Aristotle giving rational and psychological explanations regarding the origins of poetry. He says that man is by nature imitative ; he learns through imitation and finds pleasure in imitation. Thus, instinct for imitation which is rooted in human nature gave birth to poetry. Some writers, 'the graver spirit', imitated noble actions and the actions of good men, while the more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons. From these two different kinds of writers developed Epic and Tragedy and Comedy. While this explanation may be inadequate as an explanation of the origin of poetry, it is still necessary to appreciate Aristotle's scientific bent of mind. He does not repeat the traditional argument that the muse or poetry is the daughter of memory; he does not say that the poet is 'inspired' by some divine agency or that he is possessed by what the Greeks used to call 'enthusiasm'. This is the essential modernity of Aristotle that he looks at poetry with the disinterestedness of a true scientist.

In the same chapter, Aristotle briefly discusses the development of drama and the contributions made by Aeschylus and Sophocles. Aeschylus introduced the second actor and thus, made dialogue a very important part of the play. He also reduced the importance of the Chorus. The importance of these

observations can be more tension or excitement on the stage. Sophocles introduced the third actor and thus made drama more exciting and gripping. He also introduced some innovations with regard to 'scene painting'. The remarks are followed by some observations on the language and metre employed in Tragedy. Aristotle says that the Greek dramatists through trial and error came to the right conclusion that the iambic metre was the most useful for writing dialogues. The language of Tragedy became elevated and dignified to suit the subject of Tragedy. We also find in this chapter Aristotle's penchant for making terse, teasing and brilliant observations. For example, Aristotle states that he will not go into the questions 'whether it (i.e. Tragedy) is to be judged in itself or in relation to itself'. This brief remark suggests two totally different attitudes towards literature. Critics and philosophers like Longinus and Plato have tried to evaluate poetry in terms of its relation to its effect on the audience. But the critics in the present century have generally rejected this approach and have dubbed it as 'the affective fallacy'. The new critics have argued that poem is to be seen as literature. Thus, even such a brief observation of Aristotle as the one he makes in the fourth chapter is full of suggestions and has far-reaching implications in the 'business of criticism '.

Comedy as an art form, the type of characters it imitates, and a brief account of its origins are discussed in the fifth chapter. In keeping with what he had said about the objects of imitation in the second chapter, Aristotle in this section says that Comedy imitates characters of a lower type and that it is concerned with 'some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive'. The essential function of Comedy appears to be a statistical function. But all the same, the ugly and evil aspects of life should not be presented by a comic artist. Anything that is painful or disturbing should be avoided. The influence of those observations on later writers can be illustrated by a reference to the *Poetics.* Ben Jonson, in his "Prologue" to *Every Man in His Humour*, states that the function of comedy is "to sport with folly not with vice". But Aristotle's theory of comedy appears to have little relevance to an understanding of some of the great comic writers in English. For example, Shakespeare, in his great comedies, deals with aspects of life which are painful. Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Caliban in *The Tempest* are illustrations of the limitations of Aristotle's theory of comedy.

It is in this section that Aristotle briefly comments on the 'Unity of Time' which was later grossly distorted and misinterpreted. Contrasting the epic with tragedy Aristotle says that "Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit; whereas the Epic has no limits of time." Aristotle is merely describing the practices of contemporary Greek playwrights. He is not prescribing or dogmatically asserting. But later commentators on the *Poetics* have

emphatically stated that Unity of Time is an Aristotelian prescription. It may also be mentioned here that Aristotle does not mention the Unity of Place even once in the book. So, the Unities of Time and Place may be called not Aristotelian but pseudo-Aristotelian Unities.

The sixth chapter is undoubtedly the most important chapter in the book. It is here that Aristotle gives his famous definition of Tragedy. It is also in this chapter that Aristotle makes that cryptic and puzzling observation that Tragedy "through pity and fear effects the proper purgation (or *katharsis)* of these emotions". His controversial remarks on the subject of plot and character in Tragedy are also to be found in this section.

His observations on plot and character, and his reference to *katharsis* would be discussed later.

The sixth chapter begins with the observation that Aristotle would discuss Comedy and Epic poetry later. But this promise is only partly fulfilled. There is no discussion of Comedy in the later sections of the book. This is one of the reasons for the general assumption that the *Poetics* is a fragment. Aristotle defines Tragedy as the "imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude'. By 'serious", Aristotle appears to mean an action that is 'significant' and not necessarily an action which ends unhappily. A play with a happy ending can also be called a Tragedy if it imitates an action that is 'serious'. A complete action is that which has a beginning , a middle, and an end. As regards magnitude, Aristotle says later in the book that a play should be long enough to permit a convincing change of fortune in the lives of the characters.

Every Tragedy has six parts. They are 'mythos' (or plot), 'ethos' ('or character) 'dianoia' (or thought), 'lexis' (or diction), 'melos' (or song), 'opsis' (or spectacle). Of all these, plot, says Aristotle, is the most important part of Tragedy. It is the soul of Tragedy. Spectacle, on the other hand, is the least important part of Tragedy. In fact, Aristotle goes to the extent of remarking that a play read gives the same pleasure as a play seen on the stage. He clearly states ; "for the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors." But modern critics are very sure that the power of a play cannot be felt apart from representation and actors. They maintain that a play acquires its full meaning and significance only when presented on the stage. A play presented on the stage is different from a play read in the closet. In fact, the test of a good play is its theatrical effectiveness. One of the curious features of the *Poetics* is Aristotle's utter disregard of the essential aspect of the art of the dramatist.

Since in the sixth chapter Aristotle states in unambiguous terms that plot is the first principle and the soul of a Tragedy, from the seventh chapter onwards, Aristotle discusses the proper structure of plot. In fact, quite a few of the

later sections are elaborate explications of what was implied in the famous definition of Tragedy given in the opening paragraphs of chapter six. Thus, the seventh section discusses what is meant by an action that is complete and of a certain magnitude. Aristotle defines a complete plot as that which has a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning is that which does not follow anything by 'casual necessity', the middle flows out of the beginning and the end naturally develops out of the beginning and the middle. What Aristotle means by this rather dry and technical description is that the plot of a perfect play is an inevitable flow of events. A perfect plot does not consist of a series of unconnected events. A good plot does not begin or end haphazardly. The events must flow out of each other or follow a pattern. The end of the play must be the end of the expectations of the audience. As a classicist, Aristotle asserts that a good play is a 'well-made' play. Modern theories of realism believe that the form of a work of art must reflect the raw, incomplete and chaotic nature of life. This would have been rejected outrightly by Aristotle. Events of life may not reveal any pattern, meaning or significance. Art for Aristotle is the ordering of life. He would not have agreed with the modern theories regarding 'expressive form'.

As regards the magnitude of the plot, once again Aristotle makes it clear that the criteria for deciding the proper length of a play must be concerned with the nature of drama itself. So, he states that 'the limit of length in relation to dramatic competition is not a part of artistic theory.' Elaborating his conception of the proper length of a play, Aristotle says that the play must not be small in magnitude that proportion cannot be seen. Similarly, the plot should not be a monster a thousand miles long'. These are two criteria which decides the proper length of a play. A perfect plot should have a magnitude easily embraced in one view. That is, a plot should be long enough to be capable of being grasped by a single effort of the imagination. And the proper magnitude in words of Aristotle, 'is comprised within such limits that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good or from good fortune to bad.' The plot should be long enough to permit the writer to present a convincing change of fortune in the lives of his characters. Short plays with arbitary 'denouement' do not conform to the law of probability or necessity. In the sentence quoted above, Aristotle suggests that the change need not be only from happiness to unhappiness. A happy ending is also possible and legitimate in a Tragedy which is an 'imitation of an action that is serious'.

Note:- S.H. Butcher, in his translation of the *Poetics* and F.L. Lucas in his book *Tragedy* have given brief analyses of the contents of the *Poetics.*

SHORT NOTES

1. Conception of Poetics : *Poetics* is traditionally a doctrine or systematic

theory of poetry. It defines poetry and its various branches and sub-divisions, forms and technical resources and discusses the principles that govern it and that distinguish it from other creative activities. The term is derived from the title of Aristotle's fragmentary work *peripoietikes,* or 'on poetic art', which is the foundation of and prototype of all later poetics. Aristotle himself defined it comprehensively as dealing with 'poetry itself and its kinds and the specific power of each, the way in which the plot is to be constructed if the poem is to be beautiful, of how many and of what parts it is composed and anything else that falls within the same inquiry'. (ch. 1).

But even before Aristotle there were other conceptions of **Poetics**. A hint of the *hedonistic theory* of poetry has been found in Homer's reference to the rhapsode who sings only to produce 'delight' in his listeners, as in the *Odyssey,* Book-8. But his song must be orderly and complete, *kaka kosmon,* and his subject is 'the deeds of men' (*Iliad*, Book2, line 484) as revealed by Apollo and the divine Muses to the poet, so it is truth. The poetics of inspiration may be traced to the poet's invocation to the Muse, and received theoretical form in Democritus, who was the best known representative of that view in antiquity. The opposite view of poetry as an acquired skill or technique may be found in certain sayings of Pindar and other poets. Among the philosophy schools, the Pythagoreans with their concepts of harmony, proportion and catharsis provide the rudiment of another conception of *Poetics* which may have influenced later views.

2. CLASSICAL ELIZABETHAN DRAMA and Poetics : The relations of *Classical And Elizabethan Drama* to **Poetics**, as more generally to aesthetic theory are manifold and complex. The critic's main concern is usually with the evaluation and analysis of the work which is in front of him, but this evaluation logically implies standards of judgement which have their roots in an aesthetic or poetic of some kind. This relationship being by implication may range anywhere from the conscious adherence to a definite system (e.g. in the case of the Chicago Aristotlelians), to the professed rejection of all aesthetics or poetics, as in the impressionists like Anatole France. Even more delicate and sensitive is the relationship between poetics and actual creation. Does a poet start with a definite theory of what poetry should be, and then attempt to fit his own composition into the requirements of that theory? All intellectualistic conceptions of poetics answer in the affirmative, all intutioistic or eidetic (concerning mental images of unusual vividness and detail) theories in the negative. But even a critic who believes in the creative imagination may acknowledge that a poet may have before him a vague and fluctuating idea of what his poem is going to be, an orientation toward certain subjects and certain forms, a sketch, outline or 'harmony of tones and feelings' from which his poem then develops, assuming definite shape and concrete verbalization in the process of expression. The ideal of the poetry that a poet

may dream of or aim at may be called his poetics

3. Ethical Criticism: Right from the beginning, the most pervasive of ideological standards in the critical tradition have been ethical standards. The profound moral influence that poetry is capable of exerting has been an active issue in criticism since Plato banished from his ideal **Republic** all poetry except hymns to the gods and praises of famous men. For much subsequent criticism, the problem of the relation between moral and aesthetic standards was posed in Horace's finely ambiguous formula that the end of poetry is 'an prodesse ant delectore', to instruct or to delight- or both. The grounds on which Renaissance critics defended poetry from philistines and philosophers were ethical: poetry incited men to virtue through representing the beauty of noble actions. And this was no mere tactical manoeuvre. It was an axiom in older genre-theory that each of the major forms had its own contribution to make towards the inculcation of valuable idea about human conduct. Rapin and Le Bossu, as also Virgil and Spenser, regarded the epic as potentially a lesson in ethical and even political wisdom. On the one hand, we have outright didacticism, while on the other there is the much popularized concept of 'art for art's sake.' Of course, few would deny the proposition that literature exhibits human character and actions in situations that have serious moral meaning and thus, that it is in part, in Matthew Arnold's famous phrase, a "criticism of life".

