

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOPHOCLES AND KALIDASA IN RELATION TO THE THEMES EXPLORED BY THEM**

**Bhupendra Kumar N. Dhimar**  
Research Scholar,  
Pacific University,  
Udaipur, Rajasthan  
&  
Associate Professor & Head  
Department of English  
Arts & Commerce College,  
Vyara, Dist.: Tapi. Gujarat

**Guided By**  
Dr. Subhash Sharma  
Associate Professor and Guide;  
Paher, Udaipur.

### **Abstract**

Theme of any literary text is of a great importance and so it requires close study to come to a literary judgment and interpretation. Sophocles and Kalidasa have concrete reputation as great ancient dramatists belonging to ancient Greece and ancient India, respectively. The themes explored by them in their world famous plays carry solid social and literary value. There is also a difference in their conception and perception as revealed in their major works.

**Key words:** Theme, Plot, Drama, Sacrifice, Bloodshed, Revenge, Battle, Conflict, Love, Relationship, Conception, Reflection, Morality, Ethics.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Both Sophocles and Kalidasa are extremely renowned names in the field of ancient drama. The themes treated by them have been considered very attentively by readers, scholars and critics for the centuries. A literary text should pass the test of time. And that is the best critical judgment given by different readers of different centuries.

### **REVNGE, BLOOD, MURDER AND BATTLE**

Sophocles' plays are largely about revenge, blood, murder, battle and serious intrigues. "Electra" is about Clytemnestra's revenge first and then Electra and Orestes' revenge on their mother, Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. All these incidents took place as a result of Agamemnon's murder because (keeping in mind Clytemnestra's charge) he has sacrificed his

and his wife, Clytemnestra's daughter, Iphigenia. The play has spots of blood of three persons in all, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In "Antigone", the background of the play is of blood thirsty desire of her two brothers, Polyneices and Eteocles, resulting in to the death of both the brothers. Creon intends to punish Antigone for violating the royal order resulting in to the death of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice.

"Both Creon and Antigone suffer from their inability to compromise. This play is a human drama and a tragedy that shows two passionate people who, in their determination to defend their positions, end up destroying themselves and others, the price of supporting their beliefs is paid in human blood."

Marian Mcdonald. "Greek Tragedy." Nick Hern Books. London. 2005, Page x.

In "Oedipus Tyrannus" Laius' murder has been avenged by destiny. Fate doesn't allow any of the three major characters of the play to escape. The conception of the playwright can be examined easily with the help of the themes explored by the writer.

Kalidasa's plays are not about revenge, murder, serious intrigues and internal grievous conflict and battle. In the play "Malvikagnimitram" the themes explored are related with love, dance, nature, soft jealousy and marriage. The play is replete with innocent gestures, opportunities to laugh at and with and enjoyable situations. Almost all the occasions are tension free. Political tussle and battle are there in the play but that doesn't form the major issue. It ends with a happy note and as such no kind of blood shed is there. "Vikramovarsiyam" is also about love, nature, extra-terrestrial journeys, human as well as super human characters, some obstacles on the path of love and marriage. The play ends with a delightful and a nice domestic happy note that Pururva and Urvashi can live together with their son Ayush. "Abhigyanshakuntalam", one of the loveliest plays of Sanskrit literature; highlights the theme of hermitage life, monarchy, culture and society, love and marriage, honesty and faithfulness and ethics. In this way both the playwrights concentrated on different genre of themes.

#### **PARENT-CHILDREN RELATIONSHIP.**

For any human society parent-children relationship is of utmost importance. Sophocles' play "Electra" is about the same. Agamemnon has sacrificed his and Clytemnestra's (his wife) daughter, Iphigenia. After murdering Agamemnon, without thinking anything about the existing children, Orestes and Electra, she gets united with her lover, Aegisthus. This action infuriates Orestes and Electra and the result is murder of a mother and her lover by the children. The play also highlights innocent and mutual cordiality of relationship between brother and sister, Orestes and Electra. The tragedy "Antigone" too echoes the same theme. Haemon, Creon's son, prays his father to forgive Antigone but Creon is not ready. The result is Haemon's unsuccessful attack on his father, Antigone's death, Haemon him self's suicide and his mother, Eurydice's suicide. The play also reveals Antigone's love, respect and moral duty of a sister towards her deceased brother, Polyneices. This reflects innocent and bold relationship of a sister and a brother. "Oedipus Tyrannus" is also indirectly about 'father-children' relationship. Laius, the cursed father, guided by an oracle, pierced his own infant's ankles and gives the child to a shepherd to be thrown in the forest from the top of the hill to die. The same child survives due to fate, returns to Thebes through Corinth and unknowingly murders his father Laius. He becomes responsible for his mother, Jocasta's suicide, who came to know about anti-social mistake committed by her

