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THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EAST & WEST IN *THE ILIAD*: A TRUE HISTORY OF TROJAN WAR

ARMAN HOSSAIN^{*1}, NASRIN AKTHER²

¹Lecturer, Department of English, Southern University Bangladesh

739/A Mehedibag Road, Chittagong-4000, Bangladesh

*Email: hossainarman690@gmail.com

²Research Student, International Islamic University, Chittagong



ARMAN HOSSAIN

ABSTRACT

Literature being a written material, such as poetry, novels, essays etc. are the special works of imagination characterized by excellence of style and expression. It is an old and most accepted style of expressing one's opinion about his society and values. From thousands of years, people started using their pen to portray their culture, social structure, in short, their history. Following the Tradition, *The Iliad* is an epic of clash in human civilization presented by Homer. Early three thousand years after it was composed, this poem remained the most celebrated and widely read stories ever told. This epic poem is a real presentation of the culture and society of Troy and Trojan War. The objective of this paper is to analyze the history of Troy and the Trojan War. Trojan War has occupied a special place in the history of western literature. But there are very few people who have clear idea about this war. Some say it is a myth and some say an actual incident. In the recent age, fortunately, some archaeologists have given some evidences in Favor of the idea of the Trojan War and the city of Troy. There are different rumors about the cause of the war as well. Here, I have tried my utmost to present the brief history of Trojan War and its causes, whether it is east-west conflict or Helen.

Key-words: Literature; Civilization; Excellence; Presentation; Archaeologists

Greek classics have occupied a special place in the history of English literature. These classics have opened a new era before us regarding the history and culture of ancient Greece. Among all the classic writers, the name of Homer is renowned and his writings are well accepted by all. His *The Iliad* is the first work of western literature, an epic poem of 15000 lines. This poem mostly depicts the tragedy of Trojan War and the heroic deeds of Achilles, a half-god. But, in true sense it tells the story of the darkest episode in the Trojan War. The poem reveals the heroism of Achilles along with the fall of Troy.

But a grave truth is hidden behind all the achievements of the Greeks in this war. It is said that, the Trojan War has been held because of a woman, named Helen. But it is the half-truth. There is another reason which has never been upheld by anyone, and that is the conflict between east and west, the most popular subject of debate in the modern time. If we review the issue carefully, it will be very clear to us that the cause behind the destruction of the whole city of Troy is not the issue of Helen but the conflict between the East & the West.

Before further discussion, we need to know the story behind the Trojan War. More than a hundred years before the Christ, near the eastern end of the Mediterranean was a great city which was very rich and powerful. One cannot find such a city till now. The name was Troy, the most famous city of world history. The story has started in the marriage ceremony of king Peleus and sea-nymph Thetis, where everyone was invited except Eris, the evil goddess of discord. As a form of her revenge, she threw a golden apple marked 'for the fairest'. Unfortunately, the debate ended between Aphrodite, Hera and Athena. Rejected by The divine God, Zeus, they at last came to Paris, the most beautiful and handsome prince of Troy. As it is obvious, all the three had given him tempting bribes: Hera promised to make him the lord of Europe and Asia; Athena that he would lead the Trojans to victory against the Greeks and lay Greece in Ruins; Aphrodite, that the fairest woman in the entire world should be his. Paris, who was familiar for his cowardice and lust for women, accepted Aphrodite's bribe and gave her the golden apple (Hamilton, 219). At that time, Helen, the fairest woman of the world, was the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. But Aphrodite, as per her promise, led Paris to Sparta, where he had received warmly. At that time, the guest-host relationship was considered to be a sacred one. But, Paris, driven by the shrewd Aphrodite, broke the relation of Helen and fled to Troy taking Helen with him and fled to Troy. Though Hector, Troy's greatest warrior, prince and Paris' elder brother opposed him, Paris succeeded to convince him (Troy, the movie). And this incident has led Menelaus, along with his brother and other Greek warriors to go for a war against Troy. In this ten years long war, both the Trojans and Greeks had lost many of their renowned warriors. On the tenth year of the war, following the war tactics of Odysseus, the famous wooden horse, finally the greatest city Troy had fallen under Greek wrath and totally destroyed. And that was the Judgment of Paris, famed everywhere as the reason of Trojan war (Hamilton, 219).

