

*Review*

## LITERATURE, TIME AND PLACE

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**Purpose of this study is to compare and contrast two well known dramas of English literature and to provide the understanding to the readers that literature is not time or place bound. For example, King Oedipus was written far ago than An enemy of the people. In the same way King Oedipus is written in different context than that of An enemy of the people. However, the basic theme of the both dramas is same. Author have scrutinized both dramas and discussed in literature review of the present study and concluded that the both of the dramas were same in multiple thematic aspects.**

**Key words:** Literature, Time, Place, Context, An Enemy of The People, King Oedipus.

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### INTRODUCTION

An extent literature exists on the comparison of the two or more literary works or writers in literature for example (Keith, 1983). It is quiet important to compare and contrast two pieces of literature from different times and different societies as literature is considered reflection of life and it is something universal. Such comparison gives us opportunity to evaluate literature as a collective legacy of mankind. They produce International and global effects on overall literature produced in the world. Another advantage is that in such comparisons we can evaluate ourselves that how far we succeeded in our comparison. It provides opportunity of self evaluation. On the other hand its fruitful outcome is that it helps in the revitalization of the classics. Another important aspect is that the contemporaries can get awareness of worldwide literature. It is important for the reader as well because with the help of modern texts they can easily interpret the ancient text which otherwise is difficult for them to understand. However, to date no comparative study has been done on the Oedipus Rex and An Enemy of the People.

Present work contributes in literature in a way that how much concepts and idea is important in literature and

overall, literature revolves around few basic themes which are actually same at fundamental ground. Alexander (2000) reported while explaining literature that literature is always more than its context. For example he says that Homer survived twenty seven centuries and now his work is far removed from the context provided by the author. So we can assume that what makes literature stand the test of time is not its context. Alexander proposes that merits of literature lies in pleasing language of the text and its ability to maintain human interest. The argument here is that language never remains same. Baugh and Cable (1993) reported when a language stops changing, it is called dead for example Classical Latin. The structure of language keeps on changing for example the Beowulf though is written in Old English but since the passage of time effects language is not even intelligible to a reader whose native language is not English. Second point here is that there are many works which have been translated in different languages e.g. Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett and gained equal popularity. It's a fact the beauty of language of the work is always affected in translations. Translations cannot be equal to the original text in beauty of form.

Second thing was human interest. To this point Alexander himself, offered answer that human interests have tendency to change. We may propose that it is the idea or the theme, which is relevant to basic human nature, gives literature a long life. Because human nature is same and it never changes. So we can say that it is universality which gives literature ground to stand the test of time. The present argument involves the idea that after passing a lot of time even in 19th century Ibsen repeats theme similar to Sophocles' King Oedipus in his play *An enemy of the people* with new setting in a different language with different characters than those of King Oedipus. The argument focuses on the fact that despite of having lot of difference of time, place, culture and context dramas bear perfect resemblance in themes and central ideas. We may propose that literature is boundless of the time and place; major themes are always same on fundamental level. A short account of the plot of both dramas is provide below.

Sophocles the writer of king Oedipus belonged to a prosperous family. He was one of the three important and prolific Greek dramatists. He wrote tragedies. Theban plays are the manifestation of best of Sophocles writing faculties. These plays are, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. In this paper we are going to discuss only Oedipus the king. In story Oedipus is the protagonist. He is banished by his parents, Laius and Jocasta, to prevent him fulfilling a prophecy. He was adopted by a childless couple. When he came to know that he was going to kill his father and marry his mother he tried to flee his fate. As he departed he met a man on the road. He fought and killed him. That man was his father Laius. He did not know the fact. He solves the riddle of the sphinx and enters the city of Thebes and becomes the king of Thebes and marries the Queen who is actually his mother. The city faces a plague which according to Delphic oracles is result of religious pollution caused by the man who has murdered the former king. Oedipus ensures his people to find the killer. He insists overwhelmingly on inquires. When truth comes before everyone that it is Oedipus who has killed his father and married to his mother and is the polluter of land. Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus leaves Thebes after blinding himself and his children were left in Thebes.

