

THE ROLE OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract:

Life is a mixture of happiness and sorrows. One can enjoy the taste of life if they can experience all the tastes in equal proportions. A short story, drama or a novel will incorporate all sorts of spices in life. When we look deep into the literature of the past and compare it with the present, we can clearly observe that the literature of both the eras in the amalgamation of all flavors in life. Every literature lover starts his journey with Shakespeare's works. He travels through all the essential elements of life and comes out with the main philosophy of life. Shakespeare's plays depict a variety of emotions in human beings, which can be naturally seen in people around us. Shakespeare has depicted the life in various angles through his writings. In any play or a novel, the key elements are characters. Such characters constitute men and women. Though for years men play a vital role in the success of a play, women also have powerful roles to perform. The writers of the past or the present have high regard for women. Female characters had grown with strong deep roots from the past. It is fortunate that the feminist characters were carved as influential roles in the world literature. The present paper is going to focus on the feministic perspective of Shakespeare's plays.

Keywords: literature, Shakespeare's works, female, characters etc

The literature of the past is quite fascinating and captivating. The English drama history dates back to the eleventh century. A Latin play in the honor of St. Katherine was believed to be the earliest performance in 1110 in England. It gave its path to the religious drama. The priests used it as the means of conveying truths of their religion to the illiterate masses. The church took the drama under its control; performances were confined to the church buildings. The language employed in the dramas was Latin. This form of drama was named as *Miracle or the Mystery* play. The content for the drama was chosen from the *Bible*. The mystery plays mystery was connected with religion. They contained the stories of the saints. As the popularity grew for these plays, many people were attracted to watch the plays and the performance theatre had to move from the interior part of the building to the porch.

From Porch, it moved to Church and from Church to village green or the city street. The language also shifted from Latin to French and French to English. The 14th century witnessed the rise in the level of religious drama in England. Corpus Christi plays also known as 'Collective mysteries' were represented in all large English towns. These plays exhibited the whole story of the fall of man and man's redemption. Four cycles have been noted as *The Chester Cycle of 25 plays*, *The Coventry Cycle of 42 plays*, *The Wakefield Cycle of 31 plays* and *The York Cycle of 48 plays*. These plays begin with the creation of the world and the fall of man. These religious dramas continued until the end of the 16th century.

The next plays were *Morality plays*. The characters were not from the Bible but were the legends of saints. Perseverance, Free Will, the Five Senses, the Seven Deadly Sins, Good and Bad Angels appeared on the stage as characters. Interlude was a dramatic development of the morality play. It was related to satire rather than religious or ethical nature. These were acted by the household servants. Later the tragedies and comedies developed. *Roister Doister* was the first English comedy written in 1550 by Nicholas Udall, a headmaster, who had written for his school boys. *Gorboduc* was the first English tragedy reproduced from the Senecan tragedy. The first tragedy was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton in 1561. They represented it before the members of the Inner Temple at their Christmas festivities.

Shakespeare began his career as a dramatist by the romantic form of drama. 'University Wits' followed his form of writing. A romantic dramatist is distinguished from a classical dramatist. To know about the Elizabethan theatres, they were large wooden sheds, partly thatched with rushes, a flagstaff on the roof and were surrounded by a trench. Though there were many problems for the public to continue their business, a number of theatres flourished along the bank of Thames. Shakespeare is the poet of nature. He holds a faithful mirror of manners and of life. He also has good power of imitating the passions. The women characters in Shakespeare's works are alive and fresh.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* clearly depicts two sensitive women characters. Duke Senior was thrown from his kingdom by his cunning brother Frederick. The Duke fled to the Forest

of Arden. He had a peaceful life in the forest with his followers. The only unhappiness in his life was that his only daughter Rosalind was not with him. She was with her uncle and her cousin Celia. Though Rosalind grieved for her father, she was happy in the presence of her cousin. There would be unexpected changes in everyone's life. A wrestling tournament changed the lives of the two girls.

