



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IAGO FROM SHAKESPEARE AND SHAKUNI FROM MAHABHARATHA AND THE STRENGTH OF BEEMA

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### ABSTRACT

A manipulative villainy of Iago-Desdemona's eccentric love with Othello- their married life-jealousy of Othello-handkerchief-tragic end of the play-arch villain of Shakuni-in Mahabharata-the cold war between the two groups-Pandavas and Gowravas- Beemas extra-ordinary strength-the worst sin of- strip- teasing of Panchali-staged by Shakuni-after the gambling of dice- Lord Krishna's help to Panchali to save her humiliation- so journeying in Varanatham-waxpalace secret plan to kill Pandavas- escape of Pandavas-civil war in Gurusethram-The vital role of Lord Krishna in the war-the killings of prime characters and the Gowravas death including the death of Shakuni.

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### I. Introduction

**The sketch of the unparallel arch villain Iago in Shakespeare-'Othello':** "Iago's character is marked by ill-will, envy, jealousy, and dissatisfaction at the good, enjoyed by others. He is cruel and unfeeling, and has no pity for those who suffer through his deceit<sup>(1-3)</sup>. His envoy of Cassio leads him to thoughts of a terrible revenge, in which, he included Desdemona, because she showed friendship to Cassio. He is the keen observer of human nature, and is endowed with all the arts of dissimulation. He knows how to manage everything according to time and circumstance and finds his open and honest nature of Othello very easy to deceive. The depth of his wickedness is shown in his treatment of Desdemona, who has given him no cause of offence."

**II. Introduction to Mahabharata: Villain Shakuni-**A brief story of an ancient Indian epic was Mahabharata. The great epic Mahabharata stands next to the greatest Tamil epic Ramayanam.

One Asthena, a great king built a beautiful city which was called Asthenapuram after his name. The capital of Guruthesam was 'Asthinapuram'. Iago was the insidious enemy of the kingdom of Asthinapuram staying in the palace. He had determined to take vengeance against Beesma and Pandavas. He performs a clinical operation in every attempt to trap the enemies. He had possessed a plotting mind and the sharpness of a cunningness of a fox, the source of destruction, was the fertile land of deceptions, the king of gambling, exceedingly ambitious, cruel planning to kill his enemies, until his last breath he fought, sacrifices his kingdom and his royal life only to take vengeance against his enemies, he is called Shakuni-the villain of the great Tamil epic Mahabharata.



**III. Shakespeare's Tragedy-Othello: Iago as a sadist:** He is a manipulative villain. He cannot tolerate the happiness of other human beings. He destroys the lives of the great warrior Othello and the unpatrolled, devoted wife of Othello- Desdemona, a handsome lieutenant to Othello, and Cassio; he kills even his wife Emilia to achieve his goal.

("motiveless malignity" by Samuel Taylor a motiveless villain <sup>(5)</sup>)

Othello's marriage with Desdemona and their happy and blissful family life creates a **jealousy** in his heart; he destroys the happiness of the couple newly married. The secret marriage was informed to the father of Desdemona Brabantio who strongly objects the marriage of his daughter with Othello <sup>(1-4)</sup>.

**Heiness villain;** he causes all the prime characters'death. Othello kills his beloved innocent wife Desdemona too.

**His envy** against the elevation of Cassio to the position of lieutenant passing over him.

**Suspicious.** He suspects his wife Emilia too. He thinks Othello may have slept with Emilia. "it thought abroad that' twixt my sheets/he has done my office (i.111 369-370).

Iago mentions this suspicion again at the end of the act-II, scene1; explaining that he lusts after Desdemona because he wants to get even with Othello "wife for wife"(11,12-86) none of these claims seems to adequately explain Iago's deep hatred of Othello and Iago's lack of motivation or his inability or unwillingness to express his true motivation makes his actions all the more terrifying. Iago is a misogynist and he is willing to take revenge Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, even Emilia to enjoy the pain and damage he causes.

He has the general hatred of women, so he murders his wife Emilia. His underlying motive is for persecuting Othello is his homo sexual love for the general.