LESSON NO. 1.5 **AUTHOR : DR. B.R. RAO**

CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

THE POETICS

Analysis (continued)

The eighth chapter of the *Poetics* is one of the shortest. It takes up for discussion the question whether unity of plot consists in the unity of the hero, that is, the labours of Hercules or the wanderings of Odysseus, can they be the subject of a single tragedy? Aristotle says that bad poets mistake the unity of the hero for the unity of plot. But Homer, the poet of 'surpassing' merit never commits this error. So, Aristotle advises the prospective playwrights to follow in the footsteps of Homer. A perfect plot has an organic unity. Its structure is so inevitable and the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjoined and disturbed. Coleridge, in the first chapter of the *Biographia Literaria,* uses similar language when he compares a great play by Shakespeare to an Egyptian pyramid. And the modern new critics speak in similar terms of the form-content relationship in a great work of art. Thus, Aristotle's comments on the perfect structure of plot are historically significant.

The superiority of Poetry over History is the main theme for discussion in the ninth chapter. Here is to be found that well-known defence of poetry which was referred to by Wordsworth in his *"Preface"* (1800), and by Arnold in his *The Study of Poetry.* However, this is not one of the most brilliant of chapters in the book. Aristotle's defence of Poetry in this section is more clever than profound. Contrasting Poetry with *History* he states that the Historian relates what has happened, the Poet what may happen. The Historian deals with the particulars and the accidental, while the Poet expresses the general and universal. By the universal, Aristotle meant: 'How a particular person of a certain type will, on occasion, speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity'. From these remarks of Aristotle, it becomes obvious that he expects characters in poetry to be 'types' and the situations 'typical', that is, situations and characters must follow a pattern of predictability. So, Aristotle says grandly that 'Poetry is more philosophical, and a higher thing than History'. But Aristotle weakens his thesis by trying to find out why tragedians

'keep to real names'. The explanation advanced by him is that what has happened is manifestly possible. But if what has happened revealed what may happen, an equally convincing argument can be made out that the Historian is also concerned with the universal and essential aspect of life. Thus, one can come to the opposite conclusion that History is a higher thing. Thus, this part of the section, in spite of the adulatory reference made to it by Wordsworth and Arnold is simply an illustration of verbal jugglery in which Aristotle rarely indulged. While discussing the comparative merits of Poetry and History, Aristotle makes an observation which has puzzled many modern commentators. While referring to the practice of some Greek dramatists inventing new stories, Aristotle says, "In Agathon's *Antheus,* incidents and names alike are fictitious and yet they give nonetheless pleasure. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to received legends..... for even subjects that are known are known only to a few." Modern commentators on Greek Drama argue that the stories in Greek tragedies were already known to the audiences. Hence, there was no surprise for the audiences. But the Greek audience derived pleasure from what is sometimes referred to as 'dramatic irony'. The audiences, since they knew the story in advance, were wiser than the characters on the stage. The omniscience of the audiences made them ironically contrast the expressed intentions and the declared ambitions of a character on the stage with the inevitable end that awaited him. So, it is argued that Aristotle here is exaggerating when he says that "even known subjects are known only to a few"

Coming back to the subject of the plot, Aristotle states that out of all kinds of plots, the episodic is the worst. By 'episodic plot', he means a plot in which events follow each other but not flow out of each other. In a perfect plot, the events are related to each other by the laws of probability and necessity. And in the last paragraph of this section, he discusses how emotions of pity and fear may be aroused. These emotions are 'inspired' when the sudden changes of fortune come 'by surprise', and yet they follow 'cause and effect.' Here, Aristotle unerringly pointed out the paradoxical effect of tragedy. The action of a tragedy concerns dramatic change of fortune. But at the same time, there is nothing arbitrary about these changes because they 'have an air of design.'

Chapter ten briefly discusses the kinds of plot- the simple and the complex. The simple plot is that in which there is change but not reversal of situation and recognition. For example, *Prometheus Bound*, a play by Aeschylus, begins with Prometheus already fallen, and it ends with a greater tragedy overwhelming him. The change is from bad fortune to worse fortune. And

1. Humphry House: *Aristotle's Poetics*,p.96
2. Humphry House : *Aristotle's Poetic*s, p.973

there is no 'recognition' in this play. In a complex plot, there is 'recognition' followed by 'reversal of situation'. He again reiterates that in a perfect tragedy, later events are necessary to probable results of preceding actions. The difference between a good plot and bad plot is the difference between *propter hoc* (i.e. follow from) and *post hoc* (i.e. merely follow after, without any connection).

In the next chapter, Aristotle defines 'peripeteia' and 'anagnorisis'. As regards the meaning of the word 'peripeteia' there is a great deal of disagreement among critics. S.H. Butcher translates it as 'Reversal of the Situation'. Professor Bywater translates it or to be more accurate, anglicizes it into 'peripety'. L.J. Potts translates it as 'Irony'. Margoliouth and F.L. Lucas argue that Aristotle had in mind what is called the 'irony of Fate'. 'irony of Fate' is defined by L.J. Potts as the coming of full circle of a wheel which first carries a man up and then down, and it is linked closely with the primitive but persistent idea of "idea before a fall."[1] Humphry House rejects Butcher's translation of the word. He says, "If it is to be paraphrased at all, the phrase which fits best is 'reversal of intention"[2] This controversy about the meaning of this Greek word makes one thing very clear. The change or the reversal must not be viewed in isolation from the action of the play as whole. A change comes only after the events appear to be moving in a direction favourable to the hero and this apparent change makes the hero in a Greek tragedy inordinately proud. Hence, the dramatic reversal that follows is not merely a change of fortune. It punctures the pretensions of the hero as he is forced to recognize the irony of fate. This is why in the eleventh section, Aristotle gives the examples of Oedipus and Lynceus to emphasise this ironic reversal of intention. Oedipus desperately hoping to be saved by the news brought by the messenger is actually damned by it. Danaus, gloating over the impending death of Lynceus, is unexpectedly killed. Thus, *peripeteia* constitutes a very crucial moment in the action of a tragedy.

'Peripeteia' is preceded and caused by 'anagnorisis'. Butcher translates 'anagnorisis' as 'Recognition', L.J. Potts as 'Disclosure' and Humphry House accepts Bywater's translation 'Discovery'. But the disagreement among them is with regard to the exact meaning of the word. Is it merely a recognition of the identity of persons or something more radical and profound ? In the second paragraph of section XI, Aristotle defines *anagnorisis* as a 'change from ignorance of knowledge'. This phrase can be legitimately interpreted as reference to that profound self-recognition that every tragic hero arrives at with all painful consequences of such self-recognition. It can be legitimately interpreted as referring to that moment in the life of the hero when he

1. Ibid.
2. L.J.Potts: *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*,p.82

recognises the truth about himself. In some cases the 'recognition' may save the hero, but in other cases it may come too late. But all great tragic heroes, Greek or Elizebethan, experience this moment of blinding illumination and recognition. And even a modern play like, *The Iceman Cometh* dramatises the devastating effects of self-recognition on a group of characters living in their 'pipe dreams'.

But other critics argue that this interpretation is not warranted by the text of the *Poetics.* In the passage concerned, as Humphrey House grudgingly admits, it is a pity that "nearly all the examples should be examples of the discovery of the identity of the person."[1] Potts remarks that Anagnorisis is simply the revelation of unknown facts, or the clearing up of factual misunderstanding. There is no reason to think it includes the sudden flashes of discernment.[2](e.g. Lear's "I ve' ta' en too little thought of this" or Ferdinand's "Cover her face, mine eyes dazzle. She died young"). The text of the *Poetics* appears to suggest that for Aristotle 'anagnorisis' meant the recognition of the identity of the person. The best form of recognition is coincident with 'peripeteia'. These two occuring almost simultaneously, produce pity and fear. Very briefly Aristotle works out the various kinds of 'recognition' possible. He makes a passing reference in this section to scenes of suffering by which he means 'destructive or painful action such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like preys upon the like. *Ajax* depicts "scenes of suffering". But to Aristotle these appear to be of minor significance since he does not dilate upon them.

The twelfth chapter is generally regarded as an interpolation because in this section Aristotle discusses the 'quantitative part' of a Tragedy. There is a great deal of justification for regarding this as an interpolation because the quantitative division of a play into four parts has no significant place in Aristotle's analysis of Tragedy.

'Every Tragedy' says the writer, 'can be divided into four parts'. The **Prologue** is an introductory scene where a single character speaks. This is followed by the **Parode** which is defined as the first undivided utterance of the Chorus. Thus, it is only after the Prologue and the Parode that the major tragic figure makes his or her appearance on the stage. By **Episode** Aristotle means that entire part of a tragedy which is between 'choric songs'. This can be understood only by a reference to the conditions of the Greek stage. The Chorus normally consisting of 12 to 15 members was present on the stage from the beginning to the end of a Greek Tragedy. Since the Greek dramatists could not dispense with the Chorus there could be no change of scene or place. The episode roughly corresponds to a scene in modern drama. An episode came to an end when the character retreated into the interior of the Greek stage. At the end of each episode, there were songs sung by the Chorus, songs of lamentation or of joy, of assurance or of desire, depending on the situation. This part of

1. L.J. Potts.'*Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*,p.33.

the play, Aristotle calls 'choric song'. The '**exode**' as the word itself suggests, is no choric song. The Stasimon is choric ode without anapests or trochaic tetrameters, and the kommos is a joint lamentation of the Chorus and actors. The quantitative division of the play is a rather mechanical division of tragedy. As has been said earlier, it has no importance in Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Hence, most of the commentators of the *Poetics* have very little or nothing to say on this. The most appropriate comment of this section comes from L.J. Potts who says, "This chapter is of no importance except to the historian of Greek Tragedy and not most to him."[1]

The thirteenth chapter begins with the famous definition of the tragic hero. This would be discussed in detail later. After defining the tragic hero, Aristotle goes back to the discussion of the structure of perfect tragedy. He maintains that a perfect tragedy is single in its issue- that is the change of fortune would be from good fortune to bad fortune and vice versa. He, thus, very clearly expresses his preference for an unhappy ending. This is why he says that Euripides is the most tragic of poets, because most of his plays end unhappily. In the next section, Aristotle contradicts himself by preferring a happy ending. This contradiction may be viewed in his way : for Aristotle what was important was the fact of change, not the direction of change.