and Oedipus by establishing socially unacceptable relationship. This suggests that children require healthy social nutrition and nurture if we expect healthy social atmosphere.

The plays of Kalidasa too reflects 'parent-children' and 'brother-sister' relationship, but with a different perspective. Madhavsena and Malvika are brother and sister. He has planned to marry his sister with Agnimitra, keeping in view her sister's happiness, satisfaction and safety in domestic life. Though the play, "Malvikagnimitram" major theme is different yet in the background of the play 'brother-sister' relationship adds to the thematic unity and beauty of the play. In the play "Vikramovarsiyam" we witness the happy reunion of Pururva, Urvashi and their son Ayush, who has now become a talented bold boy. He was coronated by Narad. This shows happy and healthy end of the play. Exactly in the same manner, in the play "Abhigyanashakuntalam" readers enjoy the happy union of Dushyanta, Shakuntala and their child, Sarvadaman, who is also as bold as Ayush. The presence of prince in the end of both the plays makes the plays happy and romantic, signifying healthy future and reflecting the conception and perception of Kalidasa.

### **LIFE-DEATH-NEXT?**

The major theme of Sophocles' plays is life and death. Its inevitability is quite apparent. When there is sunrise there is sunset and vice versa. Life ends with death and there is no alternative. In "Electra", directly and indirectly too we witness this theme. We come across the death of Iphigenia, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. What next? There may be the repetition of history. During the later stage of life Clytemnestra longed for the death of her husband, Agamemnon. Then life of Orestes and Electra has one mission only- the death of their mother and her lover. The play is a tragedy but ends with a bloody satisfaction of Orestes and Electra. "Antigone" is about death only. 'Life' less-'death' more. It begins with death and ends with more deaths. The theme is unquestionably life and death. Life of those alive and who were alive and death that has come and yet to come. Eteocles and Polyneices have killed each other. And the dead body of Polyneices brings more dead bodies- in form of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice. Creon alone remains there, like a corpse, waiting for the inevitable. The play "Oedipus Tyrannus" is about death of ex-king Laius and about the life of Jocasta and Oedipus. There was a serious threat to the life of Oedipus when he was an infant. The theme is of family violence. The death of the ex-king Laius, was due to the hands of his own child. Jocasta welcomes death after coming across unbearable truth. Oedipus himself goes out blind, towards death. Imagination beyond the end of the play indicates gloomy picture of life.

Kalidasa has painted life full of life. The whole play "Malvikagnimitram" comprises delightful love story, ending in Agnimitra and Malvika's marriage with the consent of the chief Queen Dharini. Marriage, union of two souls and bodies, indicates life in relation to probable new births. Next? Life of course. This reflects the conception of the author. The drama "Vikramovarsiyam" also stands for life. Pururva and Urvashi enjoy their union and happy stay at 'Gandhamadan' mountain. Urvashi's pregnancy (not disclosed because she is not a human being) symbolizes life. The vulture episode introduces their son, Ayush; who is to be coronated soon. Life follows life. Pururva is being followed by Ayush. A healthy bold and skilled son symbolizes life. What after life? Death? No, not all the times. In Kalidasa's plays we find symbolic life after life. The child Ayush stands for the playwright's positive, constructive and healthy imagination. One of the themes of the play "Abhigyanashakuntalam" is also the same 'Life'.

“Great and noble characters, with their share of sorrow and final happiness—more in heaven than on earth—such is the universal theme of Kalidasa’s works.”

