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LACK OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN “THE TRAGEDY OF CORIOLANUS”

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Abstract:-One of the key factors for a person's failure can be his lack of communication skills. If a person displays lack of self control and interpersonal skills, he is destined to fail. The negative character traits such as pride, impatience and indecisiveness contribute towards a person's doom.

The present article is a study of human nature. It is a study of how a highly talented and successful person faces a tragic end because of not having skills such as interpersonal, communication and emotional intelligence.

Keyword:communication skills , Emotional Intelligence , human nature , interpersonal skills

INTRODUCTION

Why does Coriolanus fall? What is his tragic flaw? Why a person who shed blood and risked his life be hated by his own country people? When we ask these questions after reading Shakespeare's play Coriolanus, the answers are quite surprising because they are rooted in the sciences of 20th century. One does understand that human nature was and is same and also will be the same. Still the wonder is that how come Shakespeare who belonged to 16th century can have understanding of the sciences who would be born after four centuries. Yes it is true that the field of psychology is born in 20th century. And the concept 'emotional intelligence' is one of the branches of it. Only in 21st century it is made quite obvious to the people that lack of emotional intelligence can ruin people's lives, careers and human relationships. But Shakespeare wrote the play Coriolanus to prove the same point. The answer for the above question is Coriolanus fell because of lack of emotional intelligence and lack of interpersonal skills. He is the soul cause of his own fall. It is not because of some unmerited misfortune or a villain. Coriolanus, through his bad behaviour invites his down fall. In this connection Linda Woodbridge says,

“... while Aristotle declared that tragedy involves unmerited misfortune, Shakespeare, over the course of his career, makes protagonists more and more responsible for their own catastrophes, moving from largely innocent Romeo and Juliet to heroes more clearly responsible for setting in motion the forces that destroy them (King Lear, Anthony, and Cleopatra, Coriolanus).”

So first of all, let us understand what emotional intelligence is and reasons for his downfall.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is to know, understand and regulate one's own and others' emotions. One should be aware of what kind of emotions he/she is undergoing at a given point of time, understand their nature and effect on the others and should be able to control and regulate them. In other words, one should use one's emotions for the betterment of one's position. Without hurting others one should convey what he wants to convey.

Emotions can be of two types-primary and secondary. Primary emotions are the ones we feel first when something happens in our life. Secondary emotion is the one which is the result of the primary emotion which was felt. Primary emotion leads to secondary emotion. For example, imagine, there is a husband and wife. The husband is a drunkard. Whenever he comes home drunk, the wife gets angry with him because she hates wine and the people who drink wine. Now she is experiencing the primary emotion which is 'anger'. Later, repeatedly she experiences the same emotion and it leads to the secondary emotion which is 'depression'. Depression is the secondary emotion for many primary emotions.

Whenever something happens it is in our hands to respond to it in an appropriate way. We can choose to react in a negative way or positive way. Those people who react negatively would experience negative emotions like anger, irritation...etc. but those people who choose to react positively would experience positive emotions like happiness,

satisfaction...etc. So it is in our hands how to react to a particular situation. But, because of our environment which includes parents, friends, relatives, teachers and so on...we learn to react in a certain manner.

This is what happens in the life of Coriolanus. He is taught to react harshly; he was expected to be very rough to be a great soldier. He is trained to shed blood for his country during the war. His mother Volumnia trained him to a powerful soldier, to be violent and above all to be a man.

Volumnia... If my son were my husband,
I should freelier rejoice in that absence where in he won
Honour than in the embracements of his bed where he
Would show most love ... was pleased to let him
Seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel
War I sent him, from whence he returned his brows
Bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not
More in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than
Now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

Virgilia: But had he died in the business, madam, how then?
Volumnia: Then his good report should have been my son.

.....
Volumnia: He'll beat Aufidius' head below his knee
And tread upon his neck.²

Volumnia is a tough lady who wanted her son to be like a lion. Virgilia is woman-like but Volumnia is a war-like person who trained her son also to be like her.