Commenting on the importance of an unhappy ending, Aristotle remarks that tragedy, with a double thread of plot is second in rank. By double thread of plot, Aristotle means a play in which there is 'poetic justice': the good are rewarded and the bad punished at the end of such an ending. Aristotle conceded that it is popular with the audience. But he rejects such an ending as being inartistic because in constructing such plays, the dramatist is guided by the audience. But such a play does not give the true tragic pleasure. A happy ending is more appropriate for a comedy. The practice of later dramatists and the views of other critics on this, make interesting reading. In the English dramatic tradition, tragedy has always been associated with an unhappy ending. For the Elizabethan dramatists, the fall of a great man was an awe-inspiring and aesthetically satisfying subject. But critics like Dryden and Samuel Johnson held rather unusual views on the subject. Dryden in his Dedication to *The Spanish Fryar,* wrote, 'It is not to trivialise an undertaking to make a tragedy end happily, for it is somewhat difficult to save than 'tis to kill'. The dagger and the cup of poison are always in readiness, but to bring the action to its last extremity and then by probable means to recover all, will require the art of judgement of a writer and cost him many a pang in performance. Johnson complained that Shakespeare in his tragedies sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more anxious to please than to instruct that he seems to write without a moral purpose'. Dr. Johnson preferred Tate's notorious version of *King Lear* in which Cordelia does not die but 'retires with victory and felicity'. Dennis, the famous critic of the age, preferred 'poetic

justice' in tragedy.

Fear and pity, argues Aristotle in the fourteenth chapter, must result from the inner structure of the plot. Arousing these through 'spectacle' is inartistic. With his characteristic indifference towards 'spectacle', Aristotle says that the plot should be so constructed that even without the aid of the eye, "he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place." He, then, discusses the kinds of action which would evoke these emotions. He rightly points out that when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near and dear, emotions of pity and fear are evolved. After discussing four different kinds of situations that an artist can choose: the deed of horror may be done in full awareness of the tie of kinship as in the story of Merope; the tie of kinship may be discovered after the commission of the crime as in the case of Oedipus; one may be about to act with full awareness but at the last moment the disaster is averted as in the story of Menelaus and Orestes and finally, deed of horror is about to be perpetrated in ignorance, but recognition averts the catastrophe as in the Cresphontes. Aristotle says that the last case is the best. This means that Aristotle in this section regards a happy ending as the best ending although in the earlier section he had clearly spelled out his preference for an unhappy ending.

After discussing at great length the plot of a perfect tragedy, Aristotle starts discussion of 'ethos' or 'character' in the fifteenth chapter of the book. It must be made clear here that Aristotle's views on character are far from being profound. Aristotle believes that character in tragedy must conform to known human types. He has four criteria which he believes an artist must keep in mind while creating. Character must be 'good'. Goodness is for the modern critic a very limited and limiting criterion but in Greek tragedy one doesn't find embodiment of villainy like Barabas, lago, Richard III or Macbeth. The characters of Greek tragedy may not be paragons of goodness but they are more good than bad. The tragedy is generally caused by events over which they have no control. Hence 'goodness' is not inappropriate as a term of description of characters in a Greek tragedy. The second criterion is 'propriety'. For example, valour and cleverness are 'proper for men but not for women', says Aristotle. Thirdly, character must be 'true to life' by which Aristotle appears to mean 'true to type'. The fourth requirement is that character must be consistent. These criteria betray Aristotle's limitations as a critic. From Elizabethan drama, we derive the idea of character as something complex, ambiguous, contradictory and full of those bewildering inconsistencies which make it true to life. Aristotle has a very simple idea of character in tragedy. The artist, he believes, must generalize and not particularise. This is complemented by the practices of many of the great English writers like Shakespeare. Even Milton's Satan is far from being a type.

Aristotle, then, takes up for discussion, the employment of '*Deus ex Machina'* or what Bywater calls 'stage artifice'. Aristotle is here referring to a device employed frequently by dramatists like Euripides. A complication was very often resolved by bringing a god on the stage. But Aristotle condemns the artifice. According to him, nothing extraneous, irrelevant or unpredictable should find a place in tragedy. A too frequent employment of this device makes the play less convincing and betrays the incompetence or the sheer indifference of the dramatist. And finally Aristotle also says that an artist while preserving the distinctive form of the original must make the character more beautiful than life. These inadequate remarks on character along with what has been said on the objects of imitation in the second section of the *Poetics* make it clear that Aristotle's views on character are outdated.

The remaining sections do not match the brilliance of the earlier chapters. In Section XVI, Aristotle once again discusses different forms of recognition'. These are (a) recognition by signs, birth marks or those acquired after birth, (b) recognition through a process of reasoning, (c) recognition through memory, (d) and finally, recognition that arises from the structure of the incidents. The last is the best and Aristotle cites Sophocles's *Oedipus* as an example of the best form of recognition. This section is thus rather a mechanical analysis of Greek Tragedy. Since "recognition" constitutes a crucial part of a Greek Tragedy, Aristotle's lengthy discussion on the forms of recognition is not irrelevant. But it is not profound and its relevance to later drama is not very great.

Section XVII contains Aristotle's suggestions to young and aspiring writers. He advises the poet to use his visual imagination.....to place the scene as far as possible, before his eyes. The poet should also work out his play with the proper gestures, feel those emotions which he wants to represent. Since this is not easy to do, Aristotle says, "Hence poetry implies a happy gift of nature or a strain of 'madness'. Again, while constructing a play, he should begin with outline, and later fill in the details. Since Aristotle never wrote poetry himself, his advice is far from being useful or interesting. His comments on how to write a play are superficial. He had very little interest in the study of mind and hence this is one of the most unsatisfactory sections in the book.

Abruptly in Section XVIII, Aristotle comes back to the discussion of the plot of tragedy. He divides a tragedy into two parts- "the complication" and the "denouement" or the unravelling. Complication includes all that extends from the beginning to that part of the play which makes a change in the fortunes of the protagonists. The rest of the action is "denouement". This is a convenient division of the play although it is a little too obvious. This is followed by a division of tragedies into four categories : the simple, the complex, the ethical and the pathetic. The first two kinds of tragedy Aristotle has already discussed

in section X. A simple tragedy has no "anagnorisis", no change of fortune, while a complex tragedy has both. By ethical tragedy Aristotle means a tragedy in which the motives are 'ethical' that is the struggle or the conflict in the play is not personal, it takes place at a higher and impersonal level. By pathetic tragedy, Aristotle appears to mean tragedies of 'passion', i.e., plays like those on Ajax and Ixion where the motive is 'passion'. But this four-fold division of tragedy does not occupy an important place in the *Poetics* because Aristotle does not discuss this again. But these brief remarks on 'ethical tragedy' have certain interesting possibilities. One can think of a play where the conflict is not between individuals driven by personal ambition. There can be great tragedy in which the conflict is between ideas and ideologies, between gigantic and impersonal forces. But Aristotle does not clearly specify what he means by an ethical tragedy.

In this section, Aristotle repeats himself a little when he again states that an epic structure is not suited for a tragedy. This part of the section is the repetition of his remarks on this subject in Section VIII. But the last paragraph does contain a significant observation. The Chorus, says Aristotle, must be an integral part of the whole. He notices how in the plays of Euripides whom he had earlier called the most tragic of poets, the Chorus has no important function to fulfil, but in the plays of Sophocles, the Chorus is one of the actors.

Section XIX is yet another disappointing section. This is devoted to discussion of 'Lexis' and 'Dianoia' or 'Thought' It is a unique feature of Greek Tragedy. By 'Thought' Aristotle is referring to what is said by a character to the other characters on the stage with the intention of influencing them. Since the Chorus was present on the stage from the beginning to the end of the tragedy, what was said by the protagonist to the Chorus was very often an example of 'Thought'. But this is not relevant in a discussion of modern tragedy because the Chorus has almost disappeared from the modern stage.

By 'Lexis' or 'Diction' Aristotle means something very limited. Under 'Diction' he discusses 'Modes of Utterance'. For him, 'Diction' appears to be a very unimportant part of tragedy. Modern critics on the other hand, regard language or 'Diction' as the most essential feature of a poem. The key to the significance of a work of art is the way in which the artist manipulates and transforms the language of ordinary communication. This unique aspect of a work of art is ignored by Aristotle and this is one of his major limitations as a critic.

Sections XX, XXI and XXII may be discussed together. In these three chapters, Aristotle discusses some elementary aspects of language : the words the poets use, of metaphor, and finally 'the perfection of style'. Section XX discusses some of the most obvious features of language, like the syllable, the noun, the verb, the preposition and so on. It sounds a little too elementary, it must be remembered that Aristotle was writing at a time when grammarians had

not yet systematically analysed the Greek language. Sections XXI discusses the poet's use of current words, strange words, the figures of speech, etc. Section XXII defines the perfect style as that which is clear but not 'mean', lofty and elevated but not obscure and artificial. In support of his observation, Aristotle quotes extensively from Greek poetry. These chapters give a thorough knowledge of the Greek language and it must be remembered that the *Poetics* was written for the convenience of the students of Aristotle. However, these chapters are considered by many critics as being too obvious and elementary to demand any explication.

Chapter XXIII takes up the discussion of epic poetry. The epic like tragedy must imitate a single and complete action. Even the length of the epic must be governed by the same criterion - that it must be capable of being "embraced in a single day". There are four kinds of epics- the simple, the complex, the ethical and the 'passionate'. The epic poet also employs 'peripeteia' and 'anagnorisis'. The rest of the *Poetics* discusses the differences between the epic and the tragedy. Thus, in Section XXIV, Aristotle points out that the poets use single metre, the heroic metre, whereas the dramatists use a wide variety of metres and sometimes even prose. The epic poet, however, has this advantage that he can imitate several lines of action carried on at one and the same time. This is obviously not possible in tragedy. The element of the wonderful finds a place both in epic and tragedy. The epic poet narrates while the tragic poet dramatises.