As it is a well-accepted reason that Paris' misjudgment has led to the war, many critics has opposed it as well. Is it really possible that a whole

well-constructed city and it's culture has been destroyed because of a woman? Aren't there any other reasons behind such massacre? Many archaeologists have been working on to find out the true history or, we can say, true reason behind the Trojan War. And many surprising and awe-stricken information have been revealed eventually. Many say it is an invasion against the culture and history; many have rejected the idea that this war has really occurred and many more.

But the well-established and most accepted idea that has given by the critics and the archaeologists is the conflict between the east and the west. It is one of the most recurrent subject-matter of debate even in today's world.

The story of Trojan War has been presented mainly in *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and has been studied as myth. But many of today's archaeologists who have been working on this issue, have claimed that they have been found something similar to the Troy city, as described in these two epics, near Turkey. ManfredKorfmann, who is the Director of Excavations of Troy since 1988, called the Troia Project run by the University of Tübingen and the University of Cincinnati, has said that what they have found in Turkey, is credible to the myth (Ancient History Documentary). If we go through today's world map following his instructions, we find that, in the east of the Aegean Sea, Asia Minor covers the area and in the west, Greece (Ancient History Documentary). So, the way the war has been taken place, seeing the geographical condition, it is an invasion against east by the west.

The name Troy refers both to a place in legend and a real-life archaeological site. Troy also refers to a real-life ancient city located on the northwest coast of Turkey which, since antiquity, has been identified by many as being the Troy discussed in the legend. Whether the Trojan War actually took place, and whether the site in northwest Turkey is the same Troy, is a matter of debate. The modern-day Turkish name for the site is Hisarlik (Jarus).

The idea that the city was Troy goes back at least 2,700 years, when the ancient Greeks were colonizing northwest Turkey. In the 19th century, the idea again came to popular attention when a

German businessman and early archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, conducted a series of excavations at Hisarlik and discovered treasures he claimed to be from King Priam (Jarus).

The exact size of the city is in dispute. Archaeologist Manfred Korfmann, writes in a paper in the book "*Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*" that recent work at the site shows that there was a "lower city" beyond the citadel, bringing its total size to about 30 hectares (74 acres):

"This Troy had a large residential area below a strongly fortified citadel. As far as we know today, the citadel was unparalleled in its region and in all of southeastern Europe" (Jarus).

The extent of the residential area is a topic of debate among scholars with some arguing that Korfmann is overestimating its extent. Korfmann believes the story of the Trojan War contains some truth.

"According to the current state of our knowledge the story told in the "Iliad" most likely contain a kernel of historical truth or, to put it differently a historical substrate. Any future discussions about the historicity of the Trojan War only make sense if they ask what exactly we understand this kernel or substrate to be" (Jarus).

In a 2004 article for Archaeology, an online publication of the Archaeology Institute of America, Korfmann gave his answer to the question, "Did the Trojan War really happen?" In his final summary he put it this way:

According to the archaeological and historical findings of the past decade especially, it is now more likely than not that there were several armed conflicts in and around Troy at the end of the Late Bronze Age. At present we do not know whether all or some of these conflicts were distilled in later memory into the "Trojan War" or whether among them there was an especially memorable, single "Trojan War." However, everything currently suggests that Homer should be taken seriously, that his story of a military conflict between Greeks and the inhabitants of Troy is based on a memory of historical events—whatever

these may have been. If someone came up to me at the excavation one day and expressed his or her belief that the Trojan War did indeed happen here, my response as an archaeologist working at Troy would be: Why not? (Korfmann 57:3)

