

Shakespeare and Culture Politics and Society



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Portrayal of Human Virtues in Shakespeare's
The Tempest

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Virtues are of more importance and significance in today's materialistic world. The world is progressing towards the total deterioration of values and the day-today world is filled with atrocities and mishappenings which occur because of the lack of virtues. Without virtues humanity loses its grandeur and grace. The very purpose for which God created humanity does not serve as man develops all sorts of vices which lead him towards destruction and loss. Shakespeare is really a master in observing human nature. F.W Robertson says, "One of Shakespeare's most wondrous qualities is the humanity of his nature and heart".

W.W Story says,

And such was Shakespeare, whose
strong soul could climb
Steps of sheer terror, sound the ocean grand
Of passions deep, or over fancy's strand
Trip with his fairies keeping, step and time.

T.S Coleridge comments as, "The greatest genius that perhaps human nature has produced our myriad-minded Shakespeare". The milk of human kindness in Shakespeare inspires him to kindle the positive virtues in characters. Even through the major tragedies of Shakespeare, he brings out the importance of virtues by dealing with the disastrous consequences of having vices. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* teaches us the essential didactic lesson that losing virtues by becoming anti-Christian will bring one's own ruin. The

tragic flaw in *Othello* stresses the point that one has to be patient and wise in undertaking decisions. *King Lear* teaches us, how to be prudent in reacting to the feelings of others. The comedies of Shakespeare too bring out the essential virtues of life, through which life can be made into a cup of a sweet drink in which one can drink even the last drop with success. The romances strike the notes of peace and goodwill. Forgiveness and reconciliation is the recurring motive in the last plays of Shakespeare. Wrong and evil can be conquered by love and charity. The keynote of the play *Tempest* is struck in the words of Prospero, "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance".

In fact Prospero ever retains balance and judgement. He is never intoxicated with the possession of power. Verity rightly says, "Prospero is almost a personification of wisdom. His soul is filled with truth and peace". Shakespeare tries to stress the second great commandment of Jesus Christ "Love thy neighbour as thyself". Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "Forgive and you will be forgiven". When Lord Jesus taught his disciples how to pray to the Father in Heaven, he said, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Hence Prospero undergoes a transformation in his character in the last act. The rarer action is forgiveness a noble virtue, which blesses the giver as well as the receiver.

The whole play is based upon the theme of forgiveness which is the leading motive of the play. The purpose for which Prospero raised the tempest is now fully accomplished when Antonio and Sebastian fall into his hands, pursued by terror as the result of the supernatural warning until they seem to be on the verge of madness. Hence remorse is awakened in Prospero's enemies so that they are lead towards repentance. Gonzalo says, "All three of them are desperate, their great guilt/Like poison given to work a great time after/Now gins to bite the spirits . . ."

The completeness of Prospero's forgiveness clearly appears when Alonso speaks of asking Miranda's pardon.

Prospero says, "There, sir, stop/ Let us not burden our remembrance/ With a heaviness that is gone". The spirit of forgiveness is the most striking and dominating quality of Prospero. Prospero serves as the providence of the play *The Tempest*. He controls the action and fortunes of all the characters. He never uses the supernatural powers for wrong-doings. Miranda is the very personification of womanhood, unfettered by convention and protected by her own innocence and grace. Coleridge is of the view that Miranda has been said to combine the 'delicacy of innocence' with 'the advantage of education'. Miranda's innocence lies not only in her ignorance of worldly vices, but also in an innate purity and gentleness of the heart. Miranda is really an embodiment of good virtues like simplicity, purity, grace, innocence and genuine love. Pity is the very of the soul of Miranda. "O, I have suffered/ With those that I saw suffer . . . O' the cry did knock/ Against my very heart".

Such is the inborn tenderness, fragility and pity of Miranda, exhibited in the play. Miranda is nurtured by Nature in the lonely island, like Wordsworth's *Lucy* and the innocent Eve before Satan touched her. Miranda's love for Ferdinand is really the outcome of her admiration and sympathy for him. Love emerges strongly in Miranda, when she sees Ferdinand bearing logs. She renders her helping hand to him by pleading him to take rest. Shakespeare juxtaposes the two aspects of true love and service, when Miranda offers herself to serve him by self-denying. Living all her life on an uninhabited island, and away from all human society and social intercourse, she has been able to preserve the tender bloom of her heart, the spontaneous sense to wonder and sensitiveness to beauty, if her knowledge and experience are inconceivably limited.

Miranda's sympathy for Ferdinand is awakened when Prospero makes a too severe trial of Ferdinand. Her love is finally the admiration of her outcome and sympathy. Her love is in the innocence and simplicity of her sentiment, Miranda declares to her father: "My affections/ Are then most humble: I have no ambition/ To see a goodlier man". While Miranda puts up a strong plea for Ferdinand's innocence, she is not forgetful of her duty to her father. A daughter, who deeply appreciates and esteems her father's care and affection, preserves an exquisite balance between her duty and her love.

Miranda says, "Be of comfort; My father's of a better nature, sir, Than he appears by speech; this is unwonted/ Which now came from him". The quality of the cheerfulness is found throughout the play. In the very opening scene, when the ship seems to be on the verge of disaster, the Boatswain tries to inspire confidence in the sailors by shouting "Heigh, my hearts! Cheerly Cheerly my hearts Yare! Yare!". The quality of cheerfulness is to be found throughout the play in Gonzalo. At the verge of death Gonzalo talks in a jesting manner. Even in the midst of misfortune, the good old Lord does not lose his sense of humour. Thus Shakespeare stresses the importance of cheerfulness amidst calamity.

'Our body is the temple of God' says the scripture. A noble human being should possess all the fruits of the holyspirit like love, joy, peace, patience, grace and faith. Only then the soul of the human being can reach a divine level which will end up in salvation. So, Shakespeare succeeds in portraying the fruits of the holyspirit in the form of human virtues reflected in his characters. Prospero's island is a scene symbolizing the real world. He tries to create human beings free from sin and civilization in the island. Arthur Quiller Couch comments rightly, that the whole action of the play, with the whole tale of ancient

wrong unfolded, the whole company of injuring and injured gathered into a knot, the whole machinery of revenge turned to forgiveness, takes place in about three hours of imagined time, or just the time of its actual representation on the stage.

Works Cited

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