Section XXV takes up the rather unusual topic- "the critical difficulties". For example, he says that any error which touches the essentials of the poetic art must be censured. Thus, if the poet describes the impossible or the irrational, he should be censured. But if the impossible or the irrational is justified in terms of art, then the poet should be said to be true to life, true to myth or legend, or true to the ideal. Similarly, the rightness or wrongness of a statement in a work of art must be judged in terms of the context of the poem. Aristotle says, "we must also consider by whom it is said or done, to whom by what means or for what end." Difficulties with regard to language may be solved by reference to usage or the solution may depend upon accepted custom. It may be caused by ambiguity of meaning. Hasty judgement should be avoided. Aristotle appears to be pleading for caution and understanding on the part of critics.

The last Section tries to resolve the controversy regarding the comparative merits of epic and tragedy. The epic, it may be argued appeals to a refined and limited audience, while a tragedy appeals to a heterogeneous audience. As epic can be easily recited or read, but a play needs actors who quite often

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1. F.L.Lucas: *Tragedy* : *Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* (Allied Publishers, Private limited), pp.14-15.

fail. Hence it may be argued, that the epic is superior because it appeals to a cultivated audience, does not need gesture and is more refined. But Aristotle presents these arguments only to reject them. He says that gesticulation may be equally overdone in epic recitation. If a play fails because of bad acting, it is the fault of the actor, and not of the dramatist. He repeats the arguments that like the epic, tragedy also can do without spectacle. A play read gives the same pleasure as a play acted (It may be mentioned here that in the eighteenth century, Dr. Samuel Johnson expressed similar views on the subject in his "Preface to Shakespeare"). A little illogically Aristotle says in the very next paragraph that tragedy has this advantage over the epic poem that it uses music and spectacular effects as important accessories. But the last argument in defence of tragedy is the best. He says that tragedy "attains its end within narrower limits". The concentrated effect of tragedy is superior to the diffuseness of the epic. And so he concludes: "It plainly follows that Tragedy is the higher art as attaining its end more perfectly."

The *Poetics* is thus mainly concerned with 'Tragedy' as an art form. It is quite true that the book is full of repetitions, contains a few digressions, and leaves some questions unanswered and some promises unfulfilled. In spite of these obvious limitations, the *Poetics* is one of the greatest works of criticism. Aristotle has enriched the vocabulary of *Classical And Elizabethan Drama*. One cannot discuss or write about a play without using words like plot, character, recognition, change of fortune and error of judgement. Aristotle's definition of 'Tragedy' is still useful in our day for an understanding of Greek Tragedy. Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero had a remarkable sustained influence on many great dramatists of the West. As F.L. Lucas points out., "even today there is no better starting point for the study of serious drama than the *Poetics*. But the *Poetics*, ill-written, incomplete lecture-notes as they are, provide even now the basis for an enquiry into the nature of drama.'[1]

Late Prof. B.R. RAO has given exhaustive chapter- wise analysis of the *Poetics* and has explained almost all the major concepts and critical terms and it would not be proper to repeat them separately. Student is advised to go through the lessons thoroughly. However, some terms have been explained below for the benefit of the students.

1. Chorus

Chorus is an established tradition of Greek Tragedy. The Chorus consisting of 12 or 15 members remained on the stage from the beginning to the end of Greek Tragedy. The chorus was essential because there was no change of place or scene in Greek Tragedy. The chorus sang songs at the end of each scene, songs of lamentation or of joy of assurance or of desire. A Greek chorus often intervenes to express sentiments between the tense emotional speeches of the chief personages of the play. Chorus has often been regarded

as a hindrance, W.M. Dixon in *Tragedy* calls it a "deliberate entry against realism, to exclude versimilitude, to forbid the illusion that we are witnessing a scene from real life." But chorus can be useful in the hands of a master. Choral odes of Sophocles are relevent to the plot than are many Euripidean lyrics. Chorus acts as a bridge between the audience and the stage. It also enables the poet to express his own views. It also represents the simple humanity as a foil to the super-human persons of the plot. Aristotle regards chorus as an accessory rather that as an integral part of Tragedy.

2. Affective Fallacy

Aristotle states in the fourth chapter of the *Poetics* that he will not go into the question 'whether it (i.e. Tragedy) is to be judged in itself or in relation to itself.' This cryptic observation suggests two antithetical attitudes towards literature. Critics like Longinus and Plato suggested that literature should be evaluated on the basis of its effect on the people and the audience. The new critics term this as 'affective fallacy' and assert that any piece of literature should be judged on the basis of contents of the work itself. Wimsatt and Beardsley define the 'affective fallacy' as the efforts of evaluating a poem by its effect especially its emotional effect upon the reader. As a result of this fallacy, 'the poem itself as an object, tends to disappear so that criticism ends in impressionism and relativism. Aristotle's theory of catharsis can be the subject matter of controversy in this regard.

3. Poetic Justice

Commenting on the significance of an unhappy ending, Aristotle remarks that tragedy with a double plot is second in rank. He considers a plot in which there is 'poetic justice' that is the good are rewarded and the evil are punished as not the ideal. Aristotle believes that such equitable distribution of justice goes well with comedy, but it impairs and dilutes the tragic action. In a tragedy a person suffers more than he deserves and usually his undeserved sufferings end in his tragic death. The tragic end evokes the emotions of pity and fear and produces the pleasure proper to the tragic feelings of catharsis. A tragedy is in a realm of its own, and should be governed by its own high principles of decorum and morality, and not by the way things work out in the real world. Poetic justice destroys the possibility of tragic suffering which exceeds what the protagonist has merited by his tragic *flaw*. Aristotle rejects the plot which strives to demonstrate poetic justice at the close of a literary work.

4. Deus Ex Machina

In Latin, **Deus ex machina** means "a god from a machine". It refers to the practice of some Greek playwrights, especially Euripides to end the drama with god who was lowered on the stage by a mechanical apparatus and who

solved problems of the dramatic personages. The phrase is now used for any forced or improbable device, a birthmark, an unexpected inheritance, the discovery of a lost will, letter or handkerchief by which a hard pressed author makes shifts in the story to resolve his plot. This device has been used by Dickens in *Oliver Twist,* Hardy in *Tess*, Dryden in *All for Love,* Shakespeare in *Othello* and Brecht in *Three Penny Opera.* Aristotle is against the use of this device which Bywater calls the 'stage artifice'. He calls this device incredible, wrong and improbable. It shows the incompetence of the author and renders the story unconvincing . It also dilutes the natural and logical growth of the play. Development of the action of the play should be ensured through logical and essential actions and not through the employment of stage artifices.

5. Spectacle

The primary purpose of tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear. Aristotle asserts that these two primary emotions should never be aroused through spectacle. With his characteristic indifference towards 'spectacle', Aristotle asserts that plot should be so constructed that even without the aid of the eye, 'he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place'. Too much emphasis on events and the scenery will weaken the inherent unity of the plot and render the play melodramatic. Fear and pity, argues Aristotle must arise from the inner structure of the play. Spectacle, at best, can be described as a stage artifice.

6. Lexis or Diction

Lexis or diction means the mode of utterances. But Aristotle does not attach much importance to diction. He does not regard it as an essential part of a poem. Modern critics view language as the most important tool to arouse the emotions of pity and fear. The success of the writer depends on his skills to manipulate and transfrom the language of common humanity to the sublime and artistic level. The proper diction is one which is clear but not 'mean', elevated but not obscure and artificial. Though Aristotle discusses various elements of language, yet he regards diction as an artifice.

7. Hexis

Humphry House defines character as 'hexis' or bent or tendency of habit or mind. Habit is something that we develop through repeated actions. This shows that our actions have a great bearing on the formation of our habits and tendencies. This establishes the primacy of action in shaping, developing and perpetuating our character. Hence charater is formed, revealed and actualized through our actions. Since plot deals with action, and not with character, action is the soul of Tragedy.

Short Notes

1. Metacriticism- The task of metacriticism is the critical examination of criticism, of its technical terms, its logical structure, its fundamental principles and premises. If the critic says that Keats's *Lamia* is a masterpiece because it embodies the woman-into-serpent archetype, the metacritic will ask how does the critic know this? What sort of evidence could establish such an embodiment? Is the concept archetype sufficiently articulated to serve as a critical tool? Why is the presence of an archetype in a literary work a reason for judging it to be great? These questions go beyond the scope of the critic's concerns, which is with the work itself and which apparently must pre-suppose, rather than provide, anwers to them. If we think of criticism in the narrower sense as consisting of singular statements about particular poems, short stories etc., then we immediately wonder whether such statements can be brought together into a system, in which some principles are seen as logical consequences of other, more fundamental ones, The endeavour to form such principles and to connect them belongs to the *theory of literature*, which is sometimes called'*Poetics'*, like Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism (*1957). How far criticism can be, or ought to be, systematized in this way is itself an important (metacritical) question.'

2. Practical Criticism- By practical criticism is meant the close study of particular works. Few commentaries on individual works before the eighteenth century are thorough or illuminating. Perhaps, such things begin with Addison's *Spectator* essays or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and some of the close attention paid to Shakespeare by writers like William Richardson and Maurice Morgann. But the real father of practical criticism is Coleridge. In him, we can for the first time see the qualities of the best of the 'New Critics' : intense brooding on a work to grasp its essential quality and illustrating this by careful and subtle reference to details. Matthew Arnold's idea of 'touchstones', looks at first like the sort of comparision of actual passages that is so popular today, but in fact, it is not pioneer work. It has none of the careful choice of comparable passages, the juxtaposition of like with almost like that a good modern critic will insist on. Practical criticism had a definite beginning in 1920 when I.A. Richards gave unsigned poems to his students at Cambridge for their comments and appraisal. Richards described the experiment as *Practical Criticism* and added a discussion of the main problem of criticism. This book and its sequel, *Interpretation in Teaching,* are among the main sources of what has become standard lecture room practice in America and in England : based on close reading or *explication de texte.*

3. Creation of Tragedy- What seems to be the social conditions conducive to the writing of tragedy? Both the Golden Age of Greece and the England of Shakespeare's of the time of Elizabeth -I were places and periods of great

intellectual stimulation. The human spirit was exalted, mankind ennobled. The world seemed an exciting place full of enormous possibilities. Life was not blind or filled with despair. The spirit of such ages was congenial to tragedy because these cultures affirmed the worth and dignity of human life. The atmosphere of these times seems to conform to the three basic assumptions necessary for the creation of tragedy. '**First**, the dignity of man; **second** , the freedom of his will and his responsibilty for the use which he makes of that will; and **third**, the existence in the universe of a superhuman factor'. (Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O Neill, Jr. (eds.) *The Complete Greek Drama,* New York: Random House, Inc. 1938,p. xxviii). Such assumptions are positive expressions about life and its meaning. When the philosophical clilmate of an age rejects one or more of these points of view, tragedy of elevated and affirmative nature is difficult to create.

