

An Observation on Human Emotions with Reference to Select Plays of Shakespeare

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to analyse the limitations and the scope of the given theme, “Action vs. Reaction” on experimenting the characters of Shakespeare's drama. To justify the purpose, a psychological observation of each character on how their system of behaviour works with respect to reactions and actions on particular situation. It is more like a behavioural measurement of dynamic possibilities. Newton's third law of gravity works divergently in the human emotions, where the characters experience the result of their action as reactions and realise their action later. Though the action comes first, the realization of the action comes only after the reaction. Newton's law explain that the force applied on an object as action and the experience of that object on an applied force as reaction. Shakespearean law of emotion is little disparate to Newton's law where the force applied is not recognized until the character suffers the reaction. Only through the reaction the action is being recognized apart from the question whether the action is good or bad. Most of the times, the action will not be rewarded for resulting in good reaction. The action is bemoaned when the character encounters a disastrous reaction as an effect of his/her action. Thus, the characters under the influence of action and reaction of Shakespeare's select dramas like *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* are employed for observations and findings of their outcomes.

Interaction came into existence even before verbal and written communication. Emotions and gestures were the earliest discoveries of mankind through which they could communicate very effectively. Everything was experimental learning in the Paleo-lithic age. The men of the pre-paleo-lithic age hunted and ate raw animals and were ignorant about cooking. The great forest fire guided them the way for cooking. A male deer trapped in the forest fire found dead in the forest, where one of the Neanderthals was so inquisitive to check why the deer was not moving, and touched it dubiously to confirm its state, with his index finger. His finger plunged into the burnt skin of the deer and he swiftly took back his finger and kept it in his mouth impulsively. Then he found that the burnt meat was very tasty. That was the turning point of the era and a step ahead towards civilization. Only through the reaction, the action is being recognized. The impulsive ‘reaction’ of the stone-age man turned out to be an ‘action’ towards civilized way of eating. Unlike the Newton's law, the reaction is followed by the action in living subjects. Newton's law may be feasible on non-living objects but not on the human subjects.

History of literature had seen many playwrights and poets yet William Shakespeare was the greatest of all in his contribution, not only to English Literature but also to the world literature. Every character in his play uncovers a secret to the reader's life journey. His plays emphasis; on the follies and the fate of one's life. Folly is how an action is being done and the fate is the reaction of one's action. His writings were life like; where one can easily identify, and connect the characters to oneself. There are so many Shakespearean characters around the country; live among and within all of us. Like, beautiful yet cunning Cleopatra, ruthless hypocrite Iago, innocent Desdemona, amazingly brilliant Portia, cut throat Shylock, venomous Lady Macbeth, Nobleman Merchant Antonio, power monger Brutus, boorish Othello, so on... Shakespearean characters are taken for observation on how they behave impulsively under reactions and vigorously indulge themselves in action.

In the law of human emotions, the ‘reaction’ is situational influence and the ‘action’ is a step taken. Interaction is the reason for any action and reaction both in the law of gravity and in the law of human emotions. Shakespeare's Othello is an example for extraordinary human interactions, emotions, reactions and actions.

*“One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damned in a fair wife,
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster—unless the bookish theoretic,
Wherein the togèd consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle, without practice
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election;
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds
Christian and heathen, must be beleed and calmed
By debtor and creditor. This counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be (1.1.21-34).”*

Iago was jealous about his slipped position in the hands of Michel Cassio as a military lieutenant. He felt that he is much capable than Cassio with his experience in the battle field. Also, he claims the seniority to be considered as per the tenure for that position. He hated Othello for giving him promotion and gave his position to Cassio. Also, he had a suspicion on his wife Emilia, for cuckoldry, with Othello, the moor. He wasn't happy at all with Othello and every other incident added fuel to the fire of his conspiracy towards him. Though sometimes the action comes first; only with the reaction the action is being valued. Iago was over reactive towards Othello; his activities were only to pull down the moor to a hellish condition. He knew it's for sure that

Othello will destroy his own kingdom for the sake of his honour. So, he influenced Othello and brought in situations relating to his honour. Iago made Othello guilty about, Desdemona, his wife with the following sentence "As proofs of holy writ." (3.3.370-372) and provoked him to kill her. Othello, the moor – the title is justified in the means of him killing his only beautiful wife without even having a second thought. Iago's bad Influence on Othello is the reaction and Othello killing the innocent Desdemona is the action.