He certainly seems to take great pleasure in preventing Othello from enjoying blissful marital happiness and he expresses his love for Othello frequently and effusively.

**A keen observer of human nature.** Initially, he handles Roderigo as a puppet in his advancement towards Desdemona. He fools him and cheats him. He creates a scene to find fault with Cassio by Othello and causes for his demotion from the post of lieutenant

**He is the most inveterate liar.** Iago inspires all of the play's characters the trait that is most lethal to Othello's trust. **He is talented to manipulate** the desires of those around him that makes him both a powerful and a compelling figure.

Iago is able to take the **handkerchief** from Emilia and know that he can deflect her questions. He is able to tell Othello of the handkerchief and know that Othello will not doubt him.



(DESDEMONA)



(OTHELLO)



**Desdemona**, is a fair daughter to a rich senator of Venice Brabantio. She had many virtuous qualities. She rejected very many suitors who came forward to marry her. The noble lady saw none whom she could affect. She chose a moor- a black whom her father invited to his house to narrate the experiences of the battlefield as he was the general in the army.

The gentle Desdemona has a greedy ear to listen to the stories of Othello in the battle fields, sieges, and encounters which he had passed through the perils he had been exposed to by land and by water. She had lost her heart to know his hairbreadth escapes, marching up to the mouth of cannon. She was enchanted by his adventurous stories. She said that heaven had made her such a man. Othello could not understand her frankness than modesty bewitching prettiness and blushes. He spoke more openly of his love and gained the consent of the generous lady Desdemona privately to marry him.

The rich senator Brabantio did not accept Othello as his son-in-law as he was far below the senatorial rank or expectations. He accused the moor- Othello who by spells and witch -craft (he maintained) had seduced the affection of fair Desdemona to marry him against his consent.

The solemn council of the senate summoned Othello and Desdemona before the senate and asked the newly married couple to defend the accusation of the senator Brabantio. The statement of Othello was confirmed by the testimony of the lady Desdemona herself who appeared in court and professed her duty to her father and higher duty to her lord husband and preferred him (Brabantio above her father)

The sorrowful senator, Brabantio was unable to maintain his plea. The dutiful Desdemona accompanies her husband Othello who undertook the management of the wars in Cyprus

Othello had lately promoted, a young soldier, Cassio to be the lieutenant nearest to the general's person. This promotion gave great offence to Iago an older officer who thought he had a better claim than Cassio. Iago would often ridicule Cassio as a fellow fit only for the company of ladies and not knowing the art of war or how to set an army in array for battle than a girl. Iago hated Cassio and Othello. To make it worse, he suspects that the moor-Othello was too fond of Iago's wife Emilia. With these imaginary provocations, the plotting -mind of Iago conceived a horrid scheme of revenge, which should involve both Cassio, Othello and Desdemona in one common ruin.

The artful Iago took the mighty weapon jealousy against Othello. The mind of Othello was afflicted with jealousy which was far beyond bodily torture; the pains of jealousy were the most intolerable and had the sorest sting. To celebrate the dispersion of the enemy's fleet a holiday was made in the island at the arrival of the general Othello and his lady in Cyprus. Wine flowed in abundance and cups went round to the health of the black Othello and his lady the fair Desdemona.

Cassio was directed by the general to guard and keep the soldiers from excess in drinking that no brawl might arise. With his deep laid plans of mischief, Iago encouraged the innocent Cassio to swallow glass after glass. Cassio's tongue ran over in praise of the lady Desdemona. Iago made one fellow and had set on a mutiny. A worthy officer-Montano, interfered to appease the dispute and he was wounded in the scuffle. Instead of the slight drunken quarrel the alarm bell ringing awakened Othello who came to the scene of action.

The strict observer of discipline, Othello demoted Cassio, took away Cassio's place of lieutenant from him, for Cassio, it was a disastrous night for Cassio. Iago enjoys the pain and damage of others.

The artful villain Iago with his deep-laid plans of mischief; under colour of loyalty and love to the general, he enticed Cassio to make rather too free with the bottle. He laid a net to trap Desdemona on to entreat mediation for Cassio and then out of that very mediation contriving stratagems for Desdemona's ruin.



