

# A Study of Shakespeare's Dramas

## Abstract

The present paper gives information about Shakespearean drama. The paper basically talks about Shakespearean histories, romantic comedies, tragedies and a general view on Shakespeare works. Besides it, this paper focuses on this fact that how an ordinary person like, Shakespeare could become a world renowned dramatist

**Keywords:** Tragedies, Comedies, Romantic Comedies, Dramas, Periods.

## Introduction

The eras in English literature are not water tight compartments but some legendaries influence their periods exemplary and periods are called after their names like Elizabethan age was the age of Shakespeare and it was known by his name as he was the prime poet and dramatist of that age. The queen Elizabethan had given him the title of 'Bard'. He was not court poet like John Lyly but his works made himself self-styled court poet. He had ruled over English people's mind and heart for many years.

## Aim of the Study

Shakespeare aroused awareness in people about drama. His dramas are dramas of actions except Hamlet. He taught neither philosophy nor shower sermons to people but he made audiences an active part of drama. Every people whosoever was in the theatres considered hero, villain etc in plays. Through this paper we will study Shakespeare as a dramatist in general and his contribution in particular.

When the drama genre was thriving under Marlowe guardianship, who was the rising star of the era, that time, Shakespeare joined the group. The day he laid his foot into theatrical world many of his predecessors began to surrender before him their claim over stage world. Even Marlowe who was at elevated place too began to scare of his entry, as Shakespeare was more innovative and energetic than him. He too insisted that mediocre writers like contemporaries could not survive the onslaught of his entry into literary world and might have felt disgrace in the hands of new comer. Greene, a renowned play writer like, Marlowe too about to say goodbye to playwriting suggesting others to do same as he evinced a bright future of Shakespeare, whereas before leaving the stage he spewed out poisonous remarks on Shakespeare by saying like this in (1590) 'there is an upstart Crowe beautiful with our feathers'<sup>1</sup>(411).

Shakespeare earned applause for himself by dint of his broad vision and strenuous efforts. He not only hoisted the flag of victory in drama writing but he won exaltation for his poetry too, some intellectuals believe Shakespeare became one of the leading dramatist of Elizabethan age or he reached top level in rank because some of the dramatists had attained the age of superannuation and rest had been passed away in that era. These two factors gave an immense jolt to his career. Shakespeare had been alone ruling over the throne of English drama till 1593 when Anthony Munday, a rival somewhat stole away some popularity from him but whatever work he produced were not comparable to Shakespeare. The career of Shakespeare as a dramatist comprised entire 36 years at a stretch. He produced play after play but the beginning of his inning in drama began as tutelage to him. The first part he commenced with historical plays like Julius Caesar, one tragedy Romeo and Juliet, a comedy Mid Summer Nights dream. In these plays he showed his apprenticeship that further groomed his art of writing. Shakespeare worked on national history of England. He cited original indigenous themes from English history. He presented English history from 1200 to 1550. These plays gave a whole regime of 350 years of England, from that period he sketched Bolingbroke dethroned, Richard II arose of Lancastrian dynasty, bloody history of war of roses and the shining glory of Elizabethan period. The people of England admired shrewdness of Shakespeare because he had revealed them their historical figures or legendary heroes. The depiction of national characters on stage clarified one thing that Shakespeare himself had seen those religious and biblical plays which

## Geeta Lakhotra

Assistant Professor,  
Deptt.of English,  
GGN Science College,  
Canal Road, Jammu