Another remarkable play of Shakespeare considered an absolute polar to Othello is Antony and Cleopatra, known for its beauty and decadence. Folly and the fate plays the role of action and reaction in this play. Most of the Shakespeare's plays emphasis on folly governs the fate of one's life. Antony was known for his valour and he had an inviolable army, yet he was sensually vulnerable to Cleopatra. Antony was utterly forgiving on the disloyalty of Cleopatra due to his sensual appetite. In the battle of life Antony lost his wives Fulvia and Octavia, his statesmen Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, his loyal servant Enobarbus, his war battles, his valour, his respect and reputation and finally his life too for the malignant mistress - Cleopatra.

*"Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A towered citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs;
They are black vesper's pageants.*

*...
That which is now a horse even with a thought
The rack disdains, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.*

*...
Here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen—
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine,
Which whilst it was mine had annexed unto't
A million more, now lost—she, Eros, has
Packed cards with Caesar, and false-played my glory
Unto an enemy's triumph.
Nay, weep not, gentle Eros. There is left us
Ourselves to end ourselves. (IV.xv.3–22)"*

Antony's dotting behind Cleopatra was rewarded with a medal of treachery during his battle with Octavius. Here comes lustfulness as action and treason as reaction. It was way too late by the time, the action was justified. Reaction of Antony in a hopeless situation was to commit suicide due to his action of self-indulgence with Cleopatra in his recent past; it pushed him to a situation to put an end to everything in this world since he cannot think of a life without Cleopatra.

Greed made the Macbeth fade! Sometimes out of avariciousness, people commit mistakes; before they repent their action, they undergo disastrous reaction. *Macbeth* of Shakespeare is one such a play that instructs people not live the life of compunction.

*"Whence is that knocking? —
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red." (Act 2, scene 2, lines 55–61)*

The strong sense of guilt, of committing a crime, was apparent in the above soliloquy of Macbeth. Crime committed by Macbeth was irreparable since the victim was an innocent and a good-hearted King. King Duncan's bloodshed was the symbol of misfortune. This play of Shakespeare was full of running and chasing, cheating and killing, prophecies and hypocrisies and cold blooded murders all through. Shakespeare tried instructing the people about the way of life in a fatalistic approach. The concept of 'karma' of the Vedic literature can also be applied to Shakespeare's plays. Nature's law is so stringent that nobody can escape it. It's better to live a gentle life than repenting the action of committing the sin. Most of the problems of life occur when one is not happy with what one deserves or posses. Envy is the root cause for all the problems of life. In the case of Macbeth, enviousness and imprudence were the two follies were the pitfalls.

Of all the three plays of Shakespeare discussed above, women were the paramount reasons for all the sufferings of Shakespeare's characters. In *Othello*, question of Desdemona's loyalty; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, deceptive beauty of Cleopatra and in *Macbeth*, highly ambitious Lady Macbeth; were the reason for the doomsday of the protagonists. To conclude, 'action' is in the platform of sense-gratification and the 'reaction' is in the platform of destiny under the influence of time and action. As per one's action, the reaction is decided; still the human subjects never take the reference of the previous life-experiments of the fellow being as one do in scientific experiments; this way the scientific experiment on the non-living objects influenced by time and force gives divergent result compared to the result of the living subject who are under the influence of time and emotion.

Time and emotion acting upon on living subjects are far more influential than the non-living objects is the observation made on the select plays Shakespeare.

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