As soon as the jealousy entered in to Othello's mind, he has lost all that pride and ambition which are a soldier's virtue, and his military ardour and all his old joys forsook him and torn to pieces with these distracting thoughts. However, Othello demanded proof of Desdemona's guilt.

**Handkerchief:** Iago's third attempt to find a proof to Othello's jealousy, the handkerchief comes to his hand-a mighty weapon. Othello gave a handkerchief to Desdemona as a first gift. Unfortunately, Desdemona lost the handkerchief in a park. It was picked up by Iago's wife Emilia and it was kept at her home. Stealing the handkerchief, Iago gave it to Cassio.

Cassio was a young soldier Florentine, gay, amorous and of pleasing address favourable qualities with women; he was handsome and eloquent and exactly such a person as might alarm the jealousy of a man advanced in years (as Othello in some measure was) who had a young and beautiful wife, Othello employed Cassio as a go-between in his suit earlier. Desdemona and Cassio would talk and laugh together as in the days when he went courting for his friend. Really, Desdemona's love for Cassio was at far distance from her love for Othello.

**A dual role:** Iago plays a dual role. He made character assassination to Cassio previously. Now, he advises Cassio to seek the help of Desdemona to re-consider the general's decision and hold again his previous position. The innocent Desdemona pleads to her husband for Cassio's favour. The bad seed of jealousy in the heart of Othello is deep-rooted now. Driven by the jealousy, the black moor, Othello stifles his devoted wife who was guiltless and she sacrificed her father Brabancio-a rich senator for the sake of her true love for Othello. Othello becomes a murderer-an **uxoricide**. Iago proofs as a **manipulative, cruel and ruthless villain**. Iago causes the deaths of the prime characters-Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and his wife Emilia too.

#### IV. Mahabharata:

**Mahabharata** is one of the epics of ancient India, and the other is Ramayana. Mahabharat narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins in the Kurukshetra war. Shakuni also known as Saubala, as an extremely high intelligent, crafty and devious man and brother of Gandhari and hence he is the maternal uncle for Duryodhana. Shakuni was one of the greatest illusionists. Shakuni is considered as the unparalleled villain in Mahabharata, causes the deaths of thousands and lakhs of deaths taking vengeance in the greatest Kurukshetra war.



(Shakuni)

(Beema)

**The cause for Shakuni's Vengeance:** Shakuni was the son of Subala, the king of Gandhara kingdom. The prince of Kuru Kingdom invaded the Gandhara kingdom and enslaved the king Subala-Shakuni's father, his brothers, his uncles, and his cousins. They were imprisoned in Asthiapuram. They were starved to death except Shakuni, the youngest. As they buried the truth that Gandhari/Kanthari was a widow before her marriage to Thiruthirastra-the brother of the prince Beesma who punished them. To take vengeance against the prince



Beesma and the rulers of Asthinapuram, Shakuni stays in Asthinapuram and becomes the personal advisor to the ruling king and his brother-in law-Thiruthirastra as an **insidious enemy**.

Kanthari begot one hundred sons to Thiruthirastra. They are called Gowravas. Kunthi gave birth to five sons to Pandu the younger brother of Thiruthirastra. They are called the pandavas.

The main story revolves around the two branches of a family. In the childhood period of the children there was no hatred among them. They lived together and enjoyed the fraternity well. Among the siblings Beema was growing stronger in physic and used to tease others playfully. Nobody could outwit him. The extraordinary talents and the strength of Beema created a fear among the Gowravas. Duriyothanan, the eldest son of Gowravas envied and had a fear that will rule their kingdom later after the death of his father Thiruthirastra-a blind man the younger brother of Pandu. So, Duriyothanan attempted very many ways to kill Beema. Shakuni stood firmly to support Duriyothanan and took the active role against the Pandavas.

The wicked seed was already with Duriyothanan and he developed hatred against the cousins Pandavas.

Shakuni makes very many plots to kill Pandavas in order to help Gowravas to rule the kingdom of Asthinapuram. Even during their stay in Gurukulam under the Guru -Duronachariar and Girupachariyar who taught them all the skills and archery which are needed for the royal sons.