Thus, modern temper is considered to be largely an inhospitable ground for the nature of the tragic spirit.

LESSON NO. 1.6 **AUTHOR : DR. B.R. RAO**

CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA
ARISTOTLE : POETICS
On 'Catharsis' and 'Mimesis'

THE CONCEPT OF 'CATHARSIS' :

In the sixth chapter of the *Poetics* while defining tragedy, Aristotle writes that tragedy through pity and fear brings about the 'catharsis of these emotions'. For more than two thousand years, there has been an endless controversy regarding the meaning and significance of Aristotle's theory of 'catharsis'. John Morley was so disgusted with this sterile and unending debate that he wrote in his *Diderot* : "The immense controversy, carried on in books, pamphlets and flying articles, mostly German, as to what it was that Aristotle meant by the famous words in the sixth chapter of the **Poetics**, about tragedy accomplishing the purification of our moods of pity and sympathetic fear, is one of the disgraces of the human intelligence, a grotesque monument of human sterility.[1] The modern critics and the commentators like Lane Cooper, David Daiches, and Cleanth Brooks have accepted one or the other of the many interpretations given by past commentators. Other critics like George Whalley and Else have tried to demonstrate that more than two thousand years of commentary has been nothing but a distortion and a misreading of the *Poetics.* They have offered a new interpretation and thus have made their own contribution to the chaos of critical theories regarding catharsis. When one surveys this 'darkling plain where ignorant armies clash' one is tempted to agree with the remark of the furious and frustrated John Morley that the entire debate is 'a disgrace of the human intelligence' and 'a grotesque monument of human sterility'.

In the *Poetics* Aristotle is generally very lucid, very analytical, very thorough. However, on the subject of catharsis he is unusually silent. As scholar after scholar has remarked that the *Poetics* offers no help to the hopeful critic looking for some clue to the mystery surrounding the word, Professor Else remarks, 'The isolation and difficulty to the catharsis clause are indeed notorious, for the word catharsis does not occur again in the *Poetics*

(except in one passage which has nothing to do with catharsis)'. The word occurs only twice in the whole of the book. In the sixth chapter, in the famous definition of tragedy, the word 'catharsis' is used as an adjective in a completely different context in chapter XVII in that part of the section in which Aristotle is discussing how a writer should fill in the episodes, after first drawing the general outline of the plot (Refer to Butcher's Translation, page 63, the last but one line in which occurs the phrase '*Purificatory rites')*. After the sixth chapter, Aristotle engimatically repeats a few times that tragedy offers its own unique kind of pleasure- the

1. Quoted in F.L Lucas's **Tragedy**, p.35.

pleasure of the catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear. But the text of the *Poetics* is absolutely silent as regards the meaning of the term. Like the enigmatic Sphinx, the text offers no help to the devoted Aristotlelian. In the later chapters Aristotle does not discuss in detail the kind of action or hero would evoke pity and fear, but this is of no help in determining the term 'catharsis'. And one of the questions, which perhaps can never be answered is how important was the concept catharsis for Aristotle? Or, if it was so very important as the critics make it out to be why is it that Aristotle never bothers to explain (the term or explicate) the theory? That the book is a fragment is not the answer to the question because in the text of the *Poetics* Aristotle had plenty of opportunities for dilating upon catharsis but did not do so. What is catharsis, ask the scholars, but Aristotle does not want to answer.

The word 'catharsis' is used by Aristotle in another work of his, the *Poetics*. In that work while discussing music, Aristotle states that 'catharsis' is one of the important functions of music. He writes, 'We use this term without explanation for the present, when we come to speak of poetry, we shall give a clear account of it'. But unfortunately the *Poetics* where he speaks of poetry, he does not give the promised 'clear account of it'. And if critics try to discover the meaning of the word 'catharsis' from a study of passage in *The Poetics,* the context in which the word is used does give a clue to meaning of the word. The passage runs as follows :

For every feeling that affects some souls violently, affects all souls more or less; the difference is only one of degree. Take pity and fear, for example, or again enthusiasm. Some people are liable to become possessed by these latter emotions, but we see that when they have made use of the melodies which fill the souls with orgiastic feeling, they are brought back by the scared melodies to a normal condition as if they had been medically treated and undergone a catharsis. Those who are subject to the emotions of pity and fear and feelings generally will necessarily be affected in the same way; and so will other men in exact proportion to their susceptibility to

such emotions. All experience is a certain catharsis and pleasant relief. In the same manner melodies give innocent joy to men.[1]

This important extract from the *Poetics* does give a fairly clear idea of what is meant by catharsis. The term refers to the effect of music on people liable to become possessed by 'enthusiasm'. The effect of the sacred melodies, he mentions, is to bring the person possessed by 'enthusiasm' to 'a normal condition'. Thus, the effect of the music is to provide a 'pleasant relief' to excessive or violent emotions in the auditors. The effect of the catharsis of music creates the impression that the person concerned 'had been medically treated'. The commentators of the *Poetics* try to interpret the catharsis effect of tragedy to the specific nature of the effect. But most of the commentators agree on certain things. All of them, for example, believe that Aristotle's theory of catharsis is part of his answer to Plato's attack on poetry. The critics are

1. Humphry House: Aristotle's Poetics,107.

Unanimously of the view that catharsis refers to the effect of the play on the audience. All of them agree that the function of tragedy is first to evoke in the spectators the emotions of pity and fear, and then to bring about a 'catharsis' of the excess of these emotions thus providing a 'pleasurable relief'. And finally, the critics assume that the effect is 'automatic' that is it is more and less uniform. In the *Politics* Aristotle writes that the difference in the effects of music on different persons is 'only one of degree'- and they also assume that all tragedies have the same effect.

'A great historical discussion has centered round the phrase'[1], writes Professor Butcher.

One of the oldest interpretations of the concept of catharsis considers the term 'catharsis' as a medical metaphor. According to this view, the effect of a play on the audience is similar to the effect of medicine on the body. Tragedy, it is argued, presents incidents which evoke pity and fear. The emotion of pity is evoked by unmerited misfortune and fear for the misfortunes of a man like ourselves. Tragedy not only evolves these emotions but also brings about a 'catharsis' of these emotions. There is thus a removal of the excess of the emotions of pity and fear. This purgation or removal of the excess provides the audience an emotional relief. Plato had argued in the *Republic* that poetry 'waters and feeds the passions'. Plato regarded the emotions with a great deal of distrust. Aristotle, on the contrary, appears to argue that emotions are not bad in themselves. Only an excess of these emotions that disturbs the emotional equilibrium is

1. S.H.Butcher: "Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art", p.246.

dangerous. Plato's charge is that poetry disturbs or destroys the check of reason on the passions. Aristotle's contention is that far from destroying the emotional balance, poetry actually restores the balance. In the words of Professor Butcher, 'Aristotle held that it is not desirable to kill or starve the emotional part of the soul, and that the regulated indulgence of the feelings serves to maintain the balance of our nature'. This pathological theory of the cathartic effect of tragedy can be traced back to the Italian critics of the Renaissance. Spingarn in his *DRAMA in the Renaissance* cites some examples. Minturno in his *L' Arte Poetics (*564) presented this theory of tragedy. He wrote: 'As a physician eradicates by means of poisonous medicine, the perfervid poison of disease which effects the body, so tragedy purges the mind of its impetuosity by the force of these emotions beautifully expressed in verse'. Milton in his "Preface" to *Samson Agonistes* said something similar. He wrote, "Tragedy as it was anciently composed hath ever been held as the gravest, and most profitable of other poems; therefore, said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is temper or reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight stirred up by reading or seeing these passions well imitated". In the nineteenth century, a few critics restarted the arguments of the earlier commentators that catharsis was medical metaphor. In the twentieth century too quite a few commentators agreed with this interpretation. David Daiches, while conceding that there is considerable disagreement among scholars and critics, still asserts, 'but it seems that he (i.e. Aristotle) was claiming some kind of therapeutic value for tragedy.'[1] John Crowe Ransom, in his essay, 'The Cathartic Principle' after discussing catharsis as a medical metaphor, wittily observes, "Aristotle's opinion we have seen: 'it was that of a man with a medical training; it amounted to saying that people had better make the best of a modern military authority legalising prostitution in the neighbourhood of the camp".

Wimsatt and Brooks also appear to agree with the interpretation that catharsis is a medical Hippocratic metaphor 'implying the purgation or expulsion of something harmful'. But they opine that to discuss tragedy in terms of its effects on the audience is not the concern of the literary critic. A.L. Lucas agrees that Aristotle did use the term 'catharsis' as a medical metaphor but rejects the theory of catharsis with the comment that the "theatre is not a hospital". But the interpretation that the tragedy is an art- form which gives the pleasure of catharsis- i.e. a homoeopathic treatment of curing emotion by emotions is still one of the most widely accepted interpretations.

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1. David Daiches. *Critical Approaches to Literature*, p.28

Professor Butcher in his essay on "Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art" has offered a slightly modified interpretation of the above mentioned view of catharsis.

According to Butcher, the term 'catharsis' refers not merely to 'emotional relief' or the 'pleasurable vent to overcharged feeling'. When the tragic action is presented on the stage and the emotions of pity and fear are evoked and purged, the lower forms of emotions are found to have been transmitted into higher and more refined forms. 'The painful element in the pity and of reality is purged away, the emotions themselves are purged,' thus through a curative fear and tranquilising influence tragedy provides an aesthetic satisfaction. Butcher writes, 'Tragedy then does more than effect the homeopathic cure of certain passions. Its function, in his view, is not merely to provide an outlet for pity and fear, but to provide them a distinctively aesthetic satisfaction to purify and clarify them by then passing them through the medium of art'. (pp. 254-55). This new interpretation of catharsis has been rejected by many modern commentators. Benard is of this view, (i.e. that catharsis is a medical metaphor) which the student should learn from Butcher's work. Professor Humphry House warns in *Aristotle's Poetics* that Butcher's interpretation is a distortion of Aristotle's concept of catharsis and that it should be rejected .Wimsatt and Brooks cautiously suggest that Butcher's view connects more readily with normal modern views about the dignity of the tragic 'experience and its enlargement of our souls'. John Crowe Ransom also rejects it as 'False' because the text of the *Poetics* does not warrant this interpretation.

Humphry House and Lane Cooper offer yet another interpretation of the term 'catharsis'. Lane Cooper argues that catharsis is not merely a medical metaphor. The tragic purgation is psycho-physiological. Humphry House in his *Aristotle's Poetics* offers a similar view. He writes, to ask whether 'catharsis' is a *metaphor from* medicine or religion is to put the question in the wrong form. For it is not a metaphor derived from either. He suggested that the concept of catharsis must be interpreted in terms of the Aristotelian " golden mean". The word 'catharsis' refers not merely to a quantitative evaluation. It is also used to refer to a qualitative change in the body. Thus catharsis refers to a state of health which is the result of the restoration of the proper equilibrium or balance or harmony between the emotions.

