



Shakespeare as a Dramatist

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Abstract:-

William Shakespeare occupies prominently unique position in world literature as one of the greatest dramatist. English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. The secret of his greatness as a dramatist lies in his understanding of stagecraft and his capacity for sensing the pulse of his audiences. The playgoers loved music, dance, songs, shouting and believed in the ghosts, witches and fairies as they were superstitious. Shakespeare's understanding of human psychology, human life and nature is amazing. His protagonists are all regulated and actuated by elemental human passion, common to mankind in every age and country. His characters thus become larger than life. Shakespeare's flexibility was marvelous. Indeed, he could adapt himself to most varied situations and create most varied effects perfectly. The audiences laugh at unforeseen accidents, they are delighted in seeing vanity mortified. Shakespeare was not only the world's immortal dramatist but also an immortal poet. He poetised the English drama. This poetry is prominently seen in his prolific application of poetic similes and metaphors and in his skilful manipulation of the music in the words. Shakespeare's characters are both-types and individuals. They have their own personal and individual peculiarities, but they also represent some particular class or profession. The dramatist obliterates his entire personality and keeps himself so much in the background that everything, every action, and every word appears to come not from him but from his creations. Shakespeare appears to be reporting the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He has not been prominently the advocate of anybody but rather the representative of all. The present paper attempts to explore Shakespeare as a dramatist, his greatness and his universal appeal. It also highlights his genius and stagecraft, his understanding of human psychology and sense of audience, his humor and his style and versification.

Keywords:- Shakespeare, dramatist, stagecraft, psychology, audience, humorist, versification.



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William Shakespeare occupies prominently unique position in world literature as one of the greatest dramatist. English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He has been often called England's national poet, and the Bard of Avon. His plays have been watched not only by the contemporary audiences but he has been loved and enjoyed during the last nearly four hundred years in all ages and countries. His plays are still taught in schools and colleges all over the English speaking world and public performances of his plays are frequent. Many of his plays have been filmed and the films have been box-office hits. Nevertheless, he is one of the greatest of literary plagiarists who according to the custom of the times, borrowed the themes freely from the plays already in existence and often simply reshaped ancient plays. Most of the plays are based upon Plutarch's Lives or other popular classical translations. The original was transformed beyond recognition, and the crude and the commonplace became a beautiful and wonderful. "Dry bones of history live once again in his pages; what was crude and prosaic in the works of others undergoes a sea-change in Shakespeare's hands, becomes a thing of perennial delight and glory. Genius and art worked in union, and we get objects of wonder which his plays continue to be."¹ His superiority lies in the combination of all the gifts which were scattered in the works of others. Of the thirty-six plays he has produced, no two are alike, nor do any two create the same impression. His flexibility was marvelous. His plays are so astonishingly multifarious in kind that no one theory fits them, and each of them must be studied separately. This diversity exists everywhere in his plays.

The secret of his greatness as a dramatist lies in his understanding of stagecraft and his capacity for sensing the pulse of his audiences. There were no curtains with pained scenery but he rose above this limitation by the passages of beautiful nature descriptions. These poetic passages glowing with the beauty of nature add to the fascination of his plays. Furthermore, there were no actresses, nonetheless, the dramatist overcomes this difficulty, by making his women characters take to masculine dress. Kissing and embracing could not be performed, so the dramatist avoids such situations very skillfully. Furthermore there were no drop-curtains, the stage had to be freed and preparations made for the next scene in front of the audience. However, Shakespeare did it skillfully. In the comedies a scene ends with the actors exiting singing and dancing, in the tragedies dead bodies



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are carried away by the actors while exiting the stage. Shakespeare was not only the master of stagecraft, he possessed uncanny sense of what the audience required and catered freely to their tastes. The clowns and the supernatural, music and dancing, much horse-play are introduced for the public taste. The crude is refined and made immensely superior and indeed, he did not write to his audiences but he educated and refined them. The spectators were crude and they visited the theatre either to have a good laugh at clown or to enjoy bloodshed and violent scenes. We find, therefore, the clown or fool appears frequently in his plays. The grave-diggers in Hamlet, the drunken porter in Macbeth, the clown in Othello are the concessions to the audience taste. “The audience craved for noise and outcry, hurry and bustle, pomp and show and pageantry, and Shakespeare’s plays invariably satisfy this demand. He entertained the spectators with unceasing movement, and a feast of colors, and the noise of trumpets and cannon and shouting, and endless song and dance. Sometimes, a whole scene is given over pageantry.”²

The playgoers loved music, dance, songs, shouting and believed in the ghosts, witches and fairies as they were superstitious. The average Elizabethan came to the theatre to have an escape from the sordid realities of life into a world of romance, and Shakespeare transports them, on the wings of his imagination, to the forest of Arden or the shores of Illyria, where there is no other business but that of love-making. A dramatist, like Shakespeare had to cater to the tastes of every section of society. Obviously, we find in his plays much that is sensational, melodramatic, crude and vulgar. Obscene jokes are frequent and the antics of the fool are also there to increase hilarious laughter from ‘the groundlings.’ As it was an age of increasing prosperity, nevertheless, medieval still persisted along with the modern. Women of the court enjoyed freedom and were cultured. But women were still regarded as property of their father and were not free to marry the men of their own choice.

