



THE CONCEPT OF ARISTOTLE'S TRAGIC HERO IN THE POETIC FABLE *A SPIDER AND A FLY* BY IQBAL

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Abstract

The current research seeks to highlight the characteristics of a tragic hero in Iqbal's *A Spider and A Fly*, with a particular focus on the poet's use of hamartia in the hero's character as a vehicle for disseminating didactic messages within society. Aristotle (1907) guides the analysis of the article, especially the guidelines for a tragic hero. The current scholarship on Iqbal's poetry mostly overlooked the elements of a tragic hero in Iqbal's fable. Therefore, this research addresses the characteristics of a tragic hero in Iqbal's fable *A Spider and A Fly*. It is concluded that Fly plays the role of a tragic hero because it exhibits a greater alignment with the defining elements of a tragic hero than any other character in the poem. Iqbal tries to teach the Muslim population, especially children, against the spin doctors in the political circuit, particularly colonizers who use the tool of manipulation to divert the minds of the Indians from their freedom struggle.

Keywords: *Aristotle, Iqbal, Tragic Hero, Muslim, A Spider And A Fly, Fable, Hamartia*

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1.Introduction

Dramatic poetry, which is intended for performance and recitation, frequently reveals a persona's innermost thoughts through dialogue, soliloquy, or monologue (Cuddon, 2013). It combines theatrical techniques with verse to portray real-life experiences, drawing on elements of drama, including plot, character, conflict, and dialogue (Griffith, 2011). In a similar vein, a fable is a brief story that combines moral and instruction (Goldsmith, 1939). It is frequently expressed through allegory and has both surface simplicity and deeper meaning (Smith, 1915). Fables usually feature animals, but they can also feature people, gods, or objects, and they use conflict to draw attention to social injustices (Mehrvand & Emami, 2016). Some fables are based on true stories, even though they are fictional (R. Adrados & Holzberge, 2016).

Poets can inspire millions of people due to their brilliant qualities. They shape public opinion regarding their national and cultural identity. Such diamonds can be found in the subcontinent, such as Iqbal, whose ideas persuaded the Muslims of the subcontinent to get freedom from the colonizers.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was born on November 09, 1877, and died on April 21, 1938 (Mir, 2008). He is among the greatest philosophers and poets of the twentieth century. He was one of the first Muslim leaders who recognized the need for an independent state for the Muslims (Razak, 2012). The intellectual brilliance of Iqbal was recognized by Mir Hassan (the first teacher of Iqbal), and it was led to perfection by Sir Thomas Arnold, as Mustansir Mir states, "The precious stone discovered by Mir Hasan in Sialkot was polished into a glittering jewel by Sir Thomas Arnold in Lahore" (Mir, 2008, p. 2). The poet produced works in three languages: English is used for written prose, and Persian is the language of poetry and prose. Iqbal got recognition as a scholar, critic, philosopher, politician, and poet; however, his poetry took a place above all, as the researcher states, "The world recognized him as one of the greatest Muslim poets of his time" (Razak, 2012, p. 371). Iqbal's poetry does not depict the surface level but has a message to change the mindset of the Muslim Ummah to live a dignified life. Many of his poems are based on the philosophy of Khudi (ego philosophy or selfhood), life as a quest, and mysticism. The poet authored numerous anthologies of poetry, including *Bang-I-Dara*, translated as *The Call of the Caravan Bell* (1924). There are several fables in the collection to teach morality to children of the Muslim Ummah, as Sohaib and Rafiq write, "The Mountain and the Squirrel," "A Spider and the Fly," "The Cow and the Goat," "Sympathy," "Prayers of Children," "National Song of Indian Children," and "The Nightingale and the Firefly" teach children moral values like helping others, praising God, nationalistic fervor, trust, and walking on the path of righteousness" (2024, p. 325).

Therefore, Iqbal is one of the greatest poets of all time whose poetry covers diverse themes; however, poetic fables are written for children to learn Islamic and social values.