The virtue of good activities took the formation of Pandavas. The enmity, jealousy, greediness, and lust, the activities of animals, are the embodiments of Gowravas.

One day a sumptuous meal was served to them. They ate and slept. In the midnight Duriyothanan with the help of his associates tied Beema with the strong claimers Beema's hands, legs and his body. They threw him into the deepest part of the Ganga river which was flooding. Beema had broken all the ropes with his extraordinary body strength, and swam to the bank of the river and continued his sleep there without any disturbance.

Then, Duriyothana set the deadly poisonous snakes to bite Beema while .Beema was sleeping. Beema woke up with roaring voice like a thunder. Then he crushed all the snakes to die and threw them away. He continued his sound sleep.

On another day, Duriyothana planted the sharp edged iron rods and wooden poles into the river in a cunning way. With soft honeyed words, Duriyothana took Bheema and asked to jump into the spot where they hid the sharp weapons. Beema did not know about their cruel plan.

Knowing this heartless plan, lord Krishna took the form of honey sucking bees and was roaming over the top of the sharp weapons. Having seen the bees not to disturb them Beema jumped in to the river away from the spot and showed his bravery. Now Beema could identify the sharp weapons planted by Duriyothana. He did n't complaints to anybody.

On another occasion, Duriyothana and Shakuni mixed poison in a dish-payasam and gave Beema to have it.

Beema soon after having the poisoned dish payasam, he swooned. Then he was thrown into the river and pushed him into the bottom of the river by Duriyothana and his associates. There were, hundreds of snakes bit Beema under the bottom of the river. The snakes' poison became anti-venom in his body.



Beema came up and shone-with the beams of sun light. The blessing in the disguise in the underwater the king gobra 'Vasuki' embarrassed Beema affectionately and gave 'Deva amirtham-'the drink of heavenly dwelling persons .

A drink to keep alive the men for long years, as the snake 'Vasuki' was the relative of his mother kunthi. Beema stayed in the palace of 'vasuki' for eight days. The kin of his mother kunthi-Vasuki which showered affection on Beema.

Whatever plan, the opponents to kill Beema, all are futile. Instead, Beema became stronger and stronger.

Having enjoyed the great hospitality there under the water Beema came up and returned to Asthinapuram where his mother and others were worried about his missing for eight days. He appeared before them like a shining sun.

#### **The cruel, murderous plan: (Varanavatham)**

Then, Shakuni's cunning plan Duriyothanan wanted to banish Pandavas from Asthinapuram.They approached the king Thirutharastra to send out Pandavas to perform the last rites to the deceased Pandu in the place where Pandu died.

The Pandavas also agreed to go. Before their reaching, Duriyothanan got built a beautiful palace for their sojourning . The palace was built with wax and inflammable materials and instructed the architect to set fire while they were in asleep. Having known this secret plan to kill Pandavas along with their mother Kunthi, the minister and their paternal uncle Vithustan foiled their plan and got built a tunnel under the palace secretly through which the pandavas escaped safely setting fire by themselves.

In all the ways and means of wicked plans Gowravas could not succeed to kill Pandavas.

#### **Strip- teasing of Panchali:**



Shakuni with Duriyothana

Courtesy: Mahabharatham Tamil, Vijay T.V

Of all the Sins, Shakuni and Duriyothanan along with their associates against Pandavas, committed, the worst sin was the strip-teasing of Panchali;(an act of harass in a hostile way).



(Humiliated Panchali).

Courtesy: Mahabharatham Tamil, Vijay T.V

(Bharathi, the Tamil poet who can be compared with the English poets Wordsworth and Keats, was emotionally moved and picked up this episode, out of thousands of episodes in Mahabharatham and wrote a book with the title 'Panchali saphatham' with outburst of emotions.)



