

Lecture Sheet

'Hamlet' Represents Modern Man in Dilemma

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In the large host of Shakespeare's men and women, Hamlet stands out unique. He is too complex and intricate to be understood. Though there is hardly any untrodden land as far as the character of Hamlet is concerned yet we have tried to explore different facets of Hamlet's personality in the focus of our emphasis. Hamlet, the prince of Denmark as a student at Witten-berg might have never thought that he would confront a world quite opposite from idealism he has been cherishing in his heart. He undergoes a series of punishment for the crimes he has not committed at all. It is clear by the study of Hamlet that Shakespeare was well aware of the characteristics of a melancholic man's outward and inward behavior. Through Hamlet's persona he deals with the conflict of every modern man. To a certain extent we all are Hamlet in some way or the other. It is informed through different means that something is wrong in the kingdom of Denmark. Hamlet has come to attend his father's funeral but he finds everything in chaos. His mother Gertrude's hasty marriage with his uncle Claudius has shaken his world of moral idealism. This incident throws him into a world of moral confusion. He strives to retain in the world of moral idealism, and this he does by fabricating a make- a believe world around himself. This world has nothing to do with the actual world of action. The revelation by Ghost changes him completely into another. Hamlet who finds this world "an unweeded garden" (act I, sc II, & 1-35-62). He mourns over the evil ways of this evil



world. The step taken by his mother has filled his mind up with the poison for all women of the world. He generalizes women "Frailty thy name is woman!" (act I, sc II, 1, 1-46). He is indignant with Claudius. The villainies of his ideal person change his outlook in to-to. He is suspicious to everybody. His estimation about his fellow being is "One may smile and smile and be villain." (act I, sc VI, I, 108). He is as sensitive as a modern man. For the modern man is also living in the world of suspicion. They find none whose face is the real index of heart. People are cunning

enough to hide their wickedness behind their artificial virtues. Owing to this hypocrisy Hamlet starts despising the whole world and himself too. All the uses of the world become, "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable". (act I sc II 1-133) for him. Hamlet takes the world at its face value while it is completely otherwise. Man whom he once deemed to be God's Supreme creation, is not more than "a quintessence of dust." (act II, sc II, and 1-308). The world has lost all its charm. It is not worth living. He feels suffocated like a prisoner thrown into confinement. He is generally found analyzing his own self. This too much self-analysis changes him into a "dull and muddied – mettled rascal" (act II, sc II, 1-561) who has deliberately dried up all streams of action. Only his mind is functioning. Hamlet's fractured way of thinking; "To be or not to be that is the question" (act III, sc



I, 1-56) resembles the modern man's way of thinking. Like Hamlet the modern man is also confused. The opening words of Hamlet's soliloquy referred to show the crisis suffered by Hamlet and the modern thoughtful man at the different stages of human history. Therefore the crisis has become very common phenomenon in the modern times. The modern age is the age of indecisiveness. This state of indecisiveness has been brought out through Hamlet's character. When he says "To be or not to be that is the question" he seems referring to the existence or non-existence of the number of things. He

is doubtful regarding the existence of ghost. He suspects "The spirit I have seen, May be the Devil" (act II, sc II, 1-59). Like the modern man he is subject to his disbelief. Hamlet's dead father in the form of dead spirit commands Hamlet to avenge his death. Hamlet is not able to decide how the commandment be abided by. The Ghost ask him to leave Gertrude "to heaven and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge" (act I, sc V, 1-36). However, his behavior towards his mother is very hostile. He uses such language as can hardly be heard from a son who is so full of morality and idealism. Putting the mother son relationship aside he calls her "husband's brother's wife". (act III, sc III, 1-15). He is unable to tolerate her unwomanly and unmotherly treatment. He is unable to understand the reason of Gertrude's hasty marriage with Claudius. He reacts harshly saying, "O Shame! Where is thy blush? Rebellious hell, If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones, To flaming youth let virtue be as wax." (Act III sc IV 1-82-84) Here is an upsurge of indignation which modern man slips in when something happens against his anticipation. Rapid number of increasing suicides has become the prominent feature of the modern age especially among youngsters. To commit suicide is the plight of reality. When a person fails from all sides and finds no way out except saying good bye to the world. Hamlet too suffers from the problem of existence. He is neither able to compromise with the situation nor capable to wage war against them. He tries to be obedient to his father sincere to his beloved and good to his friends but he fails. He does not understand what his very own life is meant for. Like the modern man he thinks of the suicide. He is held back by his Christian belief and fear lest he should suffer from the greatest unhappiness than he faces in his worldly life. Throughout the play it seems Hamlet is in pursuit of his identity but this he never comes across. Hamlet wastes too much time in introspection but does not act at all. This habit is very common in modern man. Hamlet takes a resolution to fulfill the will of his

dead father, saying, "And thy commandment all alone shall live". (act1 sc VI 1-02). He promises to wash off all the things from his mind, but this does not happen. Similarly like Hamlet the modern man with uneasy mind finds anarchy wherever he throws his eyes. He dreams to put the whole world into order but his effort never fructifies. The world remains unchanged. It is also impossible to rectify the whole world. However, Hamlet makes a verbal effort to undertake this impossible work saying "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right." (act I sc VI – 1-81). It appears, he presumes that his birth is meant for putting all the evils to an end. This revolutionary spirit is present in every modern man's mind. It does not find place to erupt, therefore eats away its own potential and brings tragic consequences. Hamlet is divided into two halves the first half represents thoughts and the second action. The first part always eclipses the second half and it resulted in over thinking. Over brooding result in procrastinating which blocks every outlet for action. It is ironical that the Ghost has to appear to remind Hamlet of his duties. He says ——— "Do not forget: this visitation Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose." (act III, sc IV, 1-109) If Hamlet wants to take revenge he has "cause and will and strength and means" (act IV, sc IV 1-45) to do it, as the prince of Denmark. The only thing he lacks is action. However, he is spurred to take action many times. He calls himself a beast. Like Hamlet the modern man also encounters the same trauma. Hamlet knows that his inactiveness is the root cause of his miseries, yet he is helpless to keep the balance between his thought and action. On the ground of various characteristics similarities Hamlet is very much a modern man. He epitomizes the anguish and anger suffered by modern sensitive man. The angst of modernity is the angst of Hamlet. The modern sensitive man sees around him a world marked by an all-round collapse of moral values. He cries over this collapse but the opaqueness of the actual hard realities gives no soothing response. This terrifying in compatibility between the inner and the outer worlds results into multiple crises ——— crises of identity, crises of faith in any moral order, and crises of the very justification of living as a human being, in short, the crises of Hamletian existence. The state of socio- cultural illness can be compared with the rottenness of modern "Denmark" which has been left unattended because of the no intervention of modern men of intellect and feeling in the practical realities. In short, the fruitlessness of Hamletian proneness to inner searching results into an inner implosion of angst and alienation.



Thank You