

# Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy (B.A. Part 3 Eng. Paper 5<sup>th</sup>)

---

Dr. Vishnulok Bihari Srivastava  
Asso. Prof.  
Deptt. Of English  
Rohtas Mahila College  
Sasaram, VKSU, Ara

Aristotle has thrown sufficient light on tragedy in his epoch- making book poetics. He has reposed more faith in tragedy which requires special treatment.. He was a great admirer of Greek tragedians Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschelus. They championed the art of drama elevating tragedy to the high pedestal which helped Aristotle frame the theorizing of classical drama. Aristotle has defined tragedy as 'an imitation of an action , serious, complete, and of certain magnitude, in a language beautified in different parts with different kinds of embellishment ,through actions and not narration, and through sense of pity and fear bringing about catharsis of these emotions."

Aristotle has laid more emphasis on the nature and purpose or function of tragedy in his definition .The basic difference between comedy and tragedy is that while the former deals with men acquiring heroic stature whereas comedy is confined to the trivial aspects of human nature depicting characters worse than they are in real life. Tragedy also differs from comedy in the se.nse that it requires serious action whereas in comedy there is an abundance of grotesque action. By imitation Aristotle does not mean copying of things which are already available, he on the contrary means to suggest recreation or creative reproduction of objects

Aristotle has given more importance to plot or action in tragedy and has pushed character to the background. The action of a tragedy must be complete and consists of logical sequence of incidents. It must have a beginning, middle and end. The beginning is that which doesn't come after anything but after which some other thing does exist. What Aristotle intends to suggest is that a play should have a

good reason for beginning and ending where it does. The beginning of an action might be perceived to be a sort of a momentary slack water before the turn of the tide. Had the ghost not appeared in the beginning of Hamlet, events of Denmark would have settled into a period of rest. In the same manner middle is that which follows something else and leads to something else. The end is that which comes after something else but has nothing else following it. The appearance of ghost foretells the imminent danger which awaits at the doorstep of Denmark particularly the court thus it prepares the background for the upcoming tremor which grips the entire country within its ambit.

Aristotle has laid emphasis on six elements in tragedy which include plot, character, thought Diction, spectacle and song of which the first two enjoy significant position. Of the six elements first three are internal elements whereas the last three are external elements. According to Aristotle plot finds an edge over character on many counts. Plot is the pivotal element round which the entire citadel of tragedy is erected. Even character is subservient to it. Tragedy is an imitation of an action and life and not of men. It is the action of men that makes them happy or Wretched. Without action they cannot be tragedy but there may be a tragedy without character. Thus plot appears as the soul of a tragedy and character is pushed to the secondary position. The plot requires a single central theme in which all the elements are intermingled to demonstrate the change in the characters fortune. The major difference between the Greek tragedy and modern tragedy lies in the former's repeated emphasis on plot at the expense of character. The tragic hero is neither villainous nor exceptionally virtuous and moves from happiness to misery through frailty or some error in judgment. His action arouses pity and fear in the spectators and then purges them of these impurities. Thus a tragic hero should be a mixture of virtue and human frailty. His misfortune should come about from an error of judgement and he must fall from a height of glorious position by committing grave mistakes and his actions arouse the tragic emotions of pity and fear.