were being played by guilds in the 14 and 15 century in England. Ben Jonson praised Shakespeare for his historical plays he said: Shakespeare wanted Art<sup>2</sup> His another play Richard II is a sort of imitation of Marlowe's play Edward like Marlowe's play Shakespeare made a hero more prominent who crushed humanity and inclined to bring hell on earth. No doubt the characters of Marlowe Edward resemble Richard, to some extent but Shakespeare had introduced some new shades in him which Edward lacked. The latter plays of Shakespeare which published in form of trilogy like King John, Henry IV were his own creation. He had not written these plays being in any inspiration from any quarter but most probably he drew some events, incidences and characters from the history of England. In these dramas Shakespeare was not imitator but he sensitized every issue of the society and gave a sound Voice to the people's mood. Through these dramatic presentations; Shakespeare had kindled the spirit of patriotism among his countryman. Shakespeare was the profounder of many new techniques and he also developed new modes in the art of drama writing, moreover whatever he had developed he first promoted in his works. Like, he mingled comedy with tragedy, ending with anti-climax and much more. By placing these components in his plays he altogether threw the unities of the drama into air. It is true he confronted some criticism for doing it but he faced controversies bravely and carried on following his own procedures in drama writing. More importantly he was being criticised harshly when Sidney's defence of poesies came out in 1599. This piece of work was enough to abdicate him from his place but he kept all the distraction away and passed over them without giving them much attention unlike Shakespeare Ben Jonson became pet to everyone as he carried out all the laid down rules for drama writing, so many of the erstwhile writers believed Ben Jonson was a writer of brain not of heart where as Shakespeare was a writer of heart not of brain. Ben Jonson was inspired by Shakespeare, he himself admitted that Shakespeare was a well of inspiration so his works were not works of an age but his works belong to all ages. Even on Shakespeare he wrote a line "Shakespeare is not of one age but of all ages"<sup>3</sup> (194).

Shakespeare produced "Romeo and Juliet" in 1602. This drama starts in relax atmosphere which ends on a tragic gloomy note. In spite of its gloomy catastrophe the presence of Juliet nurse in play provides a relief to audience. The nurse plays a comic role. The success of 'Romeo and Juliet' on stage added one more feather in his cap. No sooner had the drama act on stage than it became an instant sensation. Shakespeare enjoyed its success and set his mind to produce another plays on same paradigms. As he committed onto produce plays of same motif as he produced earlier, had not looked behind and brought out the "Troilus and Cressida". These plays were so admirable that, they did not keep the public away from them for longer time. Shakespeare was dramatist as well as stage actor, he was well acquainted with both the world. His

familiarity and acolytes did not save him from vituperative criticism he bore the brunt of criticism. His misfortunes did not come to an end with that criticism but it slowly and slowly seeped into his personal life he lost his father, beloved and patron who financed him to buy theatre. Above all he had been trapped himself in political controversies too. Some events had affected him in such a manner that he brought them in to his play "Julius and Caesar". This work was centered on popular political turmoil of England. Shakespeare was not narrow minded person. He encouraged his fellow dramatists with whom he shared his thoughts with them, providing them guidelines on drama writing but on one thing he was much cleared and never denied that, he had learned many new things from his fellow dramatists that he used them exclusively in his latter plays. He learned how to convert a tragic play into comedy, comic timing, introduction of timorous, characterization of bloodshed scenes in drama.

Shakespeare was a follower of Greek dramatist Seneca so he created plays under his influence but after putting some fantastic scenes in them. He produced play on revenge motif along with it he inducted reconciliation and redemption in his plays which was not part of Seneca plays. He used violence bloodshed revenge in plays like hamlet. In this play Shakespeare picturization of the scene of destruction, humanity at low ebb etc but he had created with artistically beauty not vulgarity. Suppose play 'Macbeth' he exposed the growing ambition and greed of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, how these two prologonists got himself in trouble which claimed their lives in the end. The other play "Kings Lear" told the tale of a mad man who lost his capacity to think in the intoxication of power with pelf. The king Lear, a warrior had gone mad when his two daughters refused him to keep him on his proviso in their kingdoms. This play teaches a universal truth i.e. the blind faith and oily tongue of sycophants take anyone to near his/her disaster. Same is the case of Othello, an army general lost his mind and killed his wife Desdemona under instigation of Ego. Villain character. Othello loved his wife and in love he made himself her god; at the same time villain Ego made a plan to take revenge against him so he took most benefit of Othello's jealousy nature and used his envy against Desdemona and uttered lie about her, Othello behaved aggressively he didn't feel a need to find out the intention of his wife. Desdemona, on other hand representation of that womanhood who is submissive, docile and meek never hesitant to sacrifice life for her husband.