Professor Else has presented a radically different interpretation of the concept of catharsis. Commenting on the earlier interpretation he argues that all of them are based upon certain common erroneous assumptions. For all the earlier commentators assumed that catharsis referred to the

change of feeling or even change of character which tragedy brings about in the spectator. It was also generally assumed that the effect of catharsis is automatic and uniform and that all audiences would react in more or less the same way. Else argues that the general assumption that 'the catharsis clause whatever it means, has to do with the emotional reaction of the spectators is 'a deep seated prejudice'.

According to Professor Else, catharsis refers not to an emotional effect with which to leave the theatre, but to pity and fear 'as they are incorporated in the structure of the play by the poet'. It is the action of the play which undergoes catharsis and not the spectator. Thus, catharsis is a process and not an end result. It is a process operated by the poet through 'this structure of events'. Else obviously bases his arguments on Aristotle's comments on the tragic hero in the thirteenth section of the book and also on his later comments on Complication and Denouement. Else is, of course, conscious of what he calls the chief weakness of his theory. His interpretation or hypothesis does not fit the *Poetics* passage in which Aristotle used the word 'catharsis' to refer to the effects of music on the audience. Professor Else writes, 'The chief weakness of my hypothesis is that it does not fit the *Politics* passage.

I hope it has the compensating virtue of according with the *Poetics*, including the crucial passage in chapter 14.' George Whalley in an article entitled "On Translating *Poetics"* defends Gerald Else's interpretation. He writes, Gerald Else, as far as I know, was the first to insist that the *katharsis* occurs primarily *inside* the action and Kitto, I think, settles the matter for good and all. It is the incidents within the action itself (not the emotions of the audience) that are purified, brought to sharp focus specific to tragedy, by the *mimesis*, by the presentational action'. (See *University of Toronto Quarterly*, January, 1970).

In spite of George Whalley's defence of Else's interpretation, not many modern commentators have accepted this view of catharsis. John Jones for example in his book, *On Aristotle's Poetics* and *Greek Tragedy* repeats the old argument that catharsis has something to do with the effect of the play on the audience. The concept of catharsis is thus a very important part of Aristotle's defence of poetry. While agreeing that this is what Aristotle meant by it, the modern commentators question the utility of this approach of poetry. Wimsatt and Brooks argue that the cathartic view of tragedy concerns after all not with what tragedy says or what tragedy is so much as with what tragedy may do to us. Such an approach lies in the realm of experimental psychology and not of DRAMA. Wimsatt and Beardsley have dubbed this kind of an approach as the 'affective fallacy' which they reject

along with the other fallacy, 'the intentional fallacy'. The argument of the modern critics is that the values of a work of art must be discovered in the work of art itself and not in its effect on the audiences. As T.S. Eliot argues persuasively, a good work of art may have a bad effect, and a bad work of art may have a good effect. The nature of poetry must not be confused with the social functions of poetry. However, Aristotle's theory of catharsis is significant because it is the first systematic attempt made to defend poetry in terms of its social function.

THE CONCEPT OF 'MIMESIS' :

The word 'mimesis' is very frequently used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* in relation to art in general and poetry in particular. The word is used with a remarkable regularity and great flexibility. It functions as a key term enabling Aristotle to identify the characteristic features of the arts in general and poetry in particular. Through a close analysis of the different ways in which the word 'mimesis" is employed in the *Poetics* it is possible to arrive at some conclusion regarding Aristotle's theory of poetry and the importance given to 'mimesis' in the *Poetics.*

It is quite obvious that Aristotle was not the first Greek commentator of poetry to use the word 'mimesis' in relation to poetry. As has been pointed out by S.H. Butcher and Mckeon, it was frequently employed' by commentators like Plato in their discussion of poetry. Plato in his work, the *Republic,* uses the word 'mimesis' while discussing the place of poetry in his 'ideal republic'. From a close study of the text of the *Republic* it becomes clear that the word 'mimesis' is used by Plato in at least two different senses. In Book II of the *Republic* while commenting on the narrative and imitative styles employed by the poet, Plato says that the poet speaks directly in dithyrambic poetry.

The poet can be sometimes 'wholly imitative' as in 'dramatic' poetry in which the poet speaks through a character. Thus, one of the meanings of the word 'mimesis' in the *Republic* is 'speaking through a character'. This rather specialized meaning of the word 'mimesis' is not completely irrelevant in a discussion of the *Poetics* because in Chapter XXIV of the *Poetic,* Aristotle writes, "The poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator". Thus, in Book II of the *Republic* the word 'mimesis' is used in a 'technical' sense. In the latter sections of the *Republic* the word 'mimesis' is used in the context of Plato's well-known theory of the 'essence'. Plato argues in these chapters that the essence of the idea is the ultimate reality. The ideas or the essences are 'fixed and immutable'. They are 'known but not seen'. In relation to the essences, which are knowable but not visible, all existence, is but a

'mimesis' or an imitation. Existence, thus in relation to essence is only a 'mimesis' or a 'copy'. The poet is an imitator of life, and life itself is merely a pale reflection or a 'mimesis' of the essence. Poetry is, thus, a 'mimesis' of the essence. In this philosophical sense, 'mimesis' means a copy, and a copy, however, good or faithful is unsatisfactory and misleading. The word 'mimesis', which is normally translated as 'imitation' is thus associated with a certain lack of originality, a copy of the real. So, when Aristotle used this word in the *Poetics,* it has already acquired a pejorative and disparaging connotation. But Aristotle does not accept Plato's usage. As S.H. Butcher puts it, "Aristotle as his manner was, accepted the current phrase and interpreted it anew. But he deepened and enriched its signification looking at it from many sides in the light of masterpieces of Greek art and literature".

In the *Poetics*, the word 'mimesis' occurs a number of times in widely differing contexts with different shades of meaning. In Plato, as has been seen, the term is used in a disparaging sense, limiting literature to a servile copying of the essence or the ultimate reality. In the *Poetics*, the term does not have this disparaging connotaion. It is used as a descriptive term which accounts for the variety and complexity of arts.

In the opening section of the book, Aristotle argues that the arts are different modes of 'mimesis' of life. Thus, the essence of artistic activity is that it is a 'mimesis' of life. Aristotle thus distinguishes the poetic activity from other kinds of activity, and art from other disciplines. He states clearly, people do, indeed, ascribe the word 'maker' or 'poet' to the name of the metre, and speak of elegiac poets or epic (that is hexametre) poets, as if it were not the imitation that marks the poet, but the verse that entitles them all indiscriminately to the name. This is followed by the arguments regarding all poetry to three causes. Man is imitative by nature, learns through imitation, and finds pleasure in imitation. Thus, the instinct of 'mimesis' or 'imitation' is seen, to be the origin of all poetry, and as the characteristic virtue of all the arts.

While commenting on the pleasure derived from imitation, Aristotle makes some very perceptive observations. He rightly observes that incidents and experiences which are very painful in the real life, if successfully imitated on the stage, give pleasure to the audiences. Thus, Aristotle is pointing out the unique nature of the pleasure derived from the arts. Whether the arts establish an 'aesthetic distance' between the audience and the experience imitated, or whether through imitation the painful or disturbing element is purged out of the experience represented is still a debated question and Aristotle does not answer this. He notices a fact but does not try to explain it. But he shrewdly observes the unique nature of art

which is 'mimesis' of life.

What does an artist imitate? It is here that the brilliance of Aristotle as a critic is revealed. In chapter II of the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that an artist can imitate or represent characters above the average, below the average or present them as they are. Thus, idealised representation, caricature or simple and faithful realism are all valid modes of 'mimesis'. In Plato's *Republic* the term meant only a copy of life. Aristotle extends and enriches the meaning of the word 'mimesis' so that it ceases to have the negative connotation it had acquired in Plato's work. In Chapter IX, Aristotle makes his meaning more clear. Comparing Poetry with History, he argues that the poet represents what may happen while the historian deals only with what has happened.

The historians deal with the accidental, while the poet is concerned with the universal. Thus, poetry is "more philosophical and a higher thing than history". Poetry is concerned with universal aspects of human experiences. If the universal is the imperishable, then poetry imitates that which is true. Here, in an indirect manner, Aristotle appears to be replying to Plato's charge that poetry is false because it is merely a copy of the essence. In the later sections of the **Poetics**, Aristotle extends the meaning of the word 'mimesis' to include the wonderful, the irrational and the impossible. He also argues that a poet can imitate in his own person or can speak through his characters as the dramatist does. Both are valid modes of 'mimesis'. The dancer uses the language of gesture, and also of rhythm. But music uses what Aristotle calls 'harmony' as the medium of mimesis. Thus, Aristotle extends the meaning of the word 'mimesis' to include simple realism on the extreme and the suggestiveness and the symbolism of music and gestures of dance on the other. This is perhaps the most significant aspect of Aristotle's concept of 'mimesis' that the term becomes a metaphor which gives an adequate and comprehensive idea of the variety and complexity of literature.

As a critic, Aristotle is descriptive and not prescriptive. He does not begin with a hypothesis in terms of which literature is to be judged as was done by Plato in the *Republic.* Aristotle takes for granted the existence of poetry, compares and contrasts poetry with the other arts and discusses the different kinds of poetry. The concept of 'mimesis' may not be very useful in the present century in a discussion of literature. But if one remembers that the *Poetics* was written in the fourth century B.C., it becomes clear that the concept of 'mimesis' was the first major attempt made to trace out the complex connections between literature and life.

LESSON NO. 1.7 **AUTHOR : DR. B.R. RAO**

CLASSICAL AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA
ARISTOTLE : POETICS

On Plot and Character in Tragedy :

In the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, while discussing parts of a tragedy, Aristotle emphatically declares: "Thus plot, then, is the first principle, and as it were, the soul of a tragedy". This clear expression of his preference for plot over character has come in for a great deal of criticism from critics and creative artists. Van Brugh declared that the contrary may be said to be true. "I could show that the chief entertainment as well as the moral lies much more in the Character and Diction than in the Business and the Event." Victor Hugo states that the men in an audience preferred action and the women emotion, but the thinkers cared for character. The practice of the great English writers from Shakespeare to James Joyce appears to prove that the contrary is true. There is the well-known observation that there can be no *Hamlet* without the prince of Denmark. The leading commentators on Shakespeare, until the beginning of the twentieth century, argued that the chief glory of Shakespeare is his remarkable ability to create complex and unforgettable characters like Falstaff and Richard III.