K. Krishnamoorthy. “Kalidasa” Motilal Banarasidas. 1982 Page-14, 15.

Dushyanta and Shakuntala’s love, union, repudiation of Shakuntala, her disappearance and at last their meeting in the hermitage of Marich symbolize life and only life. Why their son Sarvadaman is there? Because of Kalidasa’s conception that is reflected through the theme. This reflects extremely positive approach of the writer. But, we find male inherits only; that too reflects the peculiar traditional social picture of the then society.

### **SOCIAL PEACE AND ANARCHY.**

“Electra”, “Antigone” and “Oedipus Tyrannus” reflect, in one way or the other, domestic, social and political anarchy. In “Electra” there is lot of anarchy. Primarily it is domestic and then political and that reflects social tradition too. Love, lust and desire for revenge lead Clytemnestra to murder her husband Agamemnon. It is followed by Orestes’ and Electra’s revenge—murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Everywhere in the drama there is anarchy. The same is the scenario in the tragedy, ‘Antigone’. The tragedy arises from political and domestic disturbance. Due to this political and domestic anarchy, Creon becomes the king in the absence of the living male heir of his predecessor, Oedipus. Political anarchy takes hold of the situation because Creon announces ban on burial of the traitor, Polyneices. The situation leads to climax of all the kinds of anarchy when Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice die. The tragedy “Oedipus Tyrannus” is an outcome of many kinds of chaos and anarchy. It begins with an oracle. Laius and Jocasta try to avoid the possible filial ingratitude. There is ‘pollution’ in the city. Social anarchy disturbs and compels Oedipus to seek truth and the result brings tons of chaos in the minds of Oedipus and Jocasta. The end of the play forecasts anarchy to follow in the life of the survivors.

Kalidasa’s plays reflect social, political and domestic peace with the help of the development of the sentiments.

“The comparative study of both the theories, shows that catharsis is the final aim of drama, according to Aristotle, while the development of sentiment is of prime importance in Sanskrit drama.”

Minakshi L. Dalal. “Conflict in Sanskrit Drama.” Somaiya, New Delhi. 1973 Page -288, 289.

Some small issues and problems are there but mild, tolerable and digestible, resulting in to all well. Queen Dharini tries her best to prevent the king, Agnimitra from being attracted towards Malvika. She even imprisons Malvika and Bakulavalika. But she is herself, later on, prepares the path for marriage of the king and Malvika. No chaos no anarchy only peace. Almost the same design and theme is reflected in “Vikramovarsiyam.” Love, marriage, obstacle in form of Urvashi’s transformation in to a creeper, their happy reunion with the help of ‘jewel of meeting’ (sangamniya mani) and by the end of the drama extreme domestic peace and pleasure when Ayush appears and Indra allows Urvashi to live with Pururva. Satisfaction and peace pervades everywhere. The theme of “Abhigyanashakuntalam” too reflects Kalidasa’s conception of social, political and domestic peace and satisfaction, Apart from some pathetic patches, especially in Shakuntala’s life at the time of her repudiation till her reunion with Dushyanta in the hermitage of Marich; the play presents climax of happiness when they (the family—

Dushyanta, Shakuntala and their son, Sarvadaman) return in the chariot of Indra to their original place.

“Rabindranath, in his criticism of the drama has interpreted it (love) as embodying the conception of Kalidasa that mere carnal love has a natural curse with it, unless it is chastened by self-mortification and tapasya (penance).”

S. N. Dasgupta. “A History of Sanskrit Literature- Classical Period.” Volume-1. University of Calcutta. 1962. Page xxxvi.

### **ETHICS, FATE AND HUMAN BEINGS.**

Sophocles’ conception and perception about ethics and fate have been clearly reflected in almost all of his plays. There is no morality and ethical background when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon, Clytemnestra’s husband. It is largely anti ethical desires that Clytemnestra joined hands with Aegisthus and murders her own husband. When you violate divine laws you disturb the health of social structure. The immoral action is followed by yet another immoral action. Orestes and Electra, however justifiable it may appear, immorally kill their mother and her paramour. In the process of taking revenge they too violated moral laws. “Antigone” is an epitome of ethical struggle. It is due to the lack of morality that there was a fatal combat between Polyneices and Eteocles. Had there been enough ethical understanding, there may not have been any kind of bloodshed. The death of the two brothers gave birth to internal as well as outer conflict and moral and royal conflict too. Creon’s label to Polyneices as a traitor is debatable and his decision to not to provide burial to his dead body is immoral and against the divine law. Antigone, a bold and an obstinate daughter of the same kind of a father, Oedipus, challenges the royal order to preserve the divine law and ethics. But in her bold and justifiable attempt to preserve and follow divine law, she sacrifices her life. This reflects Sophocles’ conception and perception of ethics and its importance in the society of human beings for its health.