The scholar explores different perspectives of Iqbal's poetry. Much of her research highlights the elements of drama in Iqbal's poetry, especially his didactic elements, which are shown through tragic flaws. Muhammad, Rustam, and Bacha (2021) conducted research, analyzing the dramatic techniques in Allama Iqbal's poetry, focusing on the poem *Devil's Cabinet*. It is concluded that Iqbal's didactic poetry is written in dramatic form; especially "The Devil's Cabinet" is a structure-like drama. The poem is divided into two sections: conflict and tension are built in the first part of the poem, while resolution can be found in the second part of the text. The conflict prevails between two forces: good and evil.

Iqbal's didactic poetry is mostly written in dramatic forms, as Mustansir says, "Iqbal had a fine sense of drama, and in his poetry, he frequently uses dramatic techniques" (Mir, 2000, p. 17). Similarly, C. M. Nairn (1979) discusses the poetic expression of Iqbal, especially the dialogue used by Iqbal that brings dramatic air to his poetry. Some of the Iqbal poems, written in Persian and Urdu, are exquisite examples of drama, called these poems "pseudo-dramatic" poetry.

Some of Iqbal's poems show the tragic flaws of characters and their consequences on characters and plot. Ahmad, Hayat, and Alam (2023) comparatively analyzed the characteristics of Satan from two literary works: "The Devil's Cabinet" by Iqbal and Milton's "Paradise Lost." Both poets highlight tragic flaws of Satan, who stands against the extreme authority of the universe. Satan is the most self-esteeming and egoistic character in "Paradise Lost" and "The Devil Cabinet," which affect the plot and entire humanity. Likewise, Ahmed (2015) explored the differences between Iqbal's point of view and Islamic narration regarding Satan as a character and the story of the "Fall of Man." In the poem, Satan's hamartia is that he is a proud being who refuses to prostrate before Adam and considers himself superior to humans and other angels.

Moreover, the national poet of Pakistan recognizes the importance of children in society. Iqbal's fables are mostly written for children to teach them a didactic message. Akdağ (2023) conducted comparative research, analyzing the poetry of Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Muhammad Iqbal, and Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh to understand the importance of children in society. These poets have opined about the children, suggesting that children should be educated and treated well because children are the future nation makers and culture transmitters. Additionally, Ali, Abdullah, Bhatti, & Abbas (2018) have done research, analyzing Iqbal's poems. This article aims to deconstruct poems from Allama Iqbal's "Poem for Children" to understand how the poet addressed children who were

upcoming leaders of Muslims in the subcontinent who lived in miserable conditions during the time.

Furthermore, the poetry of Iqbal discusses the Sufi concept, which can be helpful for moral lessons, as Akram and Hanif (2023) highlight symbolic imagery, the search for divine love, and mystical concepts in Iqbal's poetry. The term "Khudi" (meaning self-awareness) is extensively employed, through which the poet teaches readers to be themselves and believe in the power of extreme authority of the universe.

The poetry of Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal has been explored from a variety of angles. Research regarding Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal's poetry enhanced academia. However, the characteristics of a tragic hero in poetic fables written by Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal have not been explored yet. The current researcher will explore the elements of a tragic hero given by Aristotle in Iqbal's poem "A Spider and A Fly." Moreover, hamartia in the Fly character is highlighted, and it's linked to didacticism.

The current article aims to identify a tragic hero in the text, using Aristotle's classification and characteristics of a tragic hero. Furthermore, it also aims to analyze the tragic flaw known as hamartia in Aristotle's terminology and how it is used by the poet to disseminate didactic messages in society.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To identify the tragic hero in the text *A Spider and A Fly*
2. To investigate the tragic flaw in the personality of the hero and its moral implications.

1.2. Research Questions

1. Who is the tragic hero in the text *A Spider and A Fly*?
2. What is the tragic flaw in the personality of the hero, and what are its moral implications?

2. Methodology

To investigate the Aristotelian concept of hamartia in Allama Iqbal's poetic fable *A Spider and A Fly*, which is part of his collection *The Call of the Caravan Bell* (1924), this study uses a qualitative research approach, specifically a thematic framework. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research generates insights that naturally arise from the text by emphasizing interpretive analysis over statistical measurement. The main idea of the tragic hero, as conceived by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1907), has been identified and examined using a thematic approach within this

framework. According to Aristotle, a dramatic text must have six essential elements: plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song. Of these, plot and character are the most important. The tragic hero, characterized by traits like nobility, moral complexity, and the possession of a fatal flaw (hamartia) that ultimately leads to downfall, is at the heart of his theory. Applying these Aristotelian ideas to Iqbal's fable, the current study looks at how the text dramatizes the traits of the tragic hero and how the theme of hamartia functions within its story. The research offers fresh perspectives on Iqbal's adaptation of traditional dramatic concepts while highlighting the poem's tragic dimensions by placing the analysis within a thematic and qualitative framework.

