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SUBTLE VILLAINS IN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the most Subtle villains in the literature. Subtle villains are very intelligent, highly shrewd and exceedingly cunning in whatever they plan to do. They keep a certain objective and prepare a mental plan befitting their way of thinking. Perhaps we can attribute, to a certain extent; the present day concept of planning almost similar to the subtle villain's planning. In other words, these villains prepare their mental plan very carefully, devise appropriate strategies, ensure proper timing, evaluate continuously the progress at various stages, modify the strategies if needed suiting the occasions and ensure flawless implementation till their goals are achieved. Perhaps the very reason for their success might be due to their unique style of planning and implementation which makes them more popular and immortal. Also this could be the distinctive feature making them more popular than the respective heroes.

INTRODUCTION

Iago can be regarded as the most powerful among Shakespeare's evil characters. He is the zenith of villainy one has ever come across. Iago is a military officer who feels that he has been wronged by Othello, his commanding officer. The latter's decision to appoint Michael Cassio for the post of lieutenant instead of Iago had sown the first seeds of hatred in Iago's mind. Iago, the subtle villain is born at this moment. His mind begins plotting against Othello with a sole aim of destroying him and his married life with Desdemona. Iago's utterances are cold and cynical but at the same time so convincing that no one is able to see through his intrigues. He does not wait for an opportunity rather he creates opportunities to put his plans into action. Iago can be regarded as a master of making out plans on the spur of a moment and thereby gradually

trapping his victims in his web without being doubted by them. Each of his plans put into action through one of the characters moves the plot of *Othello* from one level to the next level. In his run to destroy Othello, he unflinchingly makes use of Roderigo, Cassio and even his own wife Emilia to attain his target. His first victim, Roderigo is used to provoke Brabantio against Othello and Desdemona so as to destroy their newly married bliss. Simultaneously, Iago robs Roderigo of his money and jewels by promising him to gain Desdemona's favour for him. When Roderigo realises that he is being used by Iago, he demands his jewels back but meets his death by Iago's hand. Iago's next move is against Cassio. He makes Cassio drunk while on duty in the guardroom and incites Roderigo to pick up a quarrel with him. He thus succeeds in getting Cassio dismissed but does not stop there. He sets Roderigo to waylay Cassio at night and murder him. Next, Iago targets the married love and happiness of Othello and Desdemona. Iago makes Cassio believe that it is only Desdemona who can now help him by pleading his case with Othello. At the same time Iago poisons Othello's mind against Desdemona. By his clever scheming and subtle remarks, Iago arranges the eaves-dropping scene. The sight of the handkerchief and Cassio talking lightly to his wife maddens Othello leading him to strangulate Desdemona. Thus it is clear that Iago's scheming forms the basis of the plot thus leading to the tragic ending of the play.

Most other Shakespearean characters do bad things in order to achieve a particular goal. Oftentimes the culprit is ambition, as in *Macbeth*, or revenge, as in *Hamlet*. Throughout the play, Iago provides multiple and incompatible motives for hating Othello. At one point, Iago says he's angry because Othello passed him over for a promotion. Later, he claims to suspect that Othello is having an affair with this Emilia.

It is true that Iago tasted success in all his plans but even he had to come face to face with failure. Iago's failure became evident in the final scene at the moment of his complete triumph. When it seemed that he had won, his plot is given away by his own wife Emilia. Finally even when he is placed under arrest, he remains taciturn when pressed for an explanation of his action. Thus his success is overshadowed by the moment of his failure.

Shakuni also known as Saubala, can be regarded as one of the greatest villain of the epic *Mahabharata*. He was born to king Subala of Gandhara was the prince of Gandhara Kingdom. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was the brother of Gandhari and hence Duryodhana's maternal uncle. He is believed to be an extremely intelligent but devious man. Shakuni is often

credited as the mastermind behind the Mahabharata war. Shakuni had two sons named Uluka and Vrikaasur.

It is said that in some military campaign of either Bheeshma, Pandu, or Shantanu's ancestors, Gandhara came under attack from Hastinapur. Hastinapur conquered Gandhar, killed the king AchalaSuvala, and imprisoned all the male members of his line, saying that line was full of adharma. This included Shakuni and his 100 brothers. Since all of them were sparsely fed in the prison, the family decided that at least one of them could survive and gave all the rice to Shakuni, the most cunning of them all, so that he could live on to take revenge. Eventually, King Subala, Shakuni's father, bends the knee of Shakuni to make a permanent mark of the injustice. Considered a man of dharma, his family is allowed to live.

Shakuni was unhappy with his sister Gandhari's marriage to Kaurava prince Dhritarashtra. He was more so ever angry with Bhishma for bringing this proposal as he found it insulting and demeaning, not only because Dhritarashtra was blind, but because of the way the Kurus had destroyed his line years before. He swore to avenge this insult by slowly destroying Bhishma's clan. He achieved this by poisoning the mind of his volatile nephew, and influenced Duryodhana into instigating the war with the Pandavas, which resulted in the destruction of the Kuru line. He mainly worked through inciting hatred between the Kauravas and Pandavas; his plans culminated into the biggest wars in Indian history. Throughout the story, Shakuni was very often not successful, yet he was always unshaken in his faith to destroy the lineage of Kuru. Sometimes in the story, it is brought up that Shakuni, by staying at Hastinapur, is neglecting his duties as king in Ghandar. Shakuni explained to Uluka that his desire for revenge overruns his concern for Gandhar's people. Thus, he is seen by many as one of the key persons that caused the Kurukshetra War.

CONCLUSION

Sakuni was Duryodhana's chief confidant and was known for his intelligent yet devious ways. Iago, pretending to be Othello's friend, works against the latter without coming into the open and mostly working from behind. On the other hand, Sakuni determines the strategy for Duryodhana by giving proper directions and hints at relevant occasions. He comes into action straight away many times to extend help to Duryodhana. He alone determined the strategy of dice challenge and possesses the knowledge and skill to defeat the Pandavas at dice and win for Duryodhana all he wants. Sakuni is a man of action. This power and strength is the central point

rather than the turning point in the whole story of *Mahabharata* leading to the Kurukshetra war and destruction of Kauravaclan. The second youngest of the Pandava brothers Sahadeva had taken an oath to avenge Draupadi's insult and sworn to kill Shakuni, the mastermind of the episode. As sworn, Shakuni was killed by Sahadeva on the eighteenth day of the Kurukshetra war.

There is a contrast in the ends of these villains. Iago's character is another confirmation of the truth that "crime never pays". Iago is the cause and source of the tragedy in *Othello*. Sakuni kept on provoking Duryodhana and motivates him to invite Yudhishtira for a game of dice through which he could create a lot of hurdles and problems for the Pandavas. At the end of Kurukshetra war, Sakuni was killed by Sahadeva, one of the youngest Pandavas. Iago was kept alive to be tortured slowly and continuously till death whereas Sakuni met with a quick death.

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