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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.07.06>

SHAKESPEARE'S PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AS A SECONDARY ROLE IN HIS TRAGEDIES

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ABSTRACT

One of Shakespeare's greatest achievements is that he addressed every aspect of human experience in his plays. His plays capture the current state of affairs in both England and the rest of the globe. "The aptness of Ben Jonson's comments is undeniable." As long as humanity has existed, there have been debates over women's rights. Tragedies like Othello, Macbeth, and Hamlet, as well as comedies like Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, and The Taming of the Shrew, illustrate Shakespeare's female concerns. Protest against patriarchy is evident in these plays, which feature strong patriarchal dominance. Feminism may be a trendy new term, but the notion of gender equality has been around for millennia. Although Shakespeare cannot be considered a feminist today, he was, in fact, an admirer of human kind and a humanist in the truest meaning of the word. Furthermore, a writer can't totally avoid the impact of age and social context on his or her work. His plays reflect the current social and cultural climate in England. Because Othello was a Moor and Desdemona was a white lady, the play Othello deals with issues of race. There are several subplots in the play, but its central focus is on a lady having an affair. Desdemona's death is justified by Othello's claim that she was a victim of infidelity. As a patriarchal guardian, he talks with authority and authority. This shows Desdemona's free spirit and outspoken feminist position, when she chooses Othello as her spouse. But in the end, she is a victim of the brutal patriarchal society that she was raised in. Gertrude is shown as an unfaithful lady in Hamlet, and Hamlet generalises fragility as a universal characteristic of women. Lady Macbeth is portrayed in Macbeth as a sexually depraved lady with terrible desires and a brutality that is unimaginable. This, on the other hand, may be seen as evidence that males, not women, are predisposed to cruelty. The inversion of gender roles shows Shakespeare's devotion to feminist issues above Patriarchal ones. Shakespeare's comedies challenge traditional gender roles. Throughout As You Like It, Rosalind is shown as an outspoken and clever character. Throughout The Merchant of Venice, Portia's legal arguments are very rational and well-thought out. In Shakespeare's comedies, he defies the boundaries of gender and race. This exemplifies his liberal humanism worldview.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Hamlet, Gertrude, Ophelia, Women, Feminist Criticism, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

From Renaissance to Enlightenment, there was a significant change in the way people spoke about and treated women. There have been intellectuals, authors, poets and social activists who have championed and preached gender equality and passionately rebelled against the patriarchal worldview in numerous cultures and nations. Humanism, a philosophy that emphasises the importance of putting people first, was a hallmark of the Renaissance period. For the first time, this-worldly philosophy superseded other-worldly thought in Shakespeare's Hamlet. This man, how sublime in understanding, how limitless in capacities, how expressive and wonderful in movement, how much like an angel of perception is a piece of work, says Shakespeare's Hamlet. It's like you're a god."

Individuals and life on Earth are the centre of humanism, which is both an intellectual and social philosophy. Life and culture were centred on the church and religion in the past. The church's influence started to wane in the 14th century. Humanism had its start as a reaction to this deterioration. People were no longer interested in saints, gods, or religious rites....

They started to pay closer attention to what was going on around them and how they were living their lives right now. During the Renaissance, there was a lot of advancement in material and scientific advancement. For this reason, feminism was championed by Renaissance and Enlightenment-era humanists since the emphasis on man naturally included all people, male and female.

The term "feminism" refers to the belief in gender parity as a foundation for the defence of women's rights. Humanism denies the supernatural and concentrates on the joys and achievements of this world. An emphasis is placed on the need of having a sensible outlook on life and environment. In the humanist philosophy, there is no distinction between men and women; instead, it is based on the idea of man as a whole. The Western European Renaissance lasted from the 14th century to the end of the 17th century. The focus on the individual was a resurgence of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. New continents were discovered, feudalism was abolished, and the printing press was invented during this period. Recapture of Jerusalem by Christian forces during the Crusades was



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a major contributing element. One-third of England's population was decimated by the Bucolic plague, which left many doubting the existence of God and the church's capacity to cope with the Holocaust.

