

Aristotle's concept of catharsis (B.A. Part 3 Hons paper v 2017-20)

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Catharsis is a Greek word which means purgation of the emotions of pity and fear aroused by the action of the tragic hero. In his seminal work, Poetics, Aristotle has elaborately discussed various aspects of tragedy which figures prominently in his discussion. Of the two forms of drama, Aristotle has given more credence to tragedy which assumes special significance in the sense that it aims at not only to amuse people but also to purge out the impurities latent in their personalities. The incidents of occurring in the drama hovers in the mind of the spectator even after leaving the theatre. His tension gets released This speciality helps tragedy acquire a distinct look and distinguishes it from comedy which Aristotle considers a lesser art form which depicts trivial incidents. A cursory glance over Aristotle's definition of tragedy makes it amply clear that he has laid stress on twin aspects, the nature and the objective of tragedy. In the first part, he has discussed the nature of tragedy whereas in the second part the objective of tragedy has been elaborately discussed. Catharsis figures in the second part when Aristotle says 'through pity and fear effects a purgation of these emotions' Aristotle insisted that the protagonist undergoes tragic experiences due to the lacunas latent in his own personality which Aristotle calls hamersia or tragic flaw. The protagonist of a tragedy though blessed with extra-ordinary qualities of head and heart suffers from certain weaknesses which finally lead him to his grave The protagonist is neither a pious person nor a scoundrel. He stands somewhere in the middle and witnesses tragic experiences or immense hardships due to the shortcomings which get intermingled in his personality forcing him to commit grave mistakes. The tragic hero freely chooses a series of actions which lead to his own ruin or catastrophe though enjoying exceptional qualities' The

protagonist of Sophocles' drama Oedipus Terence could have avoided the impending danger by leaving the plague to take its own course. But pity for the suffering of his people forced him to seek the advice from Delphi, the abode of Apollo..He might have left the murder of Laius uninvestigated showing dissent with Apollo's advice. But the poor fellow was bound by pity and justice which forced him to take the awkward action contrary to his wishes. He need not have forced the truth from the reluctant herdsman ,but because he can not rest content with a lie he must tear away the last veil from the illusion in which he had so long. All attempts of the herdsman to accomplish this act proves to be futile. He too should have taken note of last riddle which he deliberately choose to totleoid. The immediate cause of Oedipus catastrophe or downfall in not fate or the gods . He was not boundless by the oracles to discover the truth. What causes his ruin is his own strength and courage .his loyalty to Thebes and his loyalty to truth.

Aristotle says that the tragic destiny is precipitated by the hero 's tragic fault. Shakespeare's Cassius in Julius Caesar says 'the fault , dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ours in King Lear Edmund ridicules a belief in fortunes the 'foppery of the world'. Sophocles on the contrary says through the of 'It was Apollo who brought my woes to pass and further adds 'It was my hand that struck my eyes.'"