So, it is clear that, though there are some debate, a city similar to Troy was existed. Now, let see what the critics have said about Homer, father of this enormous epic. Authorship of this book is traditionally ascribed to this poet. Sources from antiquity indicate that Homer studied with Mante, the Oracle at Delphi, and daughter of the blind Seer Tirasias of Thebes who were both contemporaries of Jason, i.e. the generation before Helen. Homer's books contain such minute details of accurate geographical references it is difficult to conclude he was not there to compile the evidence himself. It's also interesting that, according to the standard chronology, Greek literature begins with *The Iliad*, the greatest classic in that language. There is no development of Greek epic composition; it emerges suddenly in full flower. Thus a commentator may write without blinking:

"If Homer learned to write in the 8th century, there was little or nothing for him to read."

There is no reflection upon how a completely evolved epic poetic language, vital to this day, should abruptly emerge in a literary void. This problem is not unlike many other events in the modern study of ancient history, which defy conventional understanding but are easily resolved when one eliminates the 400-year gap in Greek history known as "The Greek Dark Age" (Egan). Some traditions portray Homer as a blind poet, because the name Homer sounds like a word for "blind" in some Greek dialects. In the "Odyssey," a blind bard appears telling stories of the war, which some interpret as a cameo by the poem's author (Alishah).

It is an interesting fact that, Greeks of the third and second centuries B.C., however, already have already questioned whether Homer existed and whether the two epics are even written by a single individual. Most modern scholars believe that even if a single person written the epics, his work owed a tremendous doubt to a long tradition of

unwritten, oral poetry. Stories of a glorious expedition to the east and of its leaders' fateful journey home had been circulating in Greece for hundreds years before *The Iliad* (Spark notes).

A small evidence has been found about Homer. Some say, he was lived around 750 B.C. It is also said that, he was from Smyrna or Chios, near to Troy (HDC). *The Iliad* was composed primarily in the Ironic dialect of Ancient Greek, which was spoken on the Aegean islands and in coastal settlements of Asia Minor, now modern Turkey. Some scholars thus conclude that the poet hailed from somewhere in the eastern Greek world (Spark notes). It is the supposition of most of the critics that, homer was not institutionally educated rather naturally, like our Lalon Shah. According to Robert garland, Professor of Colgate University:

Homer, who is believed to be blind and illiterate, is the early witness of the Trojan war, held 500 years ago of his death. So, how reliable the information that he has given us, is a major question to concern. How can we believe on this blind man's tale of lust and infidelity, human sacrifice, blood, rape and most of all deceit? Is Homer's story the true story? How can a blind and illiterate poet be trusted? (HDC).

Robert says, the most important thing which is hard to believe is that, how can a man be lived after 500 years of the war and portrayed the incidents with such graphical details? How could he remember 16000 lines from *The Iliad* and 12000 lines from *Odyssey*? And the most possible answer is, Homer was the direct descendent of the lineage of the ancient story-tellers of Greek (HDC). In the ancient Greece, casual storytellers and semiprofessional minstrels passed these stories down through generations, with each artist developing and polishing the story as he told it. According to this theory, one poet or a series of poets handing down their work in succession finally turned these stories into written works, again with each adding his own touch and expanding or contracting certain episodes in the overall narrative to fit his taste (Spark Notes). Barry B. Powell, Professor of the university of Wisconsin-Madison, says:

'Homer inherited the story of *The Iliad* from his ancestors and presented it with his own twists' (HDC).

If it is so, how such a memorized song has turned to the first great literary work of western civilization? Barry agrees with the question that, is it possible that there was a Trojan War and the story have passed authentically to Homer after 500 years? He also adds that Homer must have been a great singer in his time, famous entertainer and great poet. It is possible that he inspired somebody to copy his songs which leads to the invention of the Greek alphabet (HDC).

