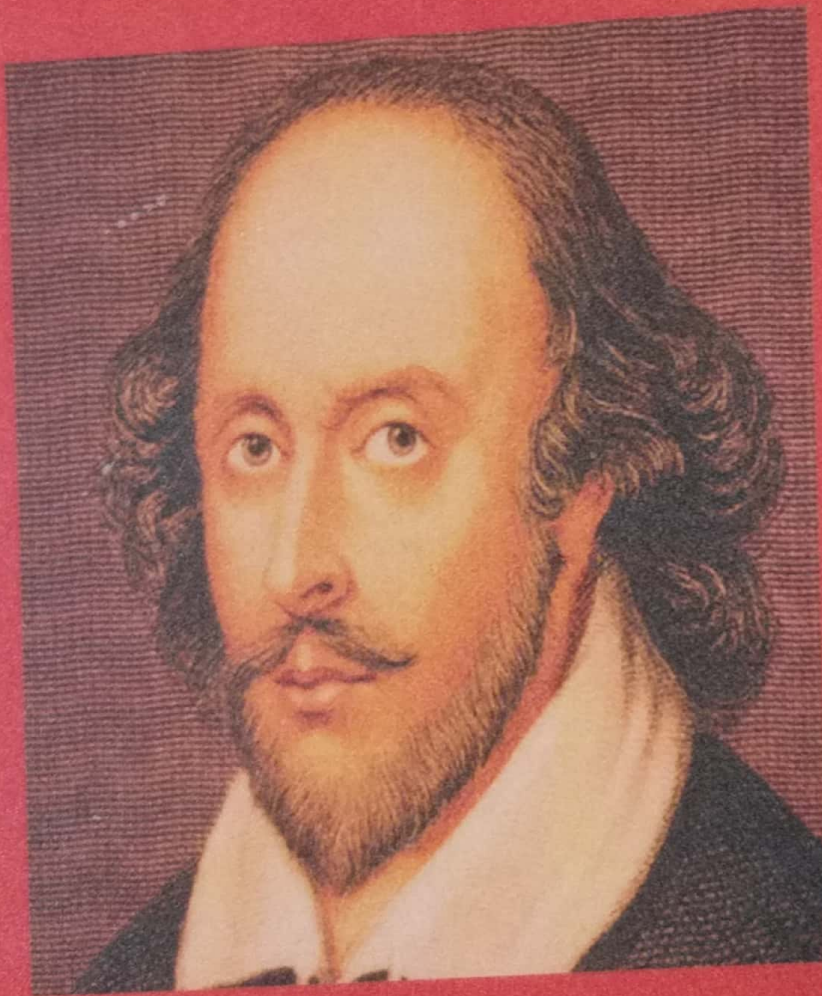


# SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

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## SHAKESPEARE'S PHILOSOPHY IN THE TEMPEST AND THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

J.PREETHI

Shakespeare is an enigma through his writings. He lives beyond ages by his style of language and power of thinking. Though drama is a mirror of its times, the philosophical thought found in his plays are still applicable in today's life. As Ben Jonson called "Shakespeare not of an age, but of all ages", still he lives in all our hearts.

This paper attempts to quote the philosophy from the plays "The Tempest" and The Merchant of Venice". Edward Dowden says 'As yet, however, Shakespeare wrote with small experience of human life; ... his imagination began to lay hold of reality of life; he came to understand the world and the men in it;..' . When a man understands the real life, he becomes a philosopher. Shakespeare understood the real life and thus his philosophical thoughts are found in his plays.

The noun *philosophy* means the study of proper behavior, and the search for wisdom. The original meaning of the word philosophy comes from the Greek roots philo- meaning "love" and -sophos, or "wisdom."

The definition of philosophy is the study of ideas about knowledge, truth, the nature and meaning of life, etc. — philosophy in a sentence. It is the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct. Philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge,

reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline. It is a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour.

In the play "The Tempest", when the ship is wrecked in the terrible storm, many lives are at stake. Shakespeare uses his philosophical tone about life. In this worldly life, though we may be rich, it is nothing before death and surrendering one's life at the eleventh hour.

*Gonzola . Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground; long heath, brown furze, anything. The Wills above be done! but I would fain die a dry death. (Act I, Scene I, Lines 61-63)*

At this time, Gonzola prefers to die on dry land. Nobody likes to face this kind of death. When things are going beyond our control, we will leave everything in God's hands.

When Miranda's father is narrating about his past life on how he is cheated by his own brother, she exclaims by saying that Alonzo man cannot be Prospero's brother. But it is possible in everyone's life that among two children, one may be good and the other may be very bad. Shakespeare writes philosophically here by the following quote,

*Miranda. Good Wombs have borne bad sons (Act I, Scene II, Line 118)*

When we face always trials and tribulations in our life, it is difficult to tolerate. Thus Shakespeare writes in a beautiful way as if Ferdinand cries in terror while he is jumping into the sea in order to escape from the suffering, unable to tolerate the

problems and says the hell is empty. He feels that he is surrounded with problems.

*Ariel. ... The King's son, Ferdinand, with hair up-starting..*

*..... cried. "Hell is empty,  
And all the devils are here."*

*(Act I, Scene II, Line 211-214)*

Shakespeare feels that when troubles come in our way, we should not get drowned in it. We should not entertain every grief. If we give importance to the entertainer ( the grief), then it will feel happy as it is the successor. It is implied in the following lines.

