



## URUBHANGAM (BREAKING OF THIGHS) – A TRAGEDY IN INDIAN TRADITION

**Bhagvanbhai H. Chaudhari, Ph. D.**

*Assoc. Professor, Dept. of English, The KNSBL Arts and Commerce College, Kheralu  
Gujarat (India)*



*Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at [www.srjis.com](http://www.srjis.com)*

By and large a play is considered an 'imitation of folk-attitude' wherein the outcome of human activity may either be happy or unhappy. Since the time of ancient Greek literature in the West, the drama has been categorized as comedy and tragedy. But Bharat Muni in his Natyashastra projected it to be:

(एतद्रसेषु भावेषु सर्वकर्म क्रयास्वथ ।

सर्वोपदेशजननं नाट्यं लोके भ वष्यति ॥ )

दुःखार्तानां श्रमार्तानां शोकार्तानां तपस्विनाम् ।

वश्रान्तिजननं काले नाट्यमेतद्भ वष्यति ॥ ११४॥

धर्म्यं यशस्यमायुष्यं हितं बुद्धवर्धनम् ।

लोकोपदेशजननं नाट्यमेतद्भ वष्यति ॥ ११५॥

(नाट्यशास्त्रम् अध्यायः १)

i.e. It will [also] give relief to unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow and grief or [over]-work, and will be conducive to observance of duty (*dharma*) as well as to fame, long life, intellect and general good, and will educate people. (Ghosh 15)

Further, he explains the concept and the significance of drama as

ईश्वराणां वलासश्च स्थैर्यं दुःखार्दितस्य च ।

अर्थोपजीवनामर्थो धृतिरुद्वेगचेतसाम् ॥ १११॥

नानाभावोपसम्पन्नं नानावस्थान्तरात्मकम् ।

लोकवृत्तानुकरणं नाट्यमेतन्मया कृतम् ॥ ११२॥

i.e. The drama as I have devised, is a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men good, bad and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all (Ghosh 15).

In the development of plot-construction of Sanskrit drama, the last stage shown is the fulfillment of goal. The protagonist of the play achieves the goal of his action as well as the spectators experience it happy ending in due course. Consequently, there is no possibility of tragedy. In addition to this it should represent the problems of human life into an artistic form. The Sanskrit court-dramatists developed the form of drama and they insisted it to be artistic. The tradition of drama has been established since past wherein the issues like war, death and decapitation cannot be performed on the stage. Due to such traditional perspectives there seems a lack of tragic drama in Sanskrit literature.

Bhasa's *Urubhangam* is based on the final phase of the historic war named Mahabharata. Bhasa has introduced certain changes in the play: For instance, Krishna himself gives a hint to Bhima to smash Duryodhan's thighs and not Arjuna as in the original; Duryodhan does not condemn Krishna as in the original, but is shown repenting over his misdeed. The changes introduced by the dramatist offer new perceptions in the character of Duryodhan, the protagonist of the play. Duryodhan has been transformed completely and made Suyodhan (good warrior) here. *Urubhangam* is considered the most significant one-act play in Sanskrit literature viewing the death and defeat of Duryodhan. As the title of this play suggests, it ends with the death of Duryodhan. There seems a dispute over category of this play as some scholars consider it a tragedy while some opine it a melodrama. Velar in *Hindu Outlook* states that *Urubhangam* is not a tragedy, but a melodrama (Nanavati 29). Keath explains:

The wicked man who perishes is merely, in the view of the Sanskrit drama, a criminal undergoing punishment, for whose sufferings we should feel no sympathy whatever such a person is not a suitable hero for any drama, and it is a mere reading of modern sentiment into ancient literature to treat Duryodhan in the *Urubhangam* as the hero of the drama. He justly pays the full penalty for insolence and contempt of Visnu (Keith 278)

To add this, Keath further notes:

Duryodhan is the prime subject of the play but not the hero. His death is admirably depicted.....Duryodhan, with all his demerits as a man, remains heroic in his death.....The *Urubhangam* may to us be tragic, but that is because we are not adorers of Visnu who regard with relish the fate of the enemy of that god, the evil Duryodhana ( Keith 106, 354 )

Keath's opposition is clearly revealed in the last part of his observation. The death of Duryodhan is admirably depicted and he remains heroic in his death, which is the prime focus of drama, despite this he should not be treated as hero. The playwright has made changes in the plot which differs in many ways than original text. Hence, from this point of view these changes are made to generate sympathy towards the character of Duryodhan. The technique of plot construction seems to develop with that particular viewpoint.

