

## The Frogs: The Clash of Moderns and Ancients

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'The Frogs' is one of the best comedies written by Aristophanes. He was the master of the old comedy in Greece and he also was the foremost comedy writer in the European Literary Tradition. Aristophanes was primarily a poet. But his concern for the social reformation and his patriotism made him writer of comedies. 'The Frogs' was produced a year before Athens was defeated in Peloponnesian War. During that time the city state was dominated by the worst and corrupt element. This fact is symbolized in the drama 'The Frogs'. The underworld, the hell is in the controlling position. Many of the best citizens were disfranchised and sent in exile. Similarly the Demagogues tyrants misruled Athens. They also prevented the making of peace with Sparta. On such a tragic background, Aristophanes wrote his play 'The Frogs'. Aristophanes handled the social, the political issues in his comedies. But 'the Frogs' has the special feature, and that is the literary criticism. In the beginning the address by the chorus expresses these views.

It urges the audience to recall the political exile. He also wants that the governing of the state must be given to the older and worthier families. This Parabasis in 'the Frogs' was very much admired by the Athenian. Actually the performance of this drama was repeated by the popular demand. Aristophanes was crowned with Athena's sacred Olive.

'The Frogs' has two parts, divided for convenience sake. The first part is a fanciful journey of Dionysus to the Hell. Dionysus, the patron God of drama finds life empty after the death of Euripides. So he decides to go to the Hell to bring Euripides back. He obtains a club and lion's skin, the traditional costume of Heracles because Heracles visited the hell previously with the same dress. Dionysus sets out for the kingdom of Pluto with his slave Xanthias on a donkey. Their journey is full of humour and even crude jokes. After a series of fantastic adventures, they cross the river Styx through a chorus of frogs. Ultimately Dionysus and Xanthias are presented before Pluto.

The first part is mixed with humour and satire about the contemporary social and political conditions. The second part takes place in Hades. When Dionysus and Xanthias reach the Hell there was a noisy quarrel raising inside. The reasons are informed to them. In hell there is a chair of honour for the greatest master of

every art. Aeschylus had held the chair for tragedy for 50 years. But after the death of Euripides he went to hell. He claimed the Aeschylus' chair. He also created a great uproar along with his followers. He demanded a contest to decide the issue. At this juncture Dionysus arrives. Dionysus is an expert in drama. Pluto appoints him as a judge in the quarrel between Aeschylus and Euripides. After the judgment Dionysus is free to choose any poet to be taken to the earth.

Aeschylus and Euripides are presented before Dionysus. There is a lengthy debate and argument between them. Each one of them describes his merits and other's demerits. They quote from their works and other finds out the mistakes. In this way the debate continues. At last the scales are brought to way and decide the superiority among them. Dionysus is unable to give his final judgment. But he decides to take Aeschylus back to the earth. The end and the final decision of Dionysus shocks and surprises Euripides. But Dionysus states that the need of the hour is Aeschylus.

The play no doubt is humorous and comical but it created a great controversy. 'The Frogs' is the first written document about literary criticism. For the first time literature was debated and criterion for literary judgment was suggested. Aeschylus asks the question- "Pray! Tell me on what particular ground a poet should claim admiration". This is a fundamental question related to literature. So many answers have been given through the ages and ages and yet the last word has not been said. It is relevant that Dionysus was made the judge. He is the ruling deity of poetry and drama. Aeschylus and Euripides indulged in severe criticism of each other's work. Both the poets suggest and adopt different methods for literary judgment. The serious problem of literary value becomes comical when their works become waved in their scales. In the end Aeschylus is declared superior, and Euripides was found wanting something more. Though Euripides was not selected the virtues and merits of his poetry are found in him. Euripides criticizes the conventional morality, blind religion and the magnificent language in the works of Aeschylus. Euripides also advocates the daily language. He states, "I put things on the stage that that come from daily life and business". Euripides is a modern poet and his real concern is the surround-

ing the society. He does not value the myths and the legends. Similarly Euripides is against sublime and magnificent language. Euripides asserts, "Oh! Let us at least use language of Men".

Aeschylus presents his views differently. Aeschylus demands that a poet should choose a great and a noble subject. He adds that the nobility of the subjects naturally results in the sublimity of the language. The diction, the imagery and the figures of speech are a natural part of great poetry. In a way the quarrel between Aeschylus and Euripides may be summed up as a quarrel between the traditional and the modern methods. The old literature had a different audience whereas the modern method is bound to be realistic. It must be mentioned here that no final judgment is passed by Dionysus. He chooses Aeschylus because the need of hour is moral orientation and

doubtless patriotism. The conditions do not require an artist like Euripides. But they need a cohesive and respectable voice of Aeschylus. Dionysus who represents Aristophanes is not very clear about his attitude towards Euripides. It is very interesting to hear the complaint of the Aeschylus. He questions, "For my dreams live an earth above, but his work died with him and as hear as witness". It implies that the works of Euripides have many universal qualities. In the end Dionysus tells Euripides the reason why he does not prefer him. He replies to Euripides by quoting Euripides' own line, "It was my tongue that swore it not my heart".

Thus, "The Frogs" of Aristophanes is a memorable comedy of him as it manifests the dramatist's literary judgment, social and political vision and immaculate technique. From all this we can imagine his impeccable place in the world literature.

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## **REFERENCE**

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