When we look at the work of the English novelists, it becomes even more clear that the genius of a writer like Dickens lies in his art of characterization. Sam Weller, Mr. Pickwick, Micawber, Uriah Heep and a host of other memorable characters constitute a gallery of portraits which rival Chaucer's gallery of portraits in *The Prologue.* For a novelist, character appears to be the soul of the novel. In the novel of "stream of consciousness", plot appears discarded. In fact, a well-constructed novel or play is regarded as a distortion of life. As Virginia Woolf argues persuasively, 'life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged'. It is a 'luminous halo'. Hence, in the modern psychological novel logical narrative is discarded. Sequence of significance is more important than mere sequence of time. And so one may be tempted to conclude that Aristotle's preference for plot over 'character' is yet another illustration of the irrelevance of the *Poetics.*

If critics are mildly annoyed by Aristotle's preference for plot, they seem to be

and at least some of them are violently angry with Aristotle's dogmatic assertion in the *Poetics*. "Again without action, there cannot be a tragedy, there may be one without characters". This statement is even more difficult to accept than the earlier one regarding the plot being the soul of a tragedy. How can there be a play without character- a *Henry IV* without Falstaff and *Macbeth* without Macbeth? By citing well-known examples from English literature one can come to the opposite conclusion that there can be no play or novel without character. And there are some great English novels which appear to have no plot worth the name. *Pickwick Papers, Mrs. Dalloway and Ulysses* appear to demonstrate the fact that plot is dispensable and not indispensable. And the dramatists of the *Theatre of the Absurd,* Samuel Beckett, Eugene lonesco and Harold Pinter have completely overturned the traditional and Aristotelian tenets regarding the structure of a play. In plays like *Waiting for Godot* nothing really happens. The dramatists are exploring a state or a human condition. And even when Aristotle's statement is applied to Greek tragedy, it appears to be inapplicable. Oedipus, Clytemnestra, Electra, Antigone and Medea are some of the memorable characters of Greek tragedy. Can one simply dismiss Aristotle's statement as being mere perverse?

F.L. Lucas with his characteristic brilliance and classical precision, argues that in the evolution of tragedy in the West there has been "far more room for the growth of character-drawing than plot". He declares, rather poetically, "The book in a woman's eye grows more interesting than the rise of dynasties, the dropping of the handkerchief than the falling of the topless towers of Illium". Aristotle was perhaps an extrovert, speculates F.L. Lucas. Hence, Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of activity in life and plot in tragedy.

Thomas Twining, the eighteenth century translator of the *Poetics*, made a very interesting translation of the passage in the sixth section of the book we are discussing. The translation runs as follows : 'Again tragedy cannot subsist without action : without "manners". All the other translators and commentators of the *Poetics* translate 'ethos' as 'character'. Commenting on the controversy regarding plot and character in tragedy George Whalley suggests that the controversy can be resolved easily if the concerned passage is translated differently. He says that it should be read as 'Furthermore, you can't have tragedy without an action, but you can have it without clearly-defined character'. But the phrase 'clearly-defined' is George Whalley's addition for the sake of clarification. None of the earlier or the later commentators recognized any need for altering the original.

Most of the modern defenders of Aristotle's statements on plot and character adopt a more or less similar approach to the problem. Aristotle's views on plot and character have been defended in terms of (a) the themes that the Greek tragic dramatists chose, (b) the conditions of Greek stage, and (c) by a reference

to Aristotle's view on the relationship between action and character in general.

In some sections of the *Poetics,* Aristotle emphasises that the Greek tragic artists generally confined themselves to the stories of well-known figures of Greek myth and legend. Stories of Iphigenia, Oedipus, Thyestes, Orestes, Medea and Antigone and similar figures constituted the themes of the tragedies. No major tragic dramatists of the times tried to invent an entirely new theme for tragedy, as for example, the Elizabethans could and occasionally did. Since the dramatists chose well-known themes, they had very little freedom so far as the depiction of the characters and the ending of the play were concerned. Sophocles, for example, could not radically alter the story of Oedipus and make it end happily. Similarly, the general outlines of the character from myth and legend were so clearly drawn in the memory of the Greek race that no dramatist could make any major changes in the depiction of the major characters in the tragedy. So, the most significant and original contribution that the dramatist could make was in the construction of the plot. Since the story was given and the characters more or less clearly defined in the national memory, the dramatists enjoyed freedom only in the structuring of the events which is called the 'plot'. The 'mythos' or 'plot' was thus the artist's own contribution. This is one of the reasons why a great deal of the *Poetics* is concerned with discussion of the plot. And this is the reason why Aristotle calls the plot the soul of a tragedy.

The Greek plays were generally presented on certain festival days. On a single day, as many as four tragedies were sometimes presented. The Greek theatre was very big and could accommodate, according to conservative estimates, twenty thousand spectators and according to other estimates as many as hundred thousand spectators. When such a large number of audiences were witnessing a dramatic performance; there was inevitably a great distance between the characters on the stage and a large number of the members of the audience. An average member of the audience sitting at a considerable distance from the stage was not in a position to appreciate subtle shades of emotion flitting across the face of the character on the stage, as for example 'the gentleman of understanding' could do in the small and compact Elizabethan theatre like the Globe. Actors of the Greek stage were thus compelled to wear masks on the stage with emotions that they were supposed to portray very boldly painted on the mask. The mask was a help for the Greek audience to identify the character on the stage. The mask was also fitted on the inside with an amplifier, so that the actor could 'project his voice'. Under these conditions the audiences had to be satisfied with loud and stylized gestures instead of character complexities conveyed through sensitive acting. A successful actor in those days needed strong vocal chords. And as Aristotle points out in the XXVI section of the book, plays sometimes failed on the

stage because of bad acting. Under these circumstances, a Greek dramatist could hold the attention of his audiences only through a skilfully constructed plot. Hence, it is not surprising that Aristotle calls the plot the soul of a tragedy. Viewed in the light of the stage conditions of those days, Aristotle's argument that the plot comes first in order of importance and character next, is not such an outrageously wrong statement as it appears to be at first sight.

While it is, thus, quite possible to defend Aristotle's overvaluation of plot, it is almost impossible, argue many Aristotelian commentators, to defend Aristotle's statement, 'Furthermore, you cannot have a tragedy without action; but you can have it without character'. However, three modern commentators on the *Poetics*, S.H. Butcher, Humphry House and Jones, have offered scholarly and thought provoking defences of Aristotle's statement. According to these scholars, Aristotle's observation on plot and character must be studied in relation to his clearly-expressed views on characters and action as stated in his *Ethics* and *Metaphysics.* George Whalley also presents a brief but vigorous defence of Aristotle's observation.

George Whalley argues that Aristotle's statement should be understood 'especially, not theoretically'. 'The connection between plot and character', says George Whalley, should be understood in terms of the relationship between the soul and the body. Aristotle calls the plot, the soul of a tragedy. The soul, argues George Whalley, is the 'form' of a person and prior to the body. And the plot is the 'form' of the tragedy and prior to the action. The characters thus constitute the body of the action. Characters do not merely 'generate' the action; they are also formed and shaped by the action. In Aristotle's views ,"the character is shaped by this action," If there can be no living organism without 'soul', then there can be no play without a plot. When Aristotle states that there can be a tragedy without character, he does not mean that there can be a tragedy without dramatic personages. What he means is that there can be tragedy in which the characters are not 'well-defined'. The dramatist may focus his attention on what the characters do without probing in the motives behind the actions of the characters. In this sense, says George Whalley, there can be a tragedy without character.

S.H. Butcher much earlier had said something similar. In his essays on Aristotle's *Poetics*, he argues that when Aristotle wrote that there can be a tragedy without characters, 'the meaning intended probably is that there may be tragedy in which the moral character of individual agents is so weakly portrayed as to be of no account in the evolution of the action. The persons may be mere types, or lacking in those distinctive qualities out of which action grows'.[1] Humphry House in his *Aristotle's Poetics* also argues that the

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1. S.H. Butcher : *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 344-345.
2. Humphry House : *Aristotle's* ***Poetics***, p.73.

word 'ethos' has two different meanings. It means the dramatic personage or character. It also means 'the ethical nature of an individual'. So commenting on Aristotle's statement that there can be a tragedy without character, he writes "It does not mean there may be a tragedy without dramatic personage , it means that there may be a tragedy without dramatic personages who exhibit what Aristotle specifically calls 'character' in the ethical sense.[2] Thus, George Whalley, Humphry House and S.H.Butcher all argue that Aristotle is stating that there can be tragedy in which characters may be drawn in very broad outlines.

Humphry House, however, goes beyond these traditional defences of Aristotle's statement. He and Jones offer what is still to date the most satisfactory explanation of Aristotle's preference for plot over character. Humphry House contrasts Plato's general philosophical outlook with that of Aristotle. Plato's emphasis was on knowledge of the ideal good without any particular stress on the translation of the 'ideal good' into concrete social action. But for Aristotle, as is made clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'the essential principle in life is the practical good, not the ideal good'. Aristotle's emphasis is on a life of action not of contemplation; on an active not a passive life. As he puts it in Section I of the *Poetics*, 'Life consists in action and its end is a mode of action; not a quality?' Hence, in Aristotle's philosophy, the emphasis is on the practical and active aspects of life in general.

In modern criticism, whenever words like 'character' and 'action' are used, the general and unspoken assumption is that character exists independent of action and is revealed by action. We tend to think of character as something given, fixed and finished. And we all think 'action' and 'character' as being independent of each other and even opposed to each other. Aristotle's views on character and action in general are diametrically opposed to the attitudes and the assumptions of our own period. Aristotle's views on this subject are available, expressed, found very clearly and succintly in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Discussing the connection between action and character, Aristotle writes, "The virtuous man is always one who has learned to be good through acting well. There are no natural saints; we acquire the virtue by exercising them; we become just by doing just acts; temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[1]

The passage quoted above has starting implications. According to Aristotle, character is not something given by nature. It is not something a person possesses at birth. There are no natural saints. Character must be viewed as a process, as something constantly explains, "Thus, in Aristotle's ethics, with or without reference to the drama, character is the antecedent series which has gone into its formation and the consequent series in which it will be actualised

1. *Quoted in John Jones's* ***On Aristotle's 'Poetics' and Greek Tragedy***
2. *Ibid.*

in future." Thus, it becomes clear that Aristotle is of the view that character is not independent of action. It is dependent upon action, and it is through action that is formed. Hence, Aristotle is quite consistent in arguing that the 'plot' of a play is the most important thing in a play.