Henrik Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright, theatre director and poet. In *An enemy of the people* he wrote story of Doctor Thomas Stockman who was involved in a project of development of baths along with his brother Peter the Mayer. Baths were expected to be an attraction for tourist and were considered to be a source of prosperity for the masses. Stockman discovered that wastes from town's tannery were contaminating water which was a dangerous thing from the point of view of health. It could result into serious illness. He sent report to Mayer with proposed solution of the problem which was somehow costly. He perceived this discovery as his

achievement but he was shocked to see that authorities were unwilling to see the seriousness of the problem and they considered it a financial wreck. The Mayer tips him off to accept the authorities' decision but doctor stockman refuses and holds a meeting to make people aware of the fact .when he mentioned the problem and asked to close the baths everyone including friends who ensured their support in the campaign turned against him before public. They called him lunatic and an enemy of the people.

On the basis of above two summaries it is quite obvious that both of the dramas are akin on certain thematic level. We can find number of similarities between two dramas. We may see that though the setting, language and culture are different both dramas are similar on thematic grounds. As for as similarities in themes are concerned these are role of fate, Hamartia, social status, moral values, love, intelligence, arrogance, medical concerns, stubbornness, acceptance and choices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed above an ample research have been done on the comparison of two or more dramas. This study put efforts to explore the similar theme which is grounded in the roots of King Oedipus and *An enemy of the people*. Authors from different cultures and eras have produced literature unintentionally on similar thematic grounds. This reality leaves a huge researchable question for the author of the present era. Similarities among both dramas are presented on the basis of literature review of dramas.

The protagonist of king Oedipus is of royal birth and king. The protagonist of *An enemy of the people* also has a fine status in society. Both of them are somehow in position to stand up and speak for public but both are unaware of the outcome. Both heroes have suffered for their kindness, love and loyalty towards there people. Due to their endeavors to save their masses they suffered a lot. One was called polluter of land because he was considered the sinner who is cause of terrible plague they all were facing. And the other was named as an enemy of the people because they considered he is trying to divest them from the financial gains which they can attain by tourism promoted by the attraction of the baths.

In both dramas heroes took initiative for saving the masses. Opening of Oedipus Rex exhibits a wonderful and splendid man whose speech reflects his inner feelings and compassion for the public. He seems to be deeply moved by the suffering of his citizen in crucial time. He calls the people of Thebes his children and he identifies himself with them. He is noble, compassionate, and wise (Dobson, 2007). In the same way doctor stockman is also very keen about people's welfare he is determined to save them at any cost. But it is his bad luck

that those people instead of appreciating him consider him an enemy of the people. People are won over by economic interests (Leck, 2005). It was the tragic fate of the heroes that brought them to their disgraced endings.

Both Oedipus and Dr Stockman were intelligent and that intelligence proved fatal for them. Oedipus enters city of Thebes by solving riddle of Sphinx which was a difficult task. He handled it with his intelligence. He answered the questions of sphinx and entered the city and then faced a miserable fate. In the same way doctor makes a splendid achievement by finding out contamination of water and he expected a great appraisal from the public on his achievement. But everything went just opposite. People misunderstood him and in fact his own intelligence brought him such sort of end.

In tragedy choices are not given much to the heroes (Dobson, 2007). We can see the limitation of choices which are provided to the both protagonists. Dr Stockman and King Oedipus are in such a position that they are unable to avoid their fate. Oedipus had to choose one thing either to let his people suffer and die due to plague, or find polluter of land to avert agony of his people. That was quite unfortunate that he himself was polluter. Sophocles had not given him space to have any solution. Being a king it was his moral duty to find killer of lauis. He was unable to avoid it even if he wanted. On the other hand Dr Stockman either had to let his people suffer from the consequences of contamination of water or brand himself as traitor by standing up and speaking for their welfare. When he was asked to be silent he replied that it was a citizen's duty to inform people. He insisted on his point of view and ignored Mayer's warnings (Leck, 2005). Both of them chose the welfare of their people at any cost. Here important thing is that this particular quality of resolution and determination is very basic quality of a hero. This quality is perfectly reflected in the character of both of the heroes.