It is a well-known fact that a war has not only destroyed a city or country, it is an invasion against the culture and belief of that city. Same thing happen in case of Troy. We can say, Homer does not elect for a Hollywood ending. He elects for such an ending which is to be followed by more havoc, more carnage, more brutality and ultimately, to the destruction of Troy. The legends say that, this is not a war which is won by a common act of valor, by steadfastness and military presentation that we may expect. On the contrary, it has been won by devastating rudeness, it has been won by deception, deceit and conspiracy; all the things that we may consider dishonorable conduct of warfare. Massive destruction has been taken place along with excessive murder. In the poem, we see, when the Greeks could not be able to break the Trojan wall, they took the help of conspiracy. And Odysseus played the major role in this conspiracy. It was him who had invented the idea of the famous 'wooden horse'. The tactics that Odysseus had applied, that Odysseus and a group of soldiers were hide in the horse and the other soldiers were waiting in their ships behind a nearby island. And the conspiracy worked. The Trojans found this mysterious horse along with an Achaean soldier named Sinon (Spark Notes). They took him as a prison whom said to them that, the Achaean had incurred the wrath of Athena for the theft of Palladium. They left Sinon as a sacrifice to the Goddess and constructed the horse as a gift to soothe her anger. Sinon explained that, the Achaeans left the horse before the Trojan gates hoping that the Trojans would destroy it and thereby earn the wrath of Athena. Believing Sinon's

story, the Trojans wheeled the massive horse into the city as a tribute to Athena. It is important to note here that, some Trojans were skeptical suggesting to be aware of the Greeks. But ultimately they believed in Sinon's story. That night, Odysseus and his men slipped out of the horse and destroyed the city.

It is obvious that in a war, one side must be bullied. In the Trojan War, it was Troy. What has done by the Greeks in the Trojan War, according to many critics, is really unacceptable and horrendous. Many act of vigilance have been occurred on that night. Priam, the mighty and merciful king of Troy has been slaughtered at his own altar. Cassandra has been raped. And the most heinous act of that night is, the infant son of Hector, Astyanax, has been thrown from the walls of Troy, whose brain it is believed, has dashed out. He was the son of the mightiest warrior Hector but has been bullied in such a way. The Greeks have been looted all the precious things of Troy and at last, set fire on it. The beautiful and glorious city has thus demolished under the animalism of the Greeks.

A question has always been arisen about the cause of the war- is it really aware for a woman or there is something else. Different theories have been given on the fact. Brig. General John S. Brown of the U.S. Army is a specialist on the warfare of the Trojan War. He, along with a group of war specialists, is working on the tactics that has been used in this war. He says,

Trojan war is the original source of a cultural expectation- of soldiers, of literature, of human behavior, the importance between the divine and the mundane (HDC). Troy's location shows its control over the trade affair from east to west: golds, spices, utensils and other luxurious products of Asia.

Experts have found a shipwreck in the coastal area of turkey which is dated at the time of the Trojan War. On that ship, treasures of seven civilizations have been found: gold utensils from Egypt, urns and spices from the far east of the central Asia and so on. So, these evident indicate to the fact that, the Trojans were at the pick of cultural and economic development and the trade and commerce around

the Aegean Sea were mastered by them. An important fact is that, at that time, Greece had an urge to become the lone supreme power. So, if they wanted to be the supreme Empire, they had to capture and destroy Troy. And they had used a simple plan, recapture Helen and the treasures of troy, by sailing to far East with 1000 ships to gain wealth and honor. In the poem, there was a feast by Agamemnon in Nestor's house, in Pylos, in the name of God Poseidon. But the real aim of Agamemnon behind the feast was to lure the Greek warriors to the war against Troy. Not only that, he did not even hesitated to sacrifice his own daughter to satisfy the gods.