“Aristotle discusses only three major kinds of moral weakness, the ones which have to do with pleasure, pain and anger and he considers all other kinds of moral weakness to be extensions of these central cases.”

Jonathan Barnes. “The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle.” Cambridge University Press. 1995. Page 215, 216.

Fate (destiny) Vs human beings is one of the central themes of the play “Oedipus Tyrannus”. The hard fought struggle of the major characters of the play and their failure is one of the most widely discussed issue. There are some blunders committed by the major characters of the drama where they may have been able to avoid the paws of fate, but this is exactly where Sophocles’ conception and perception regarding fate has been reflected. The central three characters, Oedipus, Laius and Jocasta, try to their best to escape from fate. From the very commencement of the play these three characters were conscious, due to oracle, to the approaching cruel doom, but they appear to be helpless. And all the three have ultimately become the victim of fate. Figure on page number-----would help to understand the concept. Does it convey and reflect Sophocles’ conception and perception of fate? Deep thinking on the topic, with the help of the study of the plays written by him, especially “Oedipus Tyrannus” compels us to come to such a conclusion that, like Thomas Hardy as seen in the novel “Tess of the D’Urbervilles”, Sophocles too perhaps believed that a human being is a puppet in the hands of destiny.

“The play (“Oedipus Tyrannus”) does have an obvious moral as a warning not to believe that a human being can control his life or that the world is fundamentally available for rational understanding.”

Ruth Scodel. “An Introduction to Greek Tragedy.” 2010. Cambridge University Press. Page-157.

As far as concerned with the theme—fate Vs human beings—we can say that in Kalidasa’s works it is not a major theme. For example, the play “Malvikagnimitram” doesn’t throw any special light on that topic, as it is not the theme of the play. But there is a tiny point where there is reference to fate. An ascetic, Kausiki (Parivrajika), kept silence about the real identity of the princess Malvika because she knows that according to the reading of her horoscope the princess has to be a maid for one year. Apart from this we don’t find dominance of fate in the play. Ethical point of view it seems that Kalidasa has avoided describing anything that can be considered as immoral. In “Vikramovarsiyam” fate doesn’t play a dominant role. The play reflects exemplary ethical world. Urvashi is conscious about the king’s responsibility to the inhabitants of the state. The play “Abhigyanashakuntalam” reflects typical ancient Indian moral tradition. According to that a guest is like an angel. (Atithi Devo Bhava) The whole ‘Durvasa episode’ reflects this spirit of ancient Indian culture. Of course, plot construction point of view the episode plays a very contributory role. Shakuntala’s repudiation in the palace of the king also reflects the concept of morality of the playwright and the ancient Indian social culture.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion I would like to point out that both these playwrights are in real sense great contributors as far as concerned with literary, social, domestic and political issues. Sophocles has made his conception and perception of ethics, fate, and governance clear through his plays. Likewise Kalidasa’s conception and perception can also be visualized with the help of the study of his plays. Both these writers have been great assets of the world of literature for the centuries.

### **WORKS CITED.**

1. Marian McDonald. “Greek Tragedy.” Nick Hern Books. London. 2005.
2. K. Krishnamoorthy. “Kalidasa” Motilal Banarasidas. 1982.
3. Minakshi L. Dalal. “Conflict in Sanskrit Drama.” Somaiya, New Delhi. 1973.
4. S. N. Dasgupta. “A History of Sanskrit Literature- Classical Period.” Volume-1. University of Calcutta. 1962.
5. Jonathan Barnes. “The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle.” Cambridge University Press. 1995.