Shakespeare’s understanding of human psychology, human life and nature is amazing. His protagonists are an extraordinary talented pieces of psycho-analysis or soul-dissection and they enlarge our knowledge and understanding of human nature. When we read his plays, we feel that under the given circumstances a man must act, and he will act, exactly as his actors are acting. “Shakespeare’s focus is not only on crafting characters, but on simulating their thought processes.



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This focus on process – that is, on how a character progresses in a line of thinking - is true of just about any Shakespeare play that you care to name, but it is especially true in the tragedies, in which the playwright seems unusually concerned with the internal generation - or rather degeneration- of his protagonists. We watch Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, in different ways, drive themselves mad. The narrative thread of each play concerns itself less with what each of them does, but rather with what each of them thinks. And in each of those plays, we trace the thought processes not only of protagonists, but also of other characters too: we understand the thought process by thinking through a character's thought processes. And in that process – we also come to think about ourselves.”³

His protagonists are all regulated and actuated by elemental human passion, common to mankind in every age and country. His characters thus become larger than life. The particular is thus imparted a universal, cosmic significance. Shakespeare's understanding of human psychology, human life and human nature is quite amazing. Indeed, we find gems of practical wisdom and philosophical truth throughout his works. This practical wisdom and philosophical truth are as valuable today as when they were written. We may go to him for moral truth and practical guidance in day to day affairs of life. His works are mines of Beauty, Wisdom, and Truth and so they can never grow stale. “Shakespeare not only mirrors life, he also tells us how best it should be lived. His plays are so many pieces of sane and penetrating ‘Criticism of Life’. He answers the questions “How to live?” which is a moral question. The dramatists vision is basically moral, and his morality is equally true for all ages and countries.”⁴

Shakespeare's flexibility was marvelous. Indeed, he could adapt himself to most varied situations and create most varied effects perfectly. This makes him not only one of the greatest tragic artists of the world, but also one of the greatest humorists in the English language. His humor is multifarious and often all-pervasive. The audience or play goers going to Elizabethan theatre like ‘The Globe,’ represented a cross-section of English society. Men and women of both the strata i.e. highest and lowest, came together in the public theatre. Here lies Shakespeare's genius. It is seen in the fact that he kept in mind the tastes and requirements of audiences belonging to widely different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, we find in him every shade and every kind of humor from the coarse, vulgar and obscene to the refined humor of the highest kind. There are crude farcical



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situations, antics of the fool, obscene sex-jokes, much punning for the benefit of the 'groundlings' but side by side there also goes on an entertaining exposure of human vanities and affectations. "In A Midsummer Night's Dream we find him making fun of the irrationality of love, in Twelfth Night it is the folly of sentimentalism that is exposed and ridiculed, in Much Ado About Nothing, there is a regular wit-combat, and the folly of shunning love and marriage-the other sex as a whole-invites the ridicule of our dramatist."⁵

The audiences laugh at unforeseen accidents, they are delighted in seeing vanity mortified. They are also filled with satisfaction at seeing an evil character meet with disaster. They are very happy by watching the plays and laughing at fools. Shakespeare not only creates laughter but also he often blends tragedy and pathos skillfully in his plays. In the tragedies, his humor serves to enliven the atmosphere of gloom to relieve tragic tension. Tears and smiles alternate in his plays as they do in life itself and in this respect he is more faithful to nature. In Hamlet he makes us laugh in the court of death and there is foolery of the clown to relieve the tragic tension near the close of Antony and Cleopatra. Such dramatic relief, instead of weakening the tragic effects, actually intensifies it. "Shakespeare is greater than the Greek masters, who did not permit any intermingling of the serious and the light. But Shakespeare, a student of man and his life as he was, knew that life is a mingled web of tears and smiles, of sorrows and joys, and so it is in his plays: he holds a, 'mirror to nature' in the true sense of the term."⁶