The much-hype play of Shakespeare was 'Hamlet'. The play hamlet lacks action and it is play of mind's sensitivity. Hamlet is a prince of Denmark wanted to punish the killer of his father but he doesn't want to lay his hand on them. He became lunatic and endeavoured to seek the answer of his 'to be or not to be' many critics believe this play is an artistic failure or debacle because it does not resolve the problem of hamlet.

Shakespeare contributed a lot in the field of comedy. His comedy is called as romantic comedy.

Why his comedy is romantic and why he had been carried the designation Of romantic comedy writer with him entire his career. He was first romantic comedy writer in England and he was the dramatist who originate this form of comedy. He had incorporated the romantic world with real life situation. These comedies are As you like it, Twelfth night, the merchant of Venice. These plays are store house of fancy imaginative, utopian world where everyone lives in their own nestles, making their illusionary web of dreams and so on... but on one attribution he add unique trait in these romantic comedies i.e. the women character are more predominated rather than males counterparts. The women like Rosalind, Celia in twelfth night are finest examples of womanhood and their presence in plays diminished the importance of male characters. These two woman characters carry the play on their shoulders and made it one of the most unforgettable play in the history, love is the main theme, every character is in love, one fall in love, other making plan to meet their lovers, they play music recitation love poems, fools pay visit to their masters mistress and some try to find their love in their mistress eyes. Goethe, an ancient philosopher gave a significant witty version on human life i.e. human life is a tale told in tears and smile<sup>4</sup> (186). This proverb entirely applicable to Shakespeare comedies as well as to tragedies.

#### **Last Plays and Death [1608-1616]**

Shakespeare followed everything in his plays whatever he felt a need to follow but as he came of age of maturity he discarded violence, revenge etc in his plays. In place of these things he introduced many new techniques which not only dragged his career further but also sent him at some more elevated place. The plays are pericles, Cymbeline, the winter's tale and the tempest. These dramas were typical representation of his accomplishment as a drama writer. He left no stone unturned to prove his efficiency in dramatic world. In these works he depicted love, friendship, jilters, blood bonds, finally reconciliation and redemption. The plays tempest gives a glimpses of family feud between two brothers, love of Meridand and Feridnand, slavery of aerial-inhabitant of deserted island, presence of supernatural powers and so on but towards the end whatever pain they had been inflicted on each other,

repented over and resolve the issues on note of reconciliation. The message Shakespeare wished to convey his reader that hatred could be done away with love, friendship and redemptions. After bringing out these plays Shakespeare decided to retire in his own place where he born. Every play writer who had come after him regarded him an icon and even after his death they published folio 1623 of his plays. That step of them had been applauded by all.

Shakespeare plays are too genius, too imaginative and too easy to comprehend but lack philosophy. His plays have universal appeal. Milton respected Shakespeare by eulogising him these remarks; Shakespeare Fancy child' <sup>5</sup>[427]. Milton believes Shakespeare plays took reader to the world of fancy and dreams but these plays contain no philosophy and give nothing to learn. Despite Shakespeare somewhere had been scattered his philosophy through the mouthpiece of his characters. One of the characters Fool in King Lear gave out few philosophical lines like;

It is ten o' clock

This may we see, quote he how the world wage  
Tis but an hour ago since it was nine  
And after one hour more will be eleven  
And so from hour to hour, we rot and rot  
And thereby hangs a tale.

#### **Conclusion**

Shakespeare worked a lot and gave new dimension to world for drama writing, he has enriched the world with his knowledge of drama writing. IT IS Shakespeare who made drama a national event in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If ever the name of drama comes anywhere the name of Shakespeare would definitely comes first.

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