John Jones, in an influential work *On Aristotle's 'Poetics' and Greek Tragedy,*[2] attacks the modern misreadings of Aristotle. He argues that our unexamined assumption that our views on art are superior to those of Aristotle is yet another illustration of the modern arrogance bred out of ignorance. John Jones writes, "The 'plot' - character dichotomy is radically false to understanding of tragedy. Character, like colour, must be denied even the most primitive autonomy." In modern literature, 'character' has come to be regarded as the most important aspect of a work of art. But Aristotle's views are very different. As John Jones remarks, "To our sense of characteristic conduct Aristotle opposes that of characterful action."

Aristotle's comments on character and action, if studied in the context of his views on life in general, thus, seem to be based on a logical and rational basis. Aristotle's opinions on this subject do not obviously contain the whole of the truth, One can argue that character is at least, as much 'given' as acquired through action. One can refer to the modern theories regarding the undoubted influence of heredity in forming the character of an individual. However, Aristotle's views on this issue, although a little extreme and to that extent inaccurate, are a welcome corrective to the modern emphasis on character at the expense of action. The wisest observation on this issue is perhaps to be found in Henry James's essay *The Art of Fiction* in which James remarks ,"What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character ?"

The concept of Ideal Tragic Hero

Aristotle's observations on the ideal tragic hero are to be found in the opening paragraph of Section XIII of *The Poetics*. This is yet another section of *The Poetics* which has been extensively analysed and criticised. This is, of course, nothing unique since Aristotle's observations on plot and character and his cryptic references to 'catharsis' of pity and fear have evoked critical comments and discussion. However, one unique feature of Aristotle's observations concerning the tragic hero is that there is very little disagreement regarding the meaning of the passage. The controversary concerns the applicability of Aristotle's remarks to Greek tragedy and their utility to the student of English tragedy.

Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero is a sequel to what Aristotle had earlier said about the specific effect of tragedy which he defines as the catharsis of pity and fear.

A perfect tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to be arranged on the complex plan and not on the simple plan. That is, it should be the imitation of an action which includes 'anagnorisis' (i.e. recognition) and 'peripeteia' (i.e. reversal of situation). It should imitate actions which evoke pity and fear, since this is 'the distinctive mark of tragic hero. It is to be found in Butcher's commentary on the *Poetics*.

Keeping in view the 'specific effect of tragedy', Aristotle argues that 'the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of virtuous men brought from prosperity to adversity.' Aristotle has valid reasons for rejecting such a possibility. The downfall of a virtuous man would evoke neither pity nor fear. Pity is evoked by 'unmerited misfortune' and fear for the misfortunes of a man like ourselves.' The downfall of a virtuous man evokes neither pity nor fear, It shocks the audiences, evokes in them what the Greeks called 'righteous indignation'. There is yet another reason why such an action is unfit for representation in a tragedy although Aristotle does not dwell on this. Tragedy is incariably based on a conflict; not merely the external conflict of an individual with a hostile world but with an internal conflict because a tragic hero, at least in English tragedy, is deeply divided within himself. In the case of virtuous man, there is no possibility of an internal conflict of tension because a perfect man is at peace with himself. The conflict of such a character with a hostile world cannot be dramatic because whatever the outcome of the conflict, the spiritual victory belongs to the virtuous man. In fact, the death or the defeat of a virtuous man or saint is a form of victory for the man concerned. Such a story may be said to be a kind of a 'divine comedy' and not a tragedy. (Thus the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is his ultimate triumph. His Cross is His Crown). Hence, Aristotle is right in rejecting for reasons of his own, the story of the downfall of the virtuous man.

Aristotle also rejects the story of a 'bad man passing from adversity to prosperity'. Such a story would be alien to the spirit of tragedy, because it evokes neither pity nor fear. It does not satisfy the moral sense, Aristotle declares. Here again, the practice of later Western tragic dramatists has vindicated Aristotle's assertion. No tragedy worth the name has been written on the success story of a villain.

Aristotle then goes on to argue that the downfall of an utter villain should not be exhibited in a tragedy. Such a story may satisfy the moral sense of the audience because crime meets with punishment. But since the suffering is merited, pity cannot be evoked and since the 'villain' is unlike us there can be no fear either. And so Aristotle argues that even this kind of plot should not be exhibited. If we limit ourselves to Greek tragedy. Aristotle appears to be right. The heroes and heroines of Greek tragedy are 'ethically good'. While they may not be perfect, they are definitely not embodiments of evil. Oedipus,

Antigone, Prometheus, and Orestes are 'good' characters even if they are not 'epiclikes' or 'perfectly blameless'. Even Medea is as much sinned against as sinning. However, when we look at later English tragedies, the limitations of Aristotle's observations on this kind of a character become obvious. As Butcher rightly observes, "The limitation of view arises from applying a purely ethical instead of an aesthetic standard to dramatic art", Pity and fear are not necessarily the only tragic emotions. Awe and unwilling admiration are also valid responses to a tragedy. Shakespeare, with his characteristic disregard for classical rules of writing, portrays heroic villainy in *Richard III. While the audiences may not be* able to identify themselves with this villain-hero who is physically deformed and spiritually grotesque, the emotions of terror, of admiration and awe, are evoked by such a spectacle, Shakespeare's exception proves the severe limitation of Aristotle's rule.

So there remains 'the character between these two extremes', that of a man who is not eminently good and just, and a villain. The ideal protagonist of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is neither wholly good nor completely bad. Yet he is more good than bad. 'Goodness' as a requisite feature of a tragic protagonist appears to be rather strange to a student of Elizabethan tragedy. Whatever may be said about the overreaching heroes of Elizabethan tragedies 'goodness' is far from being an appropriate term for describing them. But in Greek tragedy, the hero's misfortune is brought about'not by vice or depravity', but by some 'hamartia' or error, 'frailty'. The protagonist falls not because of any vice or depravity, Oedipus does not suffer because of any tragic flaw. They are victims of circumstances or helpless playthings of an irrevocable destiny.

The Greek tragic hero is not the master of his fate nor is he the captain of his destiny. This is why his suffering is 'unmerited' and hence evokes pity. The Elizabethan tragic heroes like Doctor Faustus, Tamurlaine, Lear and Macbeth are to a great extent, responsible for the terrible fate that over takes them. Their tragedy can be explained if not justified, in terms of their own omissions and commissions. While this pattern of action and reaction cannot be described as one of sin and retribution, there is connection between the action of choice on the part of the Elizabethan tragic hero and the suffering that follows it. But the suffering of Greek hero is the result of 'hamartia' or error of judgement and not because of any serious defect in this character. 'Hamartia' is generally translated as error. There is some disagreement among the critics as regards the exact significance of the term. Butcher defines 'hamartia' as 'error due to inadequate knowleldge of particular circumstances'. Else argues that 'hamartia' is neither fault nor flaw in the character of the hero, not even an error of judgement, but simply a mistake about the identity of a person. Richard Lattimore, in his *Patterns of Tragic Narrative* states, 'From a

consideration of the cases where the term is actually used, as in a tragedy, would conclude independently that the word in this form cannot signify a permanent characteristic in a person like pride, quickness to anger, etc. but must refer to mistaken or wrong act that has been made'. In the Greek language the word 'hamartia' (drawn from the science of archery) meant missing the mark. Thus, for example, an expert archer while shooting at a target misses, due to 'hamartia' or error of judgement. 'Hamartia' denoted not a serious flaw in the character of the person concerned, but a minor error which led to a major catastrophe. Aristotle suggests here that tragedy is based upon a perception of a complete lack of proportion between the minor error and the terrible suffering which follows as a consequence of the error. Commenting on the moral background of Greek philosophy, Fuller and McMurrian write : 'Sin was not primarily an aberration of the will but an error of intellectual judgement'. The Greek word for it (i.e. hamartia) was drawn from athletics and meant 'to miss the mark'. 'The sinner was a poor shot when it came to hitting the bull's eye of a well balanced and harmonious life.' Pointing out this unique nature of tragic suffering, Aristotle concludes that the story of one who is 'highly renowned and prosperous - a personage like Oedipus or Thyestes is suitable for representation in a tragedy.

John Jones in his book *On Aristotle's Poetics and Greek Tragedy* tries to prove that there has been a silent and innocent perversion of the main argument of Aristotle. He says, 'I meant that we have imported the tragic hero where the concept has no place.' His rather evolutionary thesis that all the earlier commentators have misread and distorted the thirteenth chapter of the *Poetics* is based on the following arguments. He rightly points out that the word 'hero' does not appear in the *Poetics*. Even in the crucial opening paragraphs of the thirteenth chapter, Aristotle uses the 'neutral' term 'persons or men'. John Jones also rightly points out that Butcher and Bywater in their translations have slightly altered the original Greek text and this slight alteration is made while discussing the first of the four alternatives, Aristotle talks of 'good men'. Professor Butcher translates it as 'good man'. Again, with regard to the second alternative, Aristotle talks of 'bad men'. Butcher translates it as 'bad man'. This slight and silent alteration of the two key phrases in chapter XIII has, says Jones, completely distorted our view of the sections. According to Jones, Aristotle did not have in view a single dominant figure. Aristotle was talking about a collective change of fortune, and not simply of a change of fortune affecting a single individual, however eminent he may be. Jones comments on the inaccuracies in the translations of Butcher and Bywater that were supported by the later translation of L.J. Potts and Dorsch. A close study of the Greek original reveals the fact that Aristotle, while discussing the first two alternatives uses the plural - 'good men' and

1. Richard Lattimore, ***Patterns of Tragic Narrative.***

'bad men'- but then when he comes to the third and fourth alternatives, he switches to the singular and talks of 'a bad man' and 'man between these two extremes'. And the last sentence of the paragraph makes it clear that Aristotle has in the text and the inaccuracies in the earlier translations pointed out by John Jones do not justify a radically new interpretation of the passage concerned. But John Jones does make one useful observation in this connection. The fall of the tragic hero is not simply the fall of an isolated individual. His fall has wider social repercussions and the fate of the entire community is very much connected with his fate.

The concept of the tragic hero in Aristotle's *Poetics* has a limited significance for the students of English tragedy. Elizabethan dramatists generally deal with men and women who are highly renowned and prosperous but their protagonists suffer because of serious flaws in their characters. As regards modern tragedy, we find that Aristotle's views on the tragic hero are even less relevant. In modern drama, the common man and not the uncommon 'hero' is their centre of attention. We are more interested in 'doll's houses' and in the deaths of salesmen than in the downfall of the highly renowned and prosperous. Richard Lattimore argues that Aristotle's concept of the 'hamartia' which is responsible for the downfall of the tragic hero, is not applicable to many Greek tragedies. He says, "I find, of the extant 32 plays, fifteen in which the fault has little or nothing to do with the main action ...and ten more where one could establish it as a major theme only by training the dramatic facts".[1] But when all is said and done, Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero is of considerable importance to a student of Western drama because it has had a continuing influence on the practices of many later Western dramatists.