During the Renaissance, humanism emphasised the individual and elevated him to a position of universal importance. The human mind was shrouded in ignorance and superstition throughout the Middle Ages. Knowledge and insight shone brightly in people's minds during this time period when the curtain of ignorance was lifted. Throughout Europe, the 16th century was a time of great social change and awakening. The Renaissance began in Italy and spread to England, converting the country into a more individualistic, secular, and urban culture. The development of education ushered in a new age of knowledge, one that included the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature. Spenser, Marlow, Shakespeare, and Milton are just a few of the literary greats to emerge from this age.

Many humanists and protestant reformers during this time period were concerned about the plight of women and their issues. Men and women alike should be educated, according to the humanists. "Women supplied the English Renaissance with a fertile subject for attack and defence," according to a statement from the Renaissance Society. (M.C. Manus4).

The Renaissance's greatest accomplishment was the concept of 'self-knowledge.' A person's difficulties may be solved through learning, according to Erasmus and Thomas More. They firmly felt that only through education could all people be set free. They also believed that women were equal to men in terms of their capacities. For Erasmus, reason was connected with masculinity and irrationality with females, according to the Western culture's belief system.

In Utopia, Thomas More slammed Europe for its religious intolerance. For a long time, women's quiet was lauded as a virtue that contributed to their domestic success. Because quiet doesn't signify submission, it's a kind of repression, women's eloquence would make them better spouses, according to More. More argued that gaining an education would provide women more spiritual and moral autonomy.

Her knowledge allows her to give the husband with not just a respite from the stresses of the world, but also a remedy to those stresses via her husband's acquiescence to her intelligent viewpoints.

John Calvin, a Protestant reformer, advocated education for everyone, regardless of gender. However, for Martin Luther, the only virtue was silence. He was a staunch supporter of the idea that marriage was a divinely-ordained institution. Celibacy, he reasoned, was a waste of time since it would only exacerbate societal unrest. Many protestant theologians, on the other hand, thought that women were destined by nature to stay at home and take care of the family, including giving birth and raising children. Women were largely responsible for having children and raising them, and marriage was primarily for this purpose.

As a rule, literature is an accurate depiction of the time period in which it was written. One of Shakespeare's greatest achievements is that he addressed every aspect of human experience in his plays. Everything from their views toward him to their worries and concerns were handled by him. There are many ways in which his opinions on many topics mirror those of his day. No writer is immune to the sway of his or her own time, place, and culture. A brilliant writer, on the other hand, is always looking for fresh ways to think. Dispassionate observation of diverse aspects of life and society is what makes Shakespeare's plays universally and eternally appealing. When it comes to love and marriage in his plays, Shakespeare reflected his own thoughts as well as those of his day. His plays depict patriarchal rule and the beginnings of dissent against it. Shakespeare is not a feminist in the current sense, but his humanist position makes him an advocate for gender equality in the long run.

For women in Elizabethan England, the ideal lady was a woman who was quiet, good, dedicated, and celibate. As a result of their upbringing, they are excellent housewives and mothers. When it comes to Greek literature, women were seen as subordinates who relied on males for everything from dad to spouse to sons. "Apolitical" was how they were characterised (stone, 1990:71) Juvenal, a Roman poet, was known for his attacks on women. Anti-feminist sentiments may be found throughout the Bible. Consequently, women were seen as a source of temptation, adultery, and the demise of man. As a result of reformation, marriage became the only social order that allowed men to earn a living while women were forced to bear children and care for them. As his wife, she was supposed to keep her mouth shut and obey him at all times. This was not the case with eloquent women.

Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (2002) by Juliet Dusinbere claims that feminist militancy began during the Elizabethan era when women protested patriarchy and male domination by dressing as men. William Shakespeare predicted the rise of feminism, and he sided with gender equality in his works. "William Shakespeare: Patriarchal Faces VsFeminist Faces" by Sabrina



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Zerar (2010) states that Shakespeare's equivocal stance about gender and gender prejudice may be seen in his works. Because he was writing for a modern audience, he was unable to make an overt attack on patriarchal dominance in the media. There are, however, signs of opposition to the dominance of males over women. As we go from his tragedies to his comedies, we see a significant change in his views on women. According to Linda Bamber, in Shakespeare, the self (man) is privileged in tragedy and the other (woman) is privileged in comedy. ' (Bamber,6). Shakespeare was unable to avoid paradoxes since he was both timeless and emblematic of his period at the same time.

Every human being has been subjected to patriarchal oppression and dominance at some point in time. Nature, rather than society, is thought to be the cause of the disparity in power between men and women. Slowly and surely, the attitude toward women started to shift as the result of scientific discoveries and political changes. One of these rising sympathisers or feminists in contemporary terms is Shakespeare.

When Shakespeare was writing his plays, Queen Elizabeth was in charge of England, and she proved that a woman could handle political and governmental matters just as well as an individual male. Nonetheless, patriarchy was widely accepted. As a result, women were subjected to numerous forms of oppression. Many people realised that many women were intellectually and spiritually superior to their husbands. Despite this, women were mostly shut out of both public and private life. They were unable to exercise their right to vote or participate in other forms of civic engagement related to politics and society. As a result, they were relegated to the tasks of mother, nurse, chef, and housewife. Law, custom, and religious authority all reinforced these long-established roles. The dominance of males rested on the ignorance of women, as Patricia Crawford correctly points out (Crawford,228). There are strong female characters throughout Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies that illustrate women have always been equal to men. While they may not have had political clout, they were no less clever or daring than their male colleagues, who they looked up to. It is not uncommon for males to be affected by women, even in societies where men predominate. Their inner strength, intellect, rationality and pragmatic response to life's challenges are all on exhibit in Shakespeare's great female characters. Several female characters, such as those in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Beatrice*, *Juliet*, *Viola*, and *Hermia* in Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies, may be used as examples of strong women.

Originally from Belmont, Portia was a wealthy heiress. She was a desirable target for suitors and husband-hunters because of her wealth and beauty. Applicants from all around the world gathered to try their luck. A will and a strategy for finding her the proper spouse were both left by her father, who had passed away. Her father influenced her choice of a marriage even from the afterlife. As if it wasn't bad enough for Portia, she tells Nerissa, "O me, the word "Choice"! I have no choice except to accept or reject everyone. Similarly, the will of a live daughter is stifled by the will of a deceased one. Isn't it difficult, Nerissa, that I'm unable to say no to any of them?"

She makes a quiet protest, even though she is unable to pick her spouse. Shakespeare expresses a feminism that is conveyed in this subtle protest by Shakespeare. At heart, he believed that women should be able to pick the men in their lives, as well as the jobs they pursue. Portia has a well-developed intellect and a logical approach to life. Antonio's life and her marriage are saved by her. Balthazar's work as a lawyer demonstrates her ability to argue and her knowledge. That kindness is more important than justice is her message to Shylock the Jew. Mercy blesses both the giver and the receiver.

Despite her affection for her father, Cordelia tells him that she does not love him as a daughter should in *King Lear*. This infuriates him to the point of expelling him from the kingdom. Finally, he is imprisoned in the dungeon by his other two daughters, who have rejected him and given him all of his possessions. A father-daughter relationship is seen as Cordelia assists her father. Wisdom, independence and clarity of thought are all on exhibit in her demeanour. She switches from being a daughter to becoming a mother, reversing roles. Even though she cannot recognise him in his condition of craziness, she accepts his apology for banishing her and cares for him like she would a child. In spite of the play's devastating ending, however, Edmund imprisons Lear and hangs Cordelia.

Hermia is a strong, self-reliant lady in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To force her to wed Demetrius instead of her true love Lysander, her father Egeus brings her to court. In the event she disobeyed her father, she would face the death penalty. That her soul "consents not to grant sovereignty" of itself to anybody even the ruler of the realm, Hermia informs Theseus and her father without adopting an aggressive posture. These remarks show her audacity and freedom of expression. A woman's self-awareness may be seen in her capacity to express herself so clearly. Society holds them to certain standards; they are aware of them, but they are also aware of their own thoughts.