Both of the heroes were ethically bound to pursue for the good of their people. The moral values were not allowing them to be silent in such a crucial time. Both heroes had undergone same tragic ending which was their falling from grace in the eye of public. Both of them proved themselves true tragic heroes by undergoing a guiltless despair which is an essential quality of a tragic hero (Dobson, M. (2007). Both of them are well aware at the end that all what had happened to them is just because of their fate and their conscience is satisfied that they did not intend any harm to their people. Both of them accepted their tragic end open heartedly which shows their leadership quality. Oedipus accepted the situation and considered his crime and showed a kingly behavior by punishing himself on his own and never allowing anyone else to do anything wrong with him. He blinds himself and says that his eyes will never see the crime he has committed (Naiburg, 2006). He is fully aware of his situation. In the same way Dr Stockman also accepts his

end open heartedly and says at the end when he sees his family that the strongest man in the world is the one who stands most alone. (Leck, 2005).

Role of Hamartia is also very much alive in characters of the heroes of both dramas. Somehow the stubborn nature of the both heroes also played important role in their reversal of fate. Oedipus is over confident, arrogant and proud. He insisted overwhelmingly on the enquiries to capture the killer of Lauius. He accused and ill treated everyone who tried to keep him from inquiries. He misbehaved with Creon, Tiresias and somehow with Jocasta and completely ignored her when she tried to stop him from the inquiries about shepherd. He said go and fetch the shepherd and leave the lady to enjoy her pride. He could have avoided his bad luck by being careful in his behavior (Dodds, 1964). Same is the case with Dr Stockman. He also insisted a lot on conveying his message to the public. He ignored Mayer's warning he put his relationship with his wife on the stake. It was his good luck that even after losing everything at the end she stood with him. So we can say that somehow this stubbornness and arrogance worked as tragic flaw for both heroes and brought them to severity of circumstances.

Both dramas discuss medical concerns very closely and this is actually focus of attention of both heroes. Oedipus is worried about his people because the city is suffering from a plague. He wanted to avoid it because he considers it disastrous for the city. Kousoulis, A. A., Economopoulos, K. P., Poulakou-Rebelakou, E., Androutsos, G., & Tsiodras, S. (2012) depicted that there are deaths all over the city. The disease was fatal and contagious. An infectious agent is causing tendency of miscarriages and stillbirths in women. City seems to perish. People of Thebes are lamenting over it. In an enemy of the people the focus is again on medical concerns. Dr Stockman's discovery reveals the danger that drainage system of baths is contaminated. He wants to fix the problem but the authorities considered the solution would be too costly so it's better to remain silent and let it go as it is. But just like Oedipus is determined to avert plague Dr Stockman as well wants to raise his voice to tell the people about the dangers regarding their health. So as the health has been a basic human concern in human life always so dramas are perfectly able to involve readers by using one of their basic needs as their major themes

## CONCLUSION

King Oedipus and an enemy of the people are in many ways similar but the most important ground is the thematic similarity. The people who think for the good of society are turned to suffering of falling from grace. Their every endeavor to save their people made their own

positions worst. They undergone almost same situation in the end that is disrespect before public. By comparing themes of these two dramas we can safely assume that literary themes are universal and they are not bound to one particular time or territory. Standards of evil and good, vice and virtue, love and hatred, kindness and cruelty and respect and disrespect are always same and in every society. Because these merits are based on the judgment of human nature and human nature remains same. So far as literature is concerned since it is written about human beings its major ideas remain same on fundamental level. And this thematic ground makes literature universal. It makes literature survive for centuries even after being removed by its context completely. Themes based on basic nature of human beings enable a piece of work to acquire favors of the people around the world without any particular attention towards the nation, race, colour, culture and language of its writer. People love it and own it since its reflection of their lives. They can easily assimilate themselves with the characters of the work and do catharsis.

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