All these traits would bring success in a war but not in peaceful times. Because his mother takes pleasure in the pain of Coriolanus, he continuously invites pain for himself and acts roughly with others which is understood as 'pride' in the beginning of the play. He experiences the primary emotions anger and hatred whenever he is expected to be flexible and adaptable. The concepts flexibility and adaptability are unknown to him.

Now we shall see the reasons of his fall one at a time.

1.Reactive not Proactive

Coriolanus is reactive in the sense that whatever others expect him to act, he acts. That is why Brutus and Sicinius could easily make him angry and say all those unexpected statements from him. Both of them know very well that Coriolanus is reactive so they move their steps very carefully and succeed in banishing him from their country.

Coriolanus doesn't grow at all. He is a flat character. Even at the end of the play when Aufidius calls him a boy', he reacts to it and ruins his relationship and finally his life. If he were proactive, he could have stopped for a while examined his behaviour and acted according to the need of the time. But he fails to do this and so suffers a lot.

2.Lack of Assertiveness

The problem of Coriolanus is that he cannot be assertive. Even though he is physically strong, he fails to be strong mentally. When he doesn't want to request the common people to be the consul, he becomes reluctant. He doesn't want to request them openly. But when his mother and Menenius tell him to speak to the people, he does. But he does it without being convinced so he fails to convince people. At the end of the play, he looks assertive by turning down the request of Menenius but when his mother approaches him, just like a child he yields and makes peace with Rome. He wants to say 'no' but he says 'yes'.

Coriolanus: O mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother, O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
.....
All the swords in Italy, and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace.³

He is punished by Aufidius for not being assertive. If he were assertive, he could have saved his life.

3.Lack of Communication Skills

Many people misunderstand the term 'communication skill' by thinking that it means speaking well. But it is actually more than that. One must know what to speak, when to speak, how much to speak and how well to speak. Without knowing this, if a man speaks as he likes, he is sure to face failure. This is what happens in the life of Coriolanus. All that Coriolanus knows is to fight in a war. He cannot speak to the people in a convincing way.

He can't utter one pleasing sentence so that he can avoid the cup of his misery. In this connection Linda woodbridge says,

“Offered what looks like an easy face-saving compromise, 'The price is to ask it kindly' (Coriolanus 2.3.69), which would ultimately prevent civil war and avert his own death, Coriolanus can't bring himself to utter one civil sentence. The very uncompromising cussedness that dooms such tragic heroes is inseparable from the spirited integrity that makes them great.”⁴

When he speaks with elders like his mother, he is easily convinced and does according to their instructions. So he fails.

4.Short Temperedness & Anger

Coriolanus is a short tempered person. He gets angry with people even for slightest stimulation. That's why Brutus and Sicinius succeeded in the first part of the play in proving the malicious and pride nature of Coriolanus. He does not even think before losing his temper. He knows that Brutus and Sicinius were targeting him. He knows that Aufidius was trying to have an edge by proving that Coriolanus was at a fault when he made peace with Rome. In both these circumstances, he had people like Menenius who would be cautioning him not to lose temper. But he does not heed to them. Without understanding what is happening, he simply starts shouting at them using vulgar expressions. This is what pains people and many other characters in the play.

5. Lack of Patience

Coriolanus has no patience. Soon after he is banished, he goes to Aufidius and tries to wage war against his own country. When his mother requests him to stop the war, without even discussing with Aufidius, he declares that the peace is made. Some decisions should not be taken on the spur of the moment. Some decisions like waging a war and stopping it require discussions. But Coriolanus has no patience for all these things. He just does whatever strikes his head.

6. Lack of Self Control

Coriolanus has no self control. He cannot stop doing things which he really wants to stop. He cannot do things which he really wants to do. He knows that his mother wants to see him as a consul. But he doesn't want to be one. Instead of convincing his mother he accepts to be a consul. He knows that to be a consul he must win the approval of people. Once the decision to be the consul is taken, he could have immediately gone for the approval of people. But he doesn't do that. Even after the persuasion of Menenius, very reluctantly he speaks to people and doesn't even convince them properly.