The character of Duryodhan in the entire play has been depicted from Kaurava's side to demonstrate his bright fame. Keath's observation can also be interpreted in the following ways:

- He is not an evil character, but an honourable warrior (Kshatriya). His attitude towards Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* is full of jealousy while in *Urubhangam* he is characterized as a man of dignity.
- His distressful situation in the play is neither a penalty for insolence nor his contempt for Visnu. It seems *Phalamparitoshasya* - the result of his discontent and such dissatisfaction to Kshatriya is considered a virtue, not a vice.
- He accepts Krishna's divinity hence his rude attitude, penalty for insolence and contempt of Visnu seem somewhat contrasting debate to that extent.

Hence, scholars hardly agree with Keath's criticism in this context. On the contrary S. K. Dey and many scholars treat *Urubhangam* a tragedy which ends with a tragic note (Nanavati, 30).

- Firstly, through Nandi and Bharat's statement the beginning and end are obviously revealed. It is a 'self-sufficient one act play'.
- Secondly, Duryodhan remains the tragic hero and he receives the sympathy for his death.
- Thirdly, he is an expert in dual-war, and his sense of forgiveness, love for family, devotion to his masters, friendship, self-respect – etc. heroic qualities make him a tragic hero who is destroyed by evil deeds of Bhima. His tragic end qualifies him a heroic character. Hence, *Urubhangam* is a tragedy.

Pusalkar says “*Urubhangam* is a tragedy, viewed from Aristotle’s point or that of Hegel” (indianscriptures.com). He describes the characteristics of Aristotle’s tragedy thus: According to Aristotle, the proper subject for a tragedy is the spectacle of a man, an ordinary human being not absolutely good or wise, who is brought to disaster by some frailty in him; it evokes feelings of fear and compassion and there by purges the soul.

Duryodhan is destroyed due to his own discontent, but out of which the sentiment of pity and fear are not clearly manifested. The purgation of pity and fear is Catharsis, which is an important characteristic of tragedy as viewed by Aristotle.

Dr. G. K. Bhatt very minutely observes the characteristics of Greek tragedy in *Urubhangam*. Bhatt’s analysis elucidated by Nanavati in his ‘Introduction’ to *Urubhangam* shows that Duryodhan’s perception of honour and dignity (which is perceived in Krishna and Pandavas) stands against truth, and hence it is erroneous, which is hamartia. The result of his evil deeds is the origin of adversity, which is peripeteia. The realization of his misdeed at the end is anagnorisis. Duryodhan courageously welcomes the death is quite appropriate to place him a tragic hero. On the other hand, his honour and dignity stand against the truth factors is hubris. Krishna, Bhima who crushes him and other occasional factors remain the symbol of divine planning. Though, at the end he is provided an opportunity to compromise the divine elements after realization of his mistake”. Thus, Dr. G. K. Bhatt establishes *Urubhangam* as formal tragedy (Nanavati 31).

Dr. G. K. Bhatt affirms in *Bahsa-studies* that “Duryodhana is great because he harbours a soul, which is capable of profound emotion, in the manifestation of which he touches an exceedingly noble level.....A respectful son, a proud and noble husband, an intensely loving father that is what Duryodhana is” (Bhatt 38). Though, Bhatt’s argument cannot be fully validated. Duryodhan’s distressful situation is not a sudden change, but the result of his evil deeds. Instead of realizing his guilt, Duryodhan justifies and supports his action.

The result of his deeds is the unchangeable principle of action (karma). In hubris he is shown compromising self-respect for the sake of his son. In Greek tragedy, when one confesses his guilt, his dignity does not remain wholly sublime (lofty). Suppose we accept it as a tragedy, it lacks the essential elements of a tragedy, i.e. the action of a certain magnitude. There is no intensity of pain or grief in his character. The pity of Duryodhan’s character is felt like personal calamity. The power of his pitiful situation cannot be equaled to world’s great tragic hero like King Lear, Oedipus or Prometheus. It is impossible for him to reach that height. To that sense, the play remains a formal tragedy. The tone of genuine tragedy in its

authenticated form is not experienced in *Urubhangam*. Correspondingly the characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy also seem superficial in it. Duryodhan's weakness is responsible for his misfortune, but the intensity of his fall lacks the grandeur of Shakespeare's tragic hero.