Brig. General John S. Brown states that the sacrifice of Agamemnon indicates that he was committed to capture this enterprise that he did not sphere his daughter as well. It is a message to the soldiers how dedicated he was, and how much he expected from them. Thus, the blood spilt in the Trojan War and that is of a child. Although, Agamemnon has paid for her death with his life. In the poem, there is an indication to such occurrence in Hector's voice:

Trojans and Greek men-at-arms, hear from me what Paris, who began this trouble between us, now proposes. He suggests the rest of the Trojans and all the Greeks ground there arms while he and warlike Menelaus meet in the middle and fight is over Helen and all the property Paris brought back with her. The one who wins and proves himself the better man can take all the property and the woman home, while we others can then swear solemn oaths of friendship (Homer,87+).

The characters that has presented here in the poem by Homer, are the upholders of the eastern and western culture. The leaders of the Greeks, Agamemnon was arrogant, overweening and always ready to take advantage of his position. In the war, he always remained at the back line, left his army to lead the front and accepted the war-blow. Achilles, the great Greek warrior, was also fiercely and ferocious. On the other hand, hector is the mentor of soldiers of homer. We find him always in the front line. Hector has been portrayed as a proper family

man. While the Greeks are fighting out of revenge and grief, Hector is fighting to defend his family, friend and his homeland. Robert Garland says, Hector is like us, the embodiment of the common man. In the poem, we see, Hector has shown due respect to the dead, by returning Patroclus' body to the Greeks.

But Achilles, breaks the rule. He shows his animal like behavior by dragging Hector's dead body with his chariot and leaves it to rot under open sky. The differences in the behaviors of these two nations show that, conflict is obvious between them and the Greeks are more aggressive than the Trojans. Seeing Hector, we can easily say, the Trojans are the peace-loving nation, live happily together with family and friends. On the contrary, the Greeks are abominous, always seek for power and wealth. And the example of it, the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, for a war-prize for which Achilles withdraws himself from the war.

In the upper discussion, we see, though it is famous cause that the Trojan War has been occurred because of the abduction of Helen, the main cause is the east-west conflict. It is an thousand year old incident but we are here see the evidence of the most popular modern debate, conflict between the eastern and western world. And we also find that the western civilization has overruled the eastern one, just like the today's world. Noam Chomsky, known as the world's number one public intellectual in a poll by *Prospect* magazine. In one of his interview on the U.S and Iraq issue, he expresses his opinion on the fact:

... Gallup released a poll taken in Baghdad shortly before in which there was an open-ended question: 'Why do you think the U.S. invaded Iraq?' there were some who agreed that it was the messianic vision: 1 percent. One percent of people in Baghdad said the war was waged to bring democracy; 5 percent said it was to help Iraqis; 4 percent said it was to destroy weapons of mass destruction; but a plurality, 43 percent, said the motive was to 'rob Iraq's oil'. I think that's approximately correct. Iraq has enormous energy reserves... they're generally thought to be

the second highest in the world, after Saudi Arabia; also, they're extremely cheap and accessible. You don't have to dig through permafrost or play with tar sands – you just put a pipe in the ground. We've already discussed how policymakers understood that if you control the energy resources of the region, you have tremendous power (Shalom, 83).

As Chomsky says, the Greeks have used the same tactics to capture the wealth of Troy as well as the supremacy.

The Iliad is a song of heroism and heroic deeds. But the glory of heroism is dimmed under the lust for power and wealth. The way the Greeks has destroyed the beautiful Troy city, it does not cope with the real definition of heroism. Power blindfolds man, it blurs his idea of love and sympathy. Agamemnon, with his lust for supreme power, destroys the culture and identity of Troy. But, the motto of Homer to write *The Iliad* was not destruction or war. In the last episode of the book, we see, when Priam comes to take Hector's body, both Priam and Achilles yield together, like father and son, like there is no Greek or Trojan or deadly enemies, rather two human. Actually, through this episode, he has given an anti-war message – we all are human, we all are fathers and sons, we all have attachment for each other which is beyond our national identity. We are human, this is our first and foremost identity.

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* **About the author:** The author of this article presently works at **Southern University Bangladesh** as a lecturer in the department of English. He completed his B.A(Hons) & Master degree from **University of Chittagong** in the department of English.