In a wrestling tournament which was held at the court, a famous named Charles had defeated three brothers easily and also challenged the fourth opponent. A handsome young man came forward to compete with Charles. The young girls pitied and begged him to wrestle with Charles. The young man thanked them and replied that he would kill him. He was not bothered about himself as he had no one to grieve over his death. Rosalind told that she would her little strength to him. Finally, the match began and Orlando won the match.

Orlando had no one to call himself as his own, even his own brother was his enemy. Orlando's father was a close friend of Duke Senior. He died when Orlando was very young. The boy was left in the care of his elder brother Oliver. He treated Orlando cruelly. Though he had no schooling, he turned to be a gentleman. Maybe he inherited this quality from his father. Frederick was angry to hear that Orlando was the son of another enemy. Nothing can change the fate. Rosalind and Orlando fell in love. She was happy to hear that he was the son of his father's friend.

Orlando had to leave the court at once as it was dangerous for him to stay in the enemy's camp. Rosalind became sad and silent when she missed Rosalind. Celia tried her best to make her cousin happy but failed in doing so. When Frederick understood the love between Rosalind and Frederick, he told her to leave the court instantly. If she wouldn't move from here, he would not hesitate to kill her. Both cousins were shocked to hear such harsh words from him. He didn't want to spare Rosalind as he thought she was becoming too popular with the people who pitied for the loss of her father.

It's not necessary that a man with bad intention should have bad offspring. Celia was such an example. She didn't want to miss her sister. Celia was practical enough to devise a plan. Both the sisters disguised themselves as countryman and a girl, changing their names set to another country with all their money and jewelry. Shakespeare shows the two girls as self-confident, daring and willing to face the circumstances. Orlando was also warned to move away from his brother. So accompanied by his faithful servant Old Adam, they moved to the Forest of Arden where Duke Senior was living with his followers.

The two girls also reached the place at the same time and bought a house and sheep from a shepherd's master. On their way, Orlando missed his way and left to the jungle and went to the place where Duke Senior was living. He asked them to give something to eat. When Duke Senior found that he was his friend's son, he invited him happily to his place. Meanwhile, the

two girls found Rosalind's name carved on the trunks of several trees. Rosalind could make out that the poetic love on the trees might have been composed by Orlando. She was right in her guess. After a few days, Oliver also changed his attitude and both the brothers married the cousins.

Even in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare shows a sensitive character Miranda, the daughter of Prospero. Prospero was the Duke of Milan and Miranda was his only child. He was more interested to read books and left his government to his brother Antonio. He trusted his brother but he wasn't loyal, so his brother was thrown out from the country. One day by his magic powers, Prospero created a storm in the sea, when he observed that his enemies were on the boat. Ferdinand, the son of Naples was also caught in the storm. Miranda saw Ferdinand, but couldn't believe her eyes as she hasn't seen any man other than her father. Prospero ordered Ferdinand to pile the logs of wood. Miranda couldn't see him working and wanted to help him. But he refused her help. Finally, Antonio and King of Naples could realize their mistakes and the story ended with a happy note with the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand.

In the above two stories, there are many things in common. The two kings had two beautiful daughters. Both the kings had to live their kingdom and live away from their brothers, who had by force took their kingdoms. Whether it was Miranda, Rosalind or Celia, Shakespeare had portrayed their characters in a very gentle manner. As women are compared to flowers, they have the natural sweet fragrance and sensitiveness in their attitude. Shakespeare showed these women as the most natural characters, who did not violently react to their pathetic situations but had the generous mind of forgiving the enemies. Though born and brought up in royal families, these women had to accept the fate and struggle in their life. But Shakespeare gave a happy ending to their lives.

Even in *Hamlet*, he shows two opposite characters. The first character is Hamlet's mother, Gertrude and the other is his girlfriend, Ophelia. He couldn't digest the reality that his father was killed by his brother and the same man married his mother. He even misses Ophelia. Here the mother character may be unaware of the fact could not understand the agony of her son. Even Ophelia couldn't make out what had happened to Hamlet. He misses both his mother and friend. Though there would not be a number of women characters in Shakespeare's plays, one could see that the characters are respected and have generosity in their attitude.

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