

## **A BRIEF STUDY OF FEMINISM; ITS IMPLICATIONS AND PORTRAYAL IN THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE.**

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### Abstract:

Much water has flown on the life and works of Shakespeare during the past few centuries and in light of this, it would be superfluous and uncalled for to probe further into the many themes running deep in the worldwide acclaimed plays of Shakespeare. Research and essays on Shakespeare's works have dealt with every aspect of his life and his plays have been fraught to the force, leaving nothing to add or substantiate to the surviving knowledge and understanding of the playwright's mind. This paper is a humble effort of the authors to place before its readers some aspects of Feminism and its exposition in the works of Shakespeare. This aspect of feminism is one vital thread of isms ever glaringly seen and experienced in the homogeneous composition of almost all the plays of Shakespeare. These so-called veins of feminism run deep and are firmly embedded in his philosophy and intellectual thought process. It forms the vital core of his perspectives and ideas which are clearly and explicitly propounded in almost all of his masterpieces. The genre of feminism and its implications can be felt and experienced in all aspects of life and literature. We the authors of this paper wish to cull out the judicious emphasis of feminism which can be seen in the works of Shakespeare. The scholarship of Shakespeare has come a long way from the days of its birth in the early '20s where readers in the realm of the scarcity of expository material, were left to fumble through the maze of old archaic syntax and prosody, to grasp what promised to look like real life happenings. The evils of society and human characteristics radiated itself rather brilliantly in the works of Shakespeare. Feminism is one such retrospective element that forms the crux of this paper. This paper shall attempt to highlight the infusion of feminism into the works of Shakespeare and the subsequent ripples and effects it had created in the lives of people living in a society of that time. Scholars are of the opinion that even today at this present time and age, this fantastic fusion of feminism experienced in the plays of Shakespeare continues to have a profound effect and repercussion which can never fade into oblivion.

Keywords: Feminism, Superfluous, Exposition, Homogenous, Perspectives, Explicitly, Judicious, Intellectual, Archaic, Syntax, Prosody, Brilliantly, Retrospective, Crux, Subsequent, Opinion, Fusion, Profound.

Introduction:

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them”

William Shakespeare

Feminism was a powerful force for social change in the twentieth century and much of Shakespearean criticism analyzes with great interest at the way women are written and portrayed about in his plays. It was in those formative years that an idea was about to sweep the world that would radically change society. Women stepped forward and stood valiantly to assert their gender and uncompromised equality in society. We need to remind ourselves that feminism is premised on the concept of basic equality of human beings and rooted deeply in liberal conceptions of individuality and fair play. When we read a Shakespeare play we can understand the texts only from where we are now, with our own ideas and beliefs.

Contemporary criticism, therefore, finds its own political and social concerns in Shakespeare's plays and expresses these concerns in the way it reads the play. Shakespeare and his portrayal of women add substantial fodder and knowledge to this onward march of feminism at this crucial moment of modern history and human consciousness. Shakespearean criticism looks with great interest at the way women are written about in the plays. There are other contemporary issues that are important in the way we read Shakespeare in the present-day context. These issues revolve around how power is exercised in society, the nature of social justice, how language shapes the world, questions of sexuality and so on so forth.

This paper shall devote its energies to deal with the aspects of feminism and its related implications in the plays of Shakespeare. It's akin to a mere drop in a wide ocean that shapes the paper in relevance to its topic, but nevertheless, feminism has been interwoven knowingly or unknowingly by this great dramatist which still contain pearls of wisdom and thought which can be pondered over again and again in the ages to come.

Feminism and Shakespeare:

If we were to formulate a question which goes like this, was Shakespeare a feminist? The answer can be convincingly be said as a no. This answer evolves from the notion that this concept didn't exist in his lifetime or for approximately three centuries following his death. This is one significant problem we have to encounter while discussing this issue of feminism in relation to Shakespeare. As its widely accepted, feminism is very much a twentieth-century concept. Hence to explore Shakespeare's plays from a feminist perspective would be deemed surrealistic.

We have to bear in mind at this juncture that when Shakespeare wrote his plays, there was no such thing as a female actor. Women were not allowed to perform; all female roles

were played by boys or young men something the audiences of that era were obviously well aware of. Therefore whenever one wishes to explore the portrayal of Shakespeare's female character, it is worth keeping this at the back of our minds. This nuance of female roles being played by boys or young men adds an additional layer of humor to the comedies particularly the context of cross-dressing which occurs in plays, 'Twelfth Night' and 'As You Like it' for instance. However, we need to bear in mind that the added humor of men playing women can't account for the regularity with which Shakespeare gives his female characters pluck, mettle and power, the likes of which would not necessarily be associated with femininity, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

No doubt Shakespeare's history plays do contain women characters, and what is most important about these plays from a feminist standpoint however, is not primarily the images of women they contrast but rather the impact the plays have had on the ways we imagine gender and sexual difference, the institution of marriage and the gulf between "public" and "private" life. These are part of the legacy affecting the lives of all women who inhabit the cultures these plays helped to shape. There is considerable disagreement among historians and critics about the position of women in English society of Shakespeare's time.

Some feminists are keen to stress the utter oppression of women in all domains of life; economic, domestic, sexual, familial and personal. Others point out that while it is certainly true that women were in no way regarded as the equals of men in official aspects of life, the Puritan doctrine of 'companionate marriage', which stressed the spiritual equality of man and wife in a loving relationship, was related to a kind of feminist flowering in this period among the sort of middle class women - those whose protestant beliefs encouraged them to consider themselves the spiritual equals of their husbands but who did not hold antic-theatrical views, those who would have attended the London theatres of that time. What is more, there is considerable evidence that women were far more active in economic life as skilled workers, managers of large domestic organizations and small businesses (Orgel 1996 a: 73-4)

A brief look at feminism in Shakespeare's Macbeth:

In Shakespeare's Macbeth, we are confronted with the conflicting character of Lady Macbeth. This lady upon receiving her husband's letter about the witches prophesies attempts to behave like a man in order to exude the strength needed to gain additional social status as royalty. Lady Macbeth appears to be very influential in planning, as to how to and when to kill King Duncan and also to the extent of chiding her husband for not acting more like a man, in spite of all these drawbacks, she is the main reason for the revealing of Macbeth's part in the usurpation of the throne.

It may be audacious of the presenters of this paper even to attempt a definition of his greatness, but it is not so difficult to describe the gifts that enabled him to create imaginative visions of pathos and mirth that whether read or witnessed in the theatre, fill the mind and lingers on in our minds and hearts for time immemorial. He is a writer of great intellectual

rapidity, perceptiveness and poetic power which can never be surpassed by anyone else. His works straddle all continents and his brilliance is acknowledged with any reason for debate.

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