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It's safe to say that Rosalind from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is the most strong and independent woman in the play. She directs the play's events and arranges four weddings, one of which is to herself. In masquerade as a male, she persuades Orlando to fall in love with her in the Arden Forest. Orlando's sentimentality and emotional outbursts are under control thanks to her constant reminders to him that love is fleeting and fleeting. Her masculine identity is discarded at the end to remind everyone that she is an actress, not a woman. Gender equality is envisioned in the future by Shakespeare in this scene.

Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is a daring, clever, and attractive character. This character refuses to follow Benedick's overbearing behaviour because she believes that she is just as capable.

To get a job serving the Duke, Viola disguises herself as a male in *Twelfth Night*. Her fortitude in the face of adversity and ability to change with the times reveal her inner strength. Baptista's younger daughter, Bianca, appears in *The Taming of the Shrew* as a secondary character. That Kate is a mean-spirited sibling. She's got a lot of suitors out there. He eventually proposed marriage, and she accepted, because of her gentle temper and independent spirit. A woman's right to pick her spouse on the basis of love and not on the basis of arranged marriage is a common issue in Shakespearean works.

The tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet is a well-known one. Romeo, the young man from an opposing family, falls in love with the stunningly beautiful Juliet. At fourteen, she was the sole daughter of the Capulets. She exudes sweetness and innocence. When she finds true love, she transforms into a confident, fearless person. Even at the tender age of fourteen, love helps her evolve as a person. Juliet is a powerful symbol of intense passion and emotional intensity. Throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, we see the power of a woman who rises beyond her social class, race, and creed. According to Shakespeare, a woman's life is defined by her love for another person.

Young, naïve, and innocent, Ophelia is Hamlet's Ophelia. In Claudius' court, she is the daughter of Lord Chamberlain Polonius. She was nurtured by her father, who instilled in her the virtues of submission, meekness, and virginity. She had no choice but to go along with what her father wanted her to do. Laertes, her older brother, often chastised her for spending time with Hamlet. When her father and brother command her to stay away from the Danish prince, Ophelia does just that. Polonius is worried about Hamlet's behaviour toward his daughter, Ophelia. Ophelia is split between her father and her lover Hamlet, and she suffers as a result. She goes insane and ends up drowning in a brook. When she dies, she is the victim of patriarchal dominance.

Because Othello was a moor and Desdemona was a white lady, Othello is a tragedy that deals with issues of race. After meeting Othello, she falls head over herself in love with him. Her father was a Venetian senator named Brabantio, and she is his only child. When she speaks about her love for Othello, she seems humble and hesitant, but her confidence grows when she denies that Othello had seduced her. "I see here a conflict of interest," she tells her father. "I owe my whole future — my health, my happiness, and my capacity to learn — to you. I've learned a lot from both my life and my schooling. As the Lord of Duties, I don't know how to treat you with respect. I'm here in front of your daughter. Then there's my spouse, and he's got the same amount of responsibility as my show'd Due to the Moor, My Lord, I challenge myself to say that she chose you over her father. (1.3.194-203).

These qualities are on display throughout Desdemona's speech, which reveals her independence and rebelliousness. Love for Othello gives her courage and a strong sense of self-confidence. A jealous Othello strangles her to death because he suspects her of cheating on him. She dies a courageous death to establish her innocence and purity in the face of death. Fatherly dominance and husbandly jealousy are only two examples of the patriarchal system's harshness against its female members.

Although Shakespeare never claimed to be a feminist in the contemporary sense, his worries about women show a dispassionate assessment of the world's duties for women. William Shakespeare had a deep respect for women's abilities and values. As a result, he was well aware of the fact that, despite the fact that they were afflicted by these vices, they did not overtly battle against them. Shakespeare's humanitarian outlook makes him sympathetic to the plight of women who express it via literature.