(STRIP-TEASING OF PANCHALI)

Shakuni was good at the particular game of 'pakadai' -dice (two pieces of rectangle shaped pieces-, dice).Nobody could win in that game with Shakuni. He plans to defeat the Pandavas and rob all their possessions by gambling without any battle and blood shedding. Shakuni knows that Uthista the eldest brother of Pandavas is interested in this play. With the approval from the king, he invites Uthista for the play. On behalf of Duriyothana, Shakuni plays 'Pakadai'(dice).Both parties bet in the game. Everytime Uthistran loses the game. In the bet, Uthistran lost all the properties, his own brothers and at last his wife 'Panchali' too in the game. The Pandavas were enslaved. The wicked, Duriyothanan desired to humiliate Pandavas in the presence of all the royal family members.

At the time of visiting the newly built palace by 'Pandavas 'Indrapratham' Duriyothana slipped on the well tiled floor carelessly. Having witnessed his falling, Panchali laughed at Duriyothanan unintentionally. But it was an insult to Duriyothana.

Recollecting that event, he wants to punish Panchali now. He orders Thutchathana to bring Panchali to the Dharbar hall. The later went and asks Panchali to accompany him. Panchali refuses to go over revealing the fact that she was wearing a single saree due to that day was in mensuration. Unmindful Thutchathanan brought her dragging violently. Duriyothana ordered Thutchathana to take off her clothes to feast his eyes with her nudity. All the brothers could not prevent that cruel act of Duriyothanan because they are enslaved. All others were only helpless spectators. The helpless and hapless Pachali cries loudly for the help. The cry with the words 'Govinda!Govinda!' reached to Lord Krishna and he rushed to the spot and supplies saree one after another until Thutchathana fell down on the ground with exhausted energy.



The act of strip-teasing of Panchali was unpardonable. Later, in the Kurukshetra war all the culprits were punished severely by Pandavas. Duryothana's thigh was torn and crushed as he desired to seat Panchali on his thigh. Thutchathana was also received the brutal attack from Beema. It was a poetic justice-the good should be rewarded and the bad must be punished. This is the theme/ lesson for the mankind.

**V. Kurukshetra/Gurushetra War:** Finally, Shakuni and his associates created a civil war which took place in Gurusetra with pandavas. Hundreds and thousands of warriors including the undefeatable Beesma, Duronachariyar, the valiant soldier Karnan who was the eldest brother of Pandavas were killed in the battle field along with one hundred sons of Gowravas. The bloods of the wounded soldiers flowed in Gurusetra war. For all the destruction of human lives, the heartless villain Shakuni played the major role. In a way his 'atma' would be satisfied for the heavy damage to Beesma and Asthinapuram though the Pandavas became the rulers after Gowravas .



(Lord Krishna as a chariot-driver in the Kurukshetra war.)

**Cruel revenges: Iago** took revenge against Othello who promoted a junior officer, Cassio to the post of lieutenant ignoring Iago causing the death of all the prime characters-Othello, Desdemona and Cassio including his wife Emilia.

**Shakuni** took revenge against not only Beesma and caused for the deaths of one hundred brothers of Gowravas and the Guru –Duronachariya and all the accomplished supporters of Duriyothana especially the eldest son of Kunthi-Karnan who was known for charities, and hundreds of and thousands of soldiers from both rivalry groups.

Duriyothana received the fatal blow from Beema who avenged for the humiliation of Panchali in strip-teasing. He tore his thigh from which the blood spurted with the blood, Panchali dyed her un-tied hair for a long time and took revenge against Duriyothana. The story of Mahabharatham was full of vengeance and avenging acts. The bad is punished.





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## VI. Conclusion

This epic Mahabharata through the prime characters, offers the teachings of nobility to the people, acceptable ethics, kings justice, fraternity among the siblings, sacrifice to the people, the wise sayings to be learnt to live a better life on this earth etc. The 'Gita upathesam'- the advice of Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the Kurukshetra war<sup>(9)</sup>. This epic Mahabharata through the prime characters, offers the teachings of nobility to the people, acceptable ethics, kings justice, fraternity among the siblings, sacrifice to the people, the wise sayings to be learnt to live a better life on this earth etc. This was taken place 500 years ago A.D. still, the characters of Mahabharata are alive in the form of dramas, in the street plays, cinema theatres in several languages not only all over India but also all over the world wherever Indians live. It is believed that the Hindus believe Mahabharata is a holy book as the Bible to the Christians.

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