*Gonzola. When every grief is entertain'd that's offer'd  
Comes to the entertainer- (Act II, Scene I, Line 15, 16)*

In every one's life, disappointment will come when our effort do not give us the expected return. If things don't go as planned or if we face failure, we will lose hope. Failure is extremely difficult to handle, but it can be overcome. Shakespeare is highly philosophical at times when all hope is lost.

In the act III, Scene III, when they find Ferdinand is missing, his father King Alonzo has lost his hope of searching for his son Ferdinand and felt that his son might have drowned in the sea. That night, Antonio and Sebastian plans to kill king Alonzo, but they fail in the first attempt of killing because of ever-watchful Ariel, and Antonio encourages Sebastian by saying that he should not give up the plan that he had resolved to carry out because of one failure. It is philosophical as

Christopher Markus, a philosopher says "Hardship often prepares an ordinary person for an extraordinary destiny. Until we achieve our goal, we should not give up.

*Antonio. Do not, for one repulse, forego the purpose  
That you resolv'd to effect  
(Act III, Scene III, Line 12, 13).*

In the play "**The Merchant of Venice**", Shakespeare uses the same philosophical thought of "All the world's a stage" is the phrase that begins a monologue in the play "As You Like it", spoken by the melancholy Jaques. The speech compares the world to a stage and life to a play and catalogues the seven stages of a man's life. Here, in this play, Antonio is fed up with his life and says in a philosophical tone.

*Antonio. A Stage where every man must play a part,  
And mine a sad one. (Act I, Scene I, Line 75-76).*

When an unworthy person advises, it cannot be accepted. When Shylock cites Biblical reference of what Jacob did after Laban and he agreed that all the new born lambs that were striped and spotted should be Jacob's as his reward for his efforts. In response to him, Shakespeare philosophically portrays bad people in heart and mind when the character Antonio says,

*Antonio. The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
.....*

*A goodly apple rotten at the heart.  
(Act I, Scene III, Line 85-89).*

This is also quoted in the Holy Bible (Mt. 22:27) as Jesus calls the Pharisees "the White-washed tombs".

When Jessica decides to elope with Lorenzo by leaving her father's house with money and jewellery in disguise, she talks about love. This quote still is used in many Tamil movies and proves that Shakespeare's philosophy on love is alive in usage.

*Jessica. But Love is blind and lovers cannot see  
The pretty follies that themselves commit;  
(Act II, Scene VI, Line 36-37).*

Shakespeare is narrating the condition of one's life after death. Whoever it may be, whether one is rich or poor, after death, all are equal. It is said in an astonishing way when the Prince of Morocco fails to choose the correct casket.

*Morocco. Gilded tombs do worms infold.  
(Act II, Scene VII, Line 68).*

The unpredictability of life is expressed by Shakespeare in a philosophical tone in the Act II when the servant informs about the arrival of Bassanio, a young Venetian.

*Servant. A day in April never came so sweet,  
To show how costly summer was at hand,  
(Act II, Scene IX, Line 94-95).*

Rebellion of one's own son or daughter for any reason, can be unbearable. It is revealed philosophically in Shylock's statement when he comes to know that her daughter has eloped.

*Shylock. My own flesh and blood to rebel!  
(Act II, Scene I, Line 30).*

Shakespeare philosophically says that the people in the world are always cheated by the outward appearance. It is

implied that learn to give a little importance to the outward appearance.

*Bassanio. So may the outward shows be least themselves:*

***The world is still deceived with ornament.***

*(Act III, Scene II, Line 74-75).*

When Antonio has lost his hope of living, philosophically utters his readiness to meet death woefully by saying that he is like a sick sheep in the herd waiting for death, the weakest fruit falls earliest to the ground and this is his fate. When something goes beyond our control, we accept that it is our fate and we have to face it. Early death is compared to the weakest kind of fruit which falls early before the period of maturing.

*Antonio. I am a tainted wether of the flock,*

***Meetest for death: the weakest kind of fruit***

***Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me:***

*(Act IV, Scene I, Line 114-116).*

In Thirukural, Thiruvalluvar has also said that in order to do a good thing, it is not wrong in telling lies. The same principle is uttered in Bassanio's speech when he wishes to make some changes in the law.

*Bassanio, To do a great right, do a little wrong,*

*(Act IV, Scene I, Line 214).*

Shylock is not willing to change his bond even though many plead in favour of Antonio. He stays stubborn and proudly says nobody's tongue has the power to change his mind. Shakespeare brilliantly frames a philosophy.

*Shylock. There is no power in the tongue of man*

*To alter me: I stay here on my bond.*

*(Act IV, Scene I, Line 240).*

As Jesus says in Matthew 5:14, "You are like light for the whole world", Shakespeare feels that if you do good deeds, you will shine in this world as if the light of a little candle travels.

*Portia. How far that little candle throws his beams!*

***So shines a good deed in a naughty world.***

*(Act V, Scene I, Line 90).*

Shakespeare has given great philosophy on 'power' and 'position'. A substitute cannot be a king though he feels that he gets respect from the people. Everyone should act according to their capability and their position as a crow cannot be a peacock. It is mentioned in this play that a usurper to the king may look as royal as the king, but only till the real king reappears. His glory vanishes as the water of a small stream vanishes into a great ocean.

*Portia. A substitute shines brightly as a king*

***Until a king be by, and then his state***

***Empties itself, as doth an island brook***

***Into the main of waters.*** *(Act V, Scene I, Line 93-96).*

Though Shakespeare is not regarded as a great philosophical authority, his thinking about life and death makes us to think him a philosopher. These philosophical ideas are still applicable at this age and it is true too. He ranges over the vast battle-ground in which human struggles with natural hindrance and in every field he sheds light.

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