3. Analysis

3.1. Good but Not Virtuous

The Fly is a good character but not virtuous because initially, the Fly refuses the Spider's request to stay in its web. This refusal shows its ability to analyze the situation and feel that there is disrespect in Spider's invitation, as the Spider says, "Beddings are available for guests' comforts; not to everyone's lot do these comforts fall." The Fly also prefers self-respect and avoids comforts that can damage self-respect and even life. The refusal shows the good characteristics of the Fly; however, in the later part of the story, a change occurs in the Fly's behavior. The excessive baseless praises overshadow the Fly's good nature. The Spider's sugar-coated terms trigger the evil characteristics of the Fly, which are vanity and hunger for social recognition. Thus, it causes its life.

3.2. Hamartia in Fly Character

Fly makes a single mistake, which is to trust the manipulators while throwing away its instinctive feelings. In the first phase of the story, the Fly avoids the ill intention of the Spider, who manipulates the Fly with sugar-coated words. Nevertheless, the Fly falls into the trap because of its single misjudgment, which is the classical example of hamartia, caused by the Fly's personality traits such as vanity and hunger for social recognition. The Fly trusts the manipulator, saying, "I do not fear you anymore; I hate the habit of declining requests." Accepting the request of the spider, the fly flies toward its web. The Spider gets an opportunity and devours the Fly. Therefore, the Fly's hamartia causes its tragic death.

3.3. Fortune Changes from Prosperity to Adversity

A change in fortune occurs in the story from prosperity (life) to adversity (death) in Fly's life. In the first part of the story, the fly enjoys freedom, self-respect, and life. However, the spider's praising terms lure the fly to its web and devour it. The transition

from prosperity (life) to adversity (death) happened with fly, which is another tenet for a tragic hero, given by Aristotle.

3.4. Arouse Pity and Fear

The change of fortune from life to death because of a single mistake that is not wholly deserved arouses pity and fear. The tragic fall of the Fly arouses pity in readers because such an intellectual can be manipulated by using shallow words, causing its tragic demise. On the other hand, the nature of manipulators creates fear in readers. The Spider's dialogue brings one evil of the society into the front, saying that "All in the world are enslaved with flattery." The reader realizes the shallow nature of manipulators whose only target is to get the desired effects. Therefore, the story arouses the emotion of pity for the Fly because of the Fly's tragic demise, caused by a single mistake, while the readers feel fear for themselves because of the cunning nature of manipulators.

3.5. Lofty Eminence in Animals' Kingdom

The fly's elevated physical posture and beauty can be taken as a symbol of upper-class animals. The Spider describes the Fly with phrases like "Your eyes look like clusters of glittering diamonds; God has adorned your beautiful head with a plume." Moreover, the initial wisdom and preferences for freedom can also be the characteristics of an elevated being because a common being cannot get the ill intentions of others as quickly as the Fly. Therefore, lofty eminence is another canon for a tragic hero, given by Aristotle, that can be identified in Fly's character.

3.6. Didactic Elements in Iqbal's Poetry Taught Through Tragic Dramatic Flaws

Iqbal incorporates didactic elements in his poetry, making the Muslim nation aware of the deceitful elements that present themselves gloriously and perfectly. Overall, the poetry of Iqbal comments on and criticizes diverse issues, including secularism, communism, modern men who are unable to refuse Satan, gender-based equality, prejudice against women, shallow understanding of Islam, and following the Western tradition. Apart from criticizing or disregarding these issues, the poet provides enough literature to guide the Muslim nation in the entire world, such as the literature on the ego, the ideal man, Islam, Islamic-based nationalism, patriotism for Islamic culture and civilization, and clashes between Western ideology and Islam. Iqbal targets people of different ages differently. The poet's philosophical concepts aforementioned are for the elder generation, while for children, the national poet of Pakistan utilizes the means of fables, incorporating dramatic elements to teach the youth of the Muslim population. The

poems, such as “The Mountain and the Squirrel,” “A Spider and the Fly,” “The Cow and the Goat,” “Sympathy,” “Prayers of Children,” and “A Dialogue,” are based on the theme of moral values like praising God, trust, helping needy people, etc. However, to analyze these poems critically, the themes of ego, The Ideal Man, anti-colonialism, and Islamic-based ideas can be found. Therefore, the following discussion has been carried out to highlight the tragic dramatic flaws and how Iqbal teaches didacticism and moral lessons by highlighting the tragic dramatic flaws in the characters of the poem *A Spider and A Fly*.