Elliot L. Jurist in *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency* explains that in Hegel's view of Tragedy, pathos ensues from the collision. Pathos is a result of tragic error (hamartia), which belongs to the protagonist, and is abetted by guilt (stemming from hamartia) and destiny. What is tragic in Greek tragedy, according to Hegel, is the paradox of voluntary acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the protagonist, despite the arbitrary force of destiny. Acknowledgement of guilt by the protagonist heightens the importance of self-recognition (Elliot 76). Hegel considers the essence of tragedy is conflict, not a moral conflict between right and wrong, but a conflict of right against right whereas Bhasa's *Urubhangam* defines 'wrong against wrong'. In the beginning Kauravas performed wickedness and unjust towards Pandavas likewise Pandavas too, pursued the same.

In *Urubhangam* Duryodhan himself urges Ashvatthama to give up his revenge and forgive Pandavas. In order to explain and convince him Duryodhan says that Draupadi was dragged in the court, infant Abhimanyu was killed and Pandavas were deprived off their legal rights and sent to forest through conspiracy. Duryodhan seems to repent when says:

In comparison to his injustice and misdeed towards Pandavas, they (Pandavas) did nothing. Here he seems to justify that he is more sinner than his enemies. O think, how little have the Pandavas who have been consecrated for the Lattle-rite, done to humiliate my pride; but on the other hand, Draupadi's hair was pulled by the hand in the gambling match; son Abhimanyu, though but a child, was put to death in the van of battle; and the Pandavas, conquered under the pretext of the gamble with dice, were forced to associate with the beasts of the forest (Devdhar 20 Shloka: 63)

Thus *Urubhangam* lacks the characteristics of Aristotle or Shakespearean tragedy. It seems impossible to consider it a tragedy as there is no intensity or grandeur in it. In *Urubhangam* a few moments before the death of Duryodhan we find a true spirit of high moral values in his character. He realizes that ripeness is all. Durjay is made King after his death and the playwright ends the play with his mental satisfaction. This end is unique in itself. Duryodhan advises his son Durjay before his death to banish grief from his heart and to serve the Pandavas and obey the commands of revered Kunti; and honour Abhimanyu's mother and Draupadi. Baldeva when sees his disciple Duryodhan advocating philosophy of 'forgive and forget' speaks "Ah, how enmity is turned into repentance!" (Devdhar 17)

To conclude this, tragedy of grand scale is impossible in *Urubhangam*, extension of one act is very limited in it and the blending of both the original concepts of Duryodhan's character and the poet's sympathy towards him in *Urubhangam* doesn't seem well- balanced or achieved successfully. Hence, *Urubhangam* should be treated neither real nor genuine, but a formal tragedy.

**Works cited:**

- Bhatt, G.K. *Bahsa-studies (Collected Papers, Vol. 1)*. Kolhapur: Maharashtra Grant Bhandar, 1968. Print. qtd. in *Research Chronicler A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed International Multidisciplinary Research Journal Volume II Issue I: January – 2014* p-70.
- Devdhar, C.R. *Urubhangam\_breaking\_of\_thighs 1940*. Creator - Fast DLI Downloader <https://github.com/cancerian0684/dli-downloader-pdf> (Translation of Bhasa's *Urubhangam*)
- Jurist, Elliot L. *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. Print.  
<<http://www.indianscriptures.com/scriptures/introduction-of-scriptures/classical-sanskrit-literature/bhasa-the-sanskrit-dramatist>> 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2017, 5 PM.
- Keith, A. B., *The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publications, 1992. Print.
- Nanavati, Rajendra. *Mahakavi Bhasvirchitam Urubhangam* Ahmedabad: Parshav Prakashan, 1993. Print.
- The Origin of Drama Chapter 1 The Natyasastra A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Historians Ascribed BHARAT- MUNI (Chapter I-XXVII) Translated into English by Manmohan Ghosh Calcutta: The Royal Society of Bengal 1951 p.15* pdf. [http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc\\_z\\_misc\\_major\\_works/natya01.html?lang=sa](http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_z_misc_major_works/natya01.html?lang=sa)