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## *Pericles Or Hamlet?*

Eysenk made a model of human behaviour by asking only a single question: do you prefer privacy or company? Shakespeare also made a career out of studying human behaviour, although as an artist and not a scientist. As a playwright, one of his recurrent themes is how much control people have over their own lives. Did Mark Antony jump, or was he pushed by his love for Cleopatra into ignoring his responsibilities? Was Coriolanus lead by his sense of justice or driven by revenge into rebellion?

Theologians ask the same question, but use different words. They ask to what extent human actions reflect the staging of God's pre-ordained plan and to what extent they result from our own personal decisions. The dichotomy can be shown as a continuum.

FREE WILL ←————→ PREDESTINATION

Only God actually knows where we humans fit along this line; theologians even of the same religion can't agree (it was the central facet of the early Islamic Mu'tazilite/Ash'arite dispute, for example). From a sociological viewpoint the more pertinent question is how free or how bound people believe themselves to be. How much do they hold themselves responsible for their fate and how much do they accept it as God's will?

When it was newly written, "Pericles" proved one of Shakespeare's more popular plays. It is barely ever performed these days - not surprisingly, perhaps, since much of the language is inept enough for critics to suggest that Shakespeare didn't actually write much of the text himself. Yet its erstwhile popularity is interesting. Perhaps nostalgia was one reason, as the play looks backwards to the Middle Ages in its style and themes. Not only is there an ancient narrator, but also Pericles' unblinking acceptance of "outrageous fortune" harkens back to earlier centuries, when human free will was seen as unimportant and even potentially dangerous in its tacit challenge to divine authority. The story of Pericles, almost a secularised version of the Bible's Job, is essentially a tapestry of gains and losses. There is no character development or conflict, just a king who has all, loses all, goes mad - and then has it all restored.

Hamlet, "to be or not to be" provokes his own fate. Whether he is totally in control or is controlled by the forces he himself unleashes provides one of the play's interests. Either way, he neither allows events to simply carry him along nor does he blindly accept all as being part of an unfathomable God's plan. He "takes up arms" and fights for his future.

Pericles and Hamlet, then, are two totally different characters. In our diagram above, Pericles, believing his destiny to be controlled by unseen others, would slot himself in far to the right; Hamlet way towards the left. If we were only given each of their positions on such an outline, and the setting of each play, it should be possible to roughly re-create Shakespeare's story. Or were we to imagine them brought to life in our own home or work situation we could make some

predictions about how they would perform. Would Pericles have a career as a business executive (“... lacks initiative ... ”)? How about Hamlet as a factory worker (“... has an unsettling effect on his fellow workers and seems unwilling to obey instructions ... ”)? Though these examples are deliberately far-fetched, the precept isn’t . From a deliberation of only a few traits, specific conclusions and projections can be made.

This, in reality, is what is planned through this study. We will first consider where Bangladesh’s fits in along five continua and then consider the implications of the country’s position on the development process here.

The free will ---- predestination dichotomy won’t be considered, although it is an important difference between Western society (whose effective religion is existentialism) and a strongly Islamic society that stresses submission to God’s will. Much of the mutual misunderstanding between Islamic and post-Christian countries can be attributed to this variant in world views. Instead we will examine forces that are embedded within Bangladeshi life, beginning with one that we have glanced at several times already: the lack of a sense of self worth.