

DISCUSS GREEK TRAGIC VISION AS REFLECTED IN OEDIPUS REX.

Drama played a central role in the life of the Greek people. It is in Greek times, that the greatest tragedies were written, from which Aristotle defined tragedy. Greek tragic vision of life is reflected through these tragedies. Since the Greeks were religious people, they saw a great role of Fate in making human life happy or sorrowful.

The divine power was a key force behind the disintegration of man. Greek tragic vision included both character traits and the power of Fate, in bringing about the downfall of great men, like Oedipus. Those who did not practise moderation or flouted universal moral code of conduct would be punished by the divine force, manifested through Fate. The role of characters was also taken into account. A study of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex can provide us insights into this Greek tragic vision.

Every human being has certain limits, and he should conduct his life within those limits. A mortal human being cannot accomplish or know everything. His mortal power is limited, something always lies beyond his capability of achievement or knowledge. Oedipus tried to challenge this limitation, so he suffered a tragedy. Arrogance in excess will bring about the downfall of the person in question. Moderation is a virtue people should practise in order to avoid catastrophe in life. Hubris (excessive pride) is a weakness in character of the protagonist, and the fall is inevitable because Fate acts in conjunction with the weakness of character to bring about the downfall of the person. These two forces operate in such a way so as to make the tragic **downfall of the** protagonist seem inevitable. Before the final moment comes, the protagonist must go through a series of circumstances that test his endurance, patience and power, in short, his resilience of spirit. The suffering is so great and intense, that the audience feels pity for the protagonist and terror for himself. The suffering is grossly out of proportion to the crime committed. Oedipus is a noble man, but his fall is inevitable because his arrogance and Fate are operating invisibly.

While in power, Oedipus acted authoritatively, accusing and rebuking people under his authority as a king. Oedipus should not have done this, while at the peak of his fortune, and should have thought about the potential misfortune that may befall him at any moment in the future. This is the lesson imparted by the play. Oedipus' suffering is so intense and heart-rending, that we are deeply moved by it. The whole plot of the play is built upon irony. Oedipus' parents (Laius and Jocasta) abandoned him as an **infant in order to** avoid the terrible fate that this infant will one day kill his father and marry his own mother. As Fate would have it, Oedipus does just this. The greatest irony is that while leaving Corinth, Oedipus naively believes that he is moving away from this terrible fate. So, **Oedipus Rex** is rightly called the tragedy of Fate.

As a king, Oedipus could not tolerate the suffering of his own people. So, he is determined to find out and punish the defiler of his city of Thebes. But it was not mandatory for Oedipus to follow his determination to its logical conclusion. It is here, where Fate intervenes. The play, then, is a tremendous reassertion of the traditional Greek religious view that man is ignorant and knowledge belongs only to the gods. And it seems at first sight to present a universe rigid on the side of order. When Oedipus comes to know that he himself, killed his own father, he faces the reality bravely. He does not face his Fate like a coward. He encounters it like a hero. There lies his greatness of tragic stature. Against the advice and appeals of others, he pushes on, searching for the truth, the whole

Dr. A. Bhadra

truth and nothing but the truth. This freedom to search, and the heroic way in which Oedipus uses it, make the play not a picture of man's utter feebleness caught in the traps of Fate. On the contrary, it is a heroic example of man's search for the truth, the truth about himself. In spite of his own name Oedipus, which resembles Greek oida ('I know'), Oedipus, who thought in his hubris, that he knew everything, did not, ironically enough, even know who his actual parents were. But he has the scope to know, and this is perhaps the only human freedom, the play seems to say, but there could be none more noble. Man is a victim of Fate, but the only independence allowed him is the search for knowledge.