

**OEDIPUS REX BY SOPHOCLES
STUDY GUIDE
EUROPEAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE
CORE COURSE II
SEMESTER I (ENGLISH HONS.)**

**BABUL PRAMANIK(W.B.E.S)
ASST. PROF. IN ENGLISH
GOVT. GENERAL DEGREE COLLEGE, CHAPRA**

ARISTOTLE'S TRAITS OF A TRAGIC HERO

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF A
TRAGIC HERO ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE

THE DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY

- A drama in which a character (usually a good and noble person of high rank) is brought to a disastrous end in his or her confrontation with a superior force (fortune, the gods, social forces, universal values), but also comes to understand the meaning of his or her deeds and to accept an appropriate punishment. (*The Norton Introduction to Literature*, 7th ed)

ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY

- Tragedy depicts the downfall of a basically good person through some fatal error or misjudgment, producing suffering and insight on the part of the protagonist and arousing pity and fear on the part of the audience.
- The Tragic undergoes a journey from darkness to light, ignorance to knowledge, from vice to virtue, from prosperity to adversity .
- The Tragic hero must suffer to be wise.

TRAGIC HERO

- The tragic hero is a man of noble stature or high position. He is not an ordinary man, but a man with outstanding quality and greatness about him. His own destruction is for a greater cause or principle.
- He goes through the phase of Hubris, Hamartia, Anagnorisis, Peripetia & Catharsis.
- His Tragic realization comes at the end.

THE TRAGIC HERO: TRAIT ONE

The tragic hero must be essentially admirable and good--usually of noble birth.

- The tragic hero is a man of noble stature. He is not an ordinary man, but a man with outstanding quality and greatness about him. His own destruction is for a greater cause or principle.
- The fall of a scoundrel or villain evokes applause rather than pity. Audiences cheer when the bad guy goes down. The nobler and more admirable the person is, the greater our anxiety or grief at his or her downfall.

THE TRAGIC HERO: TRAIT TWO

HAMARTIA – The tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall.

- A fatal error or simple mistake on the part of the protagonist that eventually leads to the final catastrophe.
- The **tragic hero** recognizes his or her flaw and its consequences, but only after it is too late to change the course of events.

THE TRAGIC HERO: TRAIT THREE

PERIPETEIA - A reversal of fortune brought about by the hero's tragic flaw.

- Once the transgression is realized, the character enters the stage of recognition and will undergo a reversal of fortune or fall from high to low.

THE TRAGIC HERO: TRAIT FOUR

ANAGNORISIS - Tragic recognition or insight.

- His actions result in an increase of self-awareness and self-knowledge
- A moment of clairvoyant insight or understanding in the mind of the tragic hero as he suddenly comprehends the web of fate in which he is entangled.

THE TRAGIC HERO: TRAIT FIVE

CATHARSIS - Transformation through transaction

- A feeling of emotional purging on the part of the audience during a tragedy--The audience feels pity and fear at first, only to feel relief and exhilaration at the end through catharsis.
- The audience must feel pity and fear for this character. Pity and fear are the natural human responses to pain and suffering – especially to that which can strike anyone at any time.

CATHARSIS: PITY AND FEAR ,TRAGIC REALIZATION AND RECONCILIATION WITH THE SELF

In a true tragedy, the hero's demise must come as a result of some personal error or decision.

There is no such thing as an innocent victim in tragedy, nor can a genuinely tragic downfall ever be purely a matter of blind accident or bad luck. The tragic hero must always bear at least some responsibility for his own doom.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAGIC HERO

According to Aristotle:

1. **Prosperity to Adversity** : Usually of noble birth, But the Tragic Hero must undergo a journey to become wise and realise the self.
2. **Hubris**: Excessive Pride, presumption or arrogance on the part of the Hero .
3. **Hamartia** – The tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall.
4. **Peripeteia** – A reversal of fortune brought about by the hero's tragic flaw.
5. **Anagnorisis** – The protagonist's actions result in an increase of self- awareness and self-knowledge.
6. **Catharsis** - The audience must feel pity and fear for the tragic character .

PROBABLE QUESTIONS ON OEDIPUS REX

- Character portrayal of Oedipus the King.
- Write a critical analysis on the character of Jocasta.
- Role of Tiresias.
- Attempt an essay on the Dramatic Irony in **Oedipus Rex**.
- How does Oedipus Rex qualify as a Greek Tragedy ?
- Plot construction in **Oedipus Rex**.
- What do you think Fate / Character is more important in the downfall of Oedipus the King?
- Write a short note on the ending of **Oedipus Rex**.
- Dramatic function of Chorus in **Oedipus Rex**.
- Critically comment on Oedipus' use of myth in **Oedipus Rex**.
- What purpose does Creon play in **Oedipus Rex** ?

SUGGESTED READINGS/ REFERENCES

- ▶ Aristotle, *Poetics*. Malcolm Heath London: Penguin, 2007.
- ▶ Plato. BK X. *The Republic*. Tr. Desmond Lee. London. Penguin, 2007.
- ▶ Sophocles. “Oedipus the King”. Tr. Robert Fagles in *Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.
- ▶ . Kitto, H. D. F. *Greek Tragedy*. London: Routledge, 1990.