CONCLUSION

Gertrude and Ophelia are the main female characters in *Hamlet*, and accordingly the main ladies to concentrate on to look at Shakespeare's portrayal of ladies. Deconstruction is essential to decipher the play according to a women's activist perspective. Both Ophelia and Gertrude are both unreasonable however levelheaded, feeble yet solid, subordinate yet free. Writing overall was composed and deciphered according to a male perspective, and *Hamlet* is an illustration of such a text. At the point when found in this light, Gertrude is preferably a mother and a spouse over a decision Queen. The attention is principally on her double-crossing and her decision to wed the King's killer. As per Cavendish (Rackin 72), numerous ladies say that they can relate to the ladies in the play and



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that Shakespeare had the option to compose as though he was a lady himself. To comprehend Gertrude, one must glance at her situation as a mother, right off the bat. A mother's liability is to secure and deal with her youngsters, in the Elizabethan time when ladies had little property. Gertrude should consequently keep Hamlet from making something absurd, that is to say, to denounce Claudius freely for killing the previous King. To safeguard Hamlet, she impugned him as frantic. Likewise, nobody trusted his allegations, and he was not rebuffed. Besides, Gertrude permitted Hamlet to disgrace her and affront her, without protecting herself. She could appear to be a feeble and close to home person, however she had objective purposes behind her way of behaving and responses. To save Hamlet's standing and to forestall bedlam in the state, she had to seem to be a blockhead who was controlled by Claudius. Notwithstanding, to additionally comprehend her personality, one must likewise view at her situation as Queen. The fundamental power is many times the King. He is the person who safeguards and keeps up with the country. Be that as it may, in this situation, the King is nonsensical and risky for the state. His decisions and activities will hurt the security of the country. Subsequently, Gertrude should have the option to act and think reasonably and pursue choices that favor the state. As Hamlet and Claudius do, Gertrude can't allow her feelings to obstruct her job as Queen. The genuine battle is, be that as it may, to certainly lead both Hamlet and Claudius in the correct heading to go with normal choices, and not expressly show her expectations.

Ophelia is depicted as a commonly feeble and inactive person. Her job isn't autonomous, and in each scene, she is connected with another person. In her most memorable entry, she is with her sibling who tells her to distrust Hamlet's warm gestures. Also, she is with her dad who submits to her to avoid Hamlet. Besides, her job is simply vital to help Hamlet's job. She is a decent instrument to persuade everybody that he is frantic, by dismissing and offending her. Maybe when she ended it all, she was autonomous and could choose for herself. Then again, her self destruction is said, by different characters, to happen in light of her dad's passing, the deficiency of Hamlet and her sibling's nonattendance. It shows that Ophelia should have motivation to help other people to live. She could appear to be unreasonable and profound when she follows her cravings to accompany Hamlet and ending it all, however it isn't too unusual. At the point when one is a one's dismissed and disgraced by a darling dad, it is simply sane and typical to respond as Ophelia does. It would presumably be unusual on the off chance that she didn't respond firmly, regardless of whether that would be the most prideful thing to do. Since Shakespeare just remembered two female characters for the play, it very well may be deciphered that these ladies are mean a lot to the plot. At the principal view, be that as it may, Ophelia and Gertrude could appear to be uninvolved and irrelevant, however they contribute significantly to the male characters' choices. Gertrude attempts to control Hamlet and Claudius from killing each other (despite the fact that she comes up short), and Ophelia gives the plot profundity by showing one more side of Hamlet. As of now, writing was much of the time composed and read according to a male perspective, which may be the justification for why Ophelia and Gertrude were not focused; despite the fact that their characters were significant. Despite the fact that the two of them kicked the bucket, it could have been a demonstration of freedom. Did Gertrude purposefully drink from the harmed cup to commit suicide, since she anticipated the confusion that followed? Did Ophelia purposefully end it all to show her solidarity to choose for herself? They could have been mishaps however they should have been suicides to give the play profundity and represent independence. By the by, Shakespeare's portrayal of people in the public eye is yet discussable and appealing today, and this is one reason why Hamlet is as yet applicable today.

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