When he wants to say sorry to people, he comes in front of everyone and commits the same mistake of using foul language against people and their representatives. Where is his self control?

Towards the end of the play, even though the fault lies with him in cancelling the war and making peace, even though he knows that Aufidius would definitely look for a chance to prove him wrong, he simply loses his self control and draws a sword to fight with Aufidius which proves fatal for him. He must have had some common sense in controlling himself and rectifying the problem.

7. Pride

The opinions of Coriolanus regarding the government and people are not at all acceptable to any man who is interested in public welfare. He belongs to elite society and disrespects common people. 'He is a very dog to the commonality'. He doesn't have good opinion on common people.

Martius: What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
Make yourselves scabs?
1st Citizen: We have ever your good word.
Martius: He that will give good words to thee will flatter
Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs
That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions finds you hares,

Where foxes, geese.⁵

Coriolanus suffers from pride and everyone in the play knows it. Several times, it is enunciated that he is proud.

Menenius: In what enormity is Martius poor in that you
Two have not in abundance?
Brutus: He's poor in no one fault, but stored with all.
Sicinius: Especially in pride.
Brutus: And topping all others in boasting.⁶

Later, even Menenius, who has been supporting Coriolanus, acknowledges that Coriolanus is proud. When Volumnia announces to him that Aufidius was defeated, he says, “**He (Coriolanus) has more cause to be proud**”.

He is so proud that he doesn't even want to speak to them to win their votes.

Coriolanus:
Let me o'er leap that custom, for I cannot
Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them
For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage.
Please you that I may pass this doing.⁷

He doesn't like the common people. He is so proud he doesn't ask pardon from people whom he had hurt with his foul language. His opinion of the common people is that

Coriolanus: the cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,
Which we ourselves have ploughed for, sowed, and scattered
By mingling them with us, the honoured number
Who lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that
Which they have given to beggars.⁸

Even when the people are so merciful towards him, he simply hates them and becomes a reason for his banishment. Coriolanus' heart is his mouth and he has marred his fortune by being proud. Whatever he had done, 'he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud.'

8. Class Conscious

Coriolanus is undoubtedly class conscious. He wants to be always surrounded by only elite people. He publicly announces his hatred for lower classes several times in the play. Class system was prevalent in the society of Coriolanus and the obvious example is the belly speech by Menenius.

“The famous 'belly' speech in Coriolanus used to be interpreted as Shakespeare's statement of belief in an inflexible class system: a patrician justifies the privilege of his own class by lecturing the plebians on the importance of the belly (metaphor for the patricians) in storing and distributing food to the whole body (metaphor for society as a whole).”⁹

One of the strong reasons for the death of Coriolanus is that he is class conscious. But if we ask the question whether the class system is eradicated by the death of Coriolanus, we can say a big 'no' with bold voice. We may also feel that he has become a scapegoat for the custom of the society. In this connection Linda Woodbridge says,

“At the end of a tragedy or a history play with a 'tragic ending' society's troubles are judged to be cured now that an offending protagonist is dead, as happens in Macbeth, Coriolanus, and Richard III; but a thinking audience is often left uneasy by this blaming of the victim. These plays often leave the impression that the troubles temporarily cured by sacrificing a scapegoat are deeply rooted in their society, and will recur.”¹⁰

I strongly agree with Linda that sacrificing a scapegoat cannot cure the ills of the society. Still he suffers for it because he makes his stand quite obvious to the general public without even having common sense.

CONCLUSION

Coriolanus is a wonderful play which proves that if a person cannot communicate properly, he is destined to fail. The play shows that those people who have lack of self control and respect for people are sure to fail. The negative qualities like pride, impatience, and indecisiveness are to be punished without any mercy. The play is a concrete proof that lack of assertiveness and emotional intelligence would contribute to words a person's tragic end.

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