Shakespeare was not only the world's immortal dramatist but also an immortal poet. He poetised the English drama. This poetry is prominently seen in his prolific application of poetic similes and metaphors and in his skilful manipulation of the music in the words. He has complete mastery over verbal music. Fusion of the dramatic and the lyric in the art of Shakespeare is perfect. Truth and beauty are perfectly blended in his works. Beauty emerges as a result of his perfect style and versification emerges from the purity of the images. His blank verse is skillfully varied by the use of rhymed lines and by the cleverly modulated application of prose. "His style is truly dramatic, the classical law of 'decorum' is fully satisfied by the dramatist, who is the creator, in a way, of romantic drama, the natural drama of England."⁷



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Shakespeare, the first dramatist was also the first poet of his day and of all times. The passion of beauty which is the characteristic of the sonnet and causes the best of them to reach the watermark of beauty in English poetry attains in the plays a fine result. We find there has a diversity of mood and accent impossible to the sonnets. Shakespeare's nature style is incomparable, quotable and packed with thought and emotion. His apt use of words has been recognized and appreciated by all his critics. The words used by him are the best for his purpose. The thought which he wants to convey cannot be expressed so well in any other words. There is a wonderful correspondence between the poet's style and the individual mood, temper, motive, and habits of the characters as if the language caught the very grain and tincture of their minds. He is one of the most quotable of English writer. Memorable passages and lines abound in him. He is so quotable only because his style is the expression of well-digested thought. His imagination moves rapidly and his images crowd into his mind. Instead of fully forming a simile, he merely suggests it because his imagination moves so rapidly. His imagination has a pictorial quality and he was often dissatisfied with all that was colorless and abstract. We find his every word as a picture. He is also found as a painter of words and juggler of dramatic imagination.

Shakespeare's characters are both-types and individuals. They have their own personal and individual peculiarities, but they also represent some particular class or profession. Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and King Lear are highly individualized but they are also typical characters. Hamlet stands for the philosophizing temperament, Macbeth appears to be representing vaulting ambition, Othello stands for jealousy or as a man of action and King Lear is a pattern of intemperance. Similarly Benedict typifies power of wit, and Sir Andrew stupidity. Shakespeare's men and women are individuals but they are also the eternal representatives of humanity for all times. Shakespeare's characters have been well-adjusted to their environment. The dramatist obliterates his entire personality and keeps himself so much in the background that everything, every action, and every word appears to come not from him but from his creations. Every word is apt to the character and character to the word. Shakespeare has portrayed all shades, degrees of passion, still there is perfect correspondence between the individual and his passion. Romeo's expression of passion just before he swallows the poison, the jealousy of Othello, the love of Ferdinand and Miranda etc are all entirely in



character. “The subtle-souled psychologist”, that he was, he had a quick and sure insight into the internal workings of the human mind. He could enter inside a character and portray him from within his consciousness.”⁸ Shakespeare is furthermore wholly impartial and thoroughly objective in his art of characterization. Everyone among us have our own likes and dislikes and Shakespeare must have had his own. Notwithstanding, we may not find from his description that he favored or preferred some one character or type to the other. Edmund, Edgar, Desdemona are all portrayed with the same even-handedness. Shakespeare appears to be reporting the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He has not been prominently the advocate of anybody but rather the representative of all.

Conclusion:-

To sum up, it may be concluded that William Shakespeare as a dramatist was not of his time alone but of all times. His genius has layers within layers and every reading of his plays reveals entirely new beauties and new significances, and still it all remains a mystery to reveal new beauty and new significance of his plays. His understanding of human nature, human life and psychology is amazing as the human soul is laid bare in his plays. The human conflict under his hands becomes symbolic of the universal conflict of the Good and the Evil. So his characters have become larger than life. Throughout his works we have got truth and practical guidance in day to day affairs of life. His plays are mines of beauty, wisdom and truth and therefore they can never grow stale. Shakespeare not only mirrors our life, but also tells us how to live life in best possible way and in addition to that he provides answers to the riddles of life. His vision towards life is basically moral, and his morality is equally true for all times and for all nations.

Endnotes:-

1. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Macbeth: Shakespeare*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1987, p.21.
2. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Shakespeare: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Meerut: Rajhans Prakashan, 1992, p.20.
3. <https://evolution-institute.org>
4. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Macbeth: Shakespeare*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1987, p.24.
5. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Macbeth: Shakespeare*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1987, p.25.
6. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Shakespeare: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Meerut: Rajhans Prakashan, 1992, p.13.
7. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Macbeth: Shakespeare*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1987, p.26.
8. Dr. Tilak, Raghukul. *Macbeth: Shakespeare*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1987, p.30.