3.7. Didactic Elements in Iqbal’s Poetry Taught Through Tragic Dramatic Flaws in the Poem *A Spider and a Fly*

The story of the poem *A Spider and a Fly* is a cautionary tale about manipulators and vanity. The spider represents the manipulators, while the fly represents those who cannot recognize their ill intentions. Thus, the poet sheds light on the tragic flaw of the fly, which is vanity. The Fly’s hamartia leads to its death. The tragic end of the fly makes the reader aware of the ill intention of manipulators behind sugar-coated words and teaches a moral lesson not to believe in flattery.

The tragic flaw of the Fly is vanity and credulity. The spider, who has been hungry for many days, requests the prey “Fly” to stay in its soft bed. The spider attracts the prey to its beautiful house, where beds are available for guests. The Fly rebuffs the Spider’s trap, saying that these soft beds are dead beds, “May God protect me from these soft beds.” The Fly’s protective strategy makes the Spider replan its strategy to catch the Fly, mentioning that all the world can be enslaved with flattery, but this being is clever. The Spider utilizes the tool of flattery, praising the Fly, which changes the Fly’s mind from doubt to conformity, as said by the Fly, “I do not fear you anymore; I hate the habit of declining requests.” As a result of this mistake, the fly tragically lost its life. Therefore, the mistakes of the Fly, such as vanity, credulity, and believing in the false words of the Spider, cause the tragic death of the Fly.

In conclusion, the tragic flaws of the main character “Fly” are vanity, credulity, and believing the false word of manipulators. Iqbal tries to teach the Muslim population, especially children, against the spin doctors in the political circuit, especially colonizers who use the tool of manipulation to divert the minds of the Indians from their freedom struggle. The Britisher falsely praised the Indian landlord and wealthy man with titles such as “Rai Bahadur” announced for those who served for public welfare to the Empire. These titles are mostly given to those who divert the minds of the Indians from real freedom and work for the British government. Therefore, the poet makes the nation realize not to fall into the trap of false praise and recognition.

4. Discussion

The current article analyzed the elements of drama, especially the tragic flaws of a character and its didactic impact on readers. Similar research has been carried out by Muhammad, Rustam, and Bacha (2021), focusing on the style of Iqbal's poetry written for didactic purposes. However, this article aims to analyze the didactic elements through the character's hamartia. Many researchers analyze the characters in Iqbal's poetry, such as Ahmad, Hayat, and Alam (2023), who analyze the Satan character, especially hamartia in the Satan character; nevertheless, the researchers did not discuss how the didactic message is given through Satan's hamartia. Moreover, Mir (2000) and C. M. Nairn (1979) discuss dramatic techniques used by the poet; however, the current research only focuses on the tragic flaw, which is one of the dramatic techniques, and its function.

5. Conclusion

Iqbal incorporates Aristotle's principle of a tragic hero in the poem "A Spider and A Fly." The Fly character has more characteristics of a tragic hero than any other in the story. The Fly is a good character, but not virtuous, because its initial preference for self-respect and freedom makes it a good character; however, its vanity and hunger for social recognition overshadow its thinking. This error of judgment (hamartia) causes its tragic death, causing pity and fear. The readers feel pity for the fly because the punishment for a single mistake is not wholly deserved, while they fear for themselves. The readers might realize that there are spin doctors everywhere in society, which leads our lives to dark ditches like Fly. Moreover, as the subject of fables, the poet interwoven didactic elements. The didactic elements are taught through hamartia in Fly's character, especially the Muslim of India. Iqbal makes the Muslim population aware of the manipulators who work for the British in colonized India to divert the mind from freedom.

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