



The concept of forgiveness and freedom - with reference to William Shakespeare's play 'The Tempest'

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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare, the great literary artist, stand unique in English literature. No other writer has received such universal recognition and fame as Shakespeare. He is the monarch of mankind. His poetic talents and dramatic craftsmanship are remarkable. He has brought in different characters in his play from kings