



SHAKESPEARE'S PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN LIFE REFLECTED IN HIS DRAMATIC POETRY

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ABSTRACT:

The present research paper 'Shakespeare's Philosophy of Human Life Reflected in his Dramatic poetry' intends to explore Shakespeare's views on human life which has the modern overtones though those poems belonged to the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The present paper considers Shakespeare two great dramatic poems: 1. All the World's A Stage' which occurs in his play 'As You Like It', and 2. 'The Lunatic, Lover and the poet' from Shakespeare's play 'Midsummer Night's Dream' The first poem 'All The World is a stage presents the similarity between the life of man with the play upon the stage. The second poem 'Lunatic, Lover and The Poet' shows the similarity between the imaginative ideas of the lunatic the lover and the madam. The deeper meaning of these poems show us a serious and truthful philosophy of human being which is



typically modern. The research method are interpretative, analytical and evaluative.

KEYWORDS :

Philosophy, Human life, Dramatic poetry, lunatic, imaginative ideas

INTRODUCTION:

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), was born on or about the 23rd April, 1564, at Stratford on - Avon, Warwickshire. He was educated at the free Grammar School at Stratford where he was taught Latin and arithmetic. While he never became a learned man, his few years at school thus

gave him a sound education as far as it went. In his 19th year he married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior, the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman of the neighboring village of Shottery. This marriage was hasty and ill-advised, and appears to have been unhappy. A few years after his marriage, he left Stratford about 1585 and arrived in London about 1586 to seek his fortunes and it was in London perhaps he became acquainted with Lord Southampton. He was probably engaged in

some subordinate capacity at one of the two theatres then existing in London, and afterwards became a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company of players. He remained in London upwards of twenty years after this, working hard, producing on an average a couple of plays a year, and growing steadily in fame and wealth. He became a shareholder in two of the leading theatres of the time, the Globe and the Black Friars, and purchased property in Stratford and London. He spent the concluding years of his life (1611-1616) mainly at Stratford. By this time Shakespeare's health had broken down completely, and he died on the 23rd April, 1616.

Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry consists of two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis*, and *Lucerne* and a sequence of 154 sonnets, the first 126 addressed to a man, the remainder referring to a woman. They purport to record a passionate history of disastrous love and broken friendship, but whether they deal with real or imaginary things is uncertain. The only certainty is that they contain in places the finest lyrical poetry of their time.

Shakespeare's dramatic work comprises 37 plays and his activity as a dramatist extended over some 24 years. His earliest work as a dramatist probably dates from 1591 and is to be found in the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*. They were followed by *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. His first effort in chronicle drama *Richard III*, and a single very youthful tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* were produced during 1594-95.

Then we have the period of his great comedies and chronicle plays between 1594-1600 - *Richard II*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV Parts I & II*, *Henry V*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As you Like it*, and *I Twelfth Night*. His work now becomes independent, and reveals immense development in power and technique. This period is followed by the period of the great tragedies, and of the bitter comedies between 1601 and 1608 during which he produced *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*. In this period all Shakespeare's powers - his dramatic power, his intellectual power and his power of expression-are at their highest. This is the time of his supreme masterpieces. During 1608-12 he wrote his later comedies or Dramatic Romances - *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* and they show the decline of Shakespeare's dramatic powers.

The most salient feature of his plays is their astonishing variety. He was supreme, not only as a dramatist, but also as a poet to whom the worlds of high imagination and delicate fancy were alike open. He possessed in a superlative degree the faculty of digesting thought into memorable and final phraseology. He had a unique command over the resources of the language. His plays are remarkable for their general truth to what is permanent in human nature. His plays contain many great poetical passages. He has, of course, his limitations and defects; but they are small things after all in comparison with those paramount qualities which have given him, the first place among the world's dramatists.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

This is a well-known passage from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. In this passage Shakespeare describes the seven ages of man from childhood to old age. Shakespeare starts by comparing the life of mankind with a play upon the stage. Just as players come on and go off the stage, so all men and women come into and leave the world. And in a man's life-time, he passes through seven ages or periods which may be compared to seven acts of a play. This passage is an example of the way the poet observes and thinks on life. We must remember that when Shakespeare wrote on the seven ages of man, he was describing what he had observed from the world and life of his time. In his days, young men of good family and sufficient wealth would spend the time, after their schooling was over, in learning the accomplishments and graces that were the mark of the gentleman, either at the royal court or in the household of great nobles. With time on their hands, they would have both opportunity and means to fall in love, to court young ladies and to indulge in romantic fancies. Round about the age of thirty, they would have grown a little more serious, and more ambitious, and would take up a soldier's life for the sake of fame, riches and

honour. And by the time they had reached well into middle age, they would have acquired an honorable position, such as that of a justice, a growing family, wisdom and experience, and they would have settled down well-satisfied with themselves and the world. This was Shakespeare's world and he has described it with gentle humour and with a sure touch, spotlighting just the essential characteristics of each age, that a man goes through. The following lines which describe the fifth stage in a man's life serve as the best example of Shakespeare's gentle humour :

“And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so. he plays his part.”

It is one of the half-dozen most quoted speeches in all Shakespeare. There is nothing more pictorial in effect in Shakespeare's plays than this passage. The seven pictures are drawn with extraordinary clearness and vivid force, and their subjects appeal to universal experience. 'The Seven Ages of Man' was an ancient conception and Shakespeare has exhibited it very brilliantly and impressively. The beauty and tenderness of the thought that life is a kind of drama with intermingling scenes of joy and sorrow, together with the justness of the sentiment, would have kept this forever in the public view.

THE LUNATIC, THE LOVER AND THE POET

This is a well-known passage from Shakespeare's play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' It is one of the often-quoted passages in all Shakespeare. Theseus, Duke of Athens and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus, have been discussing here the wonderful story of the adventures of the lovers. Theseus is a man of the world and hence scoffs at the idea of 'fairies', and puts it all down to the distorted fancies which afflict lovers. He says that lunatics, lovers, and poets are simply made up of imaginative ideas. Lovers and madmen have such boiling brains and shaping imaginations that they imagine and conceive things that the cool reason fails to understand. The lunatic, the lover and the poet are simply composed of imaginative ideas. It is therefore that the madman sees more devils than even the vast hell can hold. The lover too is quite frantic and wild and so he sees Helen's beauty in the face of an ugly gypsy. The poet's imagination creates strange imaginary creatures. By describing these ideas he calls into existence things which have no real being outside his own mind. He means that fabulous animals like dragons, and fictitious beings like fairies, originated in the excited brain and disordered imagination of some poet, who by describing them as if they really existed, handed them down as actual beings to a credulous posterity. The poets give particulars which enable us to picture their conceptions. 'The poet's pen gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name' is an oft-quoted line even while talking about Shakespeare's plays. His 'Illyria' in the Twelfth Night does not exist; but he gives it a concrete existence by giving minute particulars. Theseus further says that we can't conceive of an idea without attributing some cause to that idea — as for example, if we have good luck we attribute it to the fairies. The human imagination has a strong tendency towards personification when envisaging abstractions. In the same way, our imagination often distorts what we see to suit our pre-conceived opinions - as for example, the traveller passing through a wood at night imagines every bush to be a wild bear, ready to devour him. Theseus, who has a

rational viewpoint dismisses the lovers' tale as 'an antique fable or fairy toy thus, Theseus points out in the final scene of the play that the capacity, which the lover shares with the poet and the madman is a self-deluding imagination, which in his case takes the form of being able to 'see Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt'. The passage is a delicate piece of decoration which reveals Shakespeare's charm, originality and idea regarding the nature of love. Theseus here appears as the touchstone of maturity, reality and rational love and order.

CONCLUSION:

All the World's A Stage' which occurs in his play 'As You Like It', and 'The Lunatic, Lover and the poet' from Shakespeare's play 'Midsummer Night's Dream' The first poem 'All The World is a stage presents the similarity between the life of man with the play upon the stage. The second poem 'Lunatic, Lover and The Poet' shows the similarity between the imaginative ideas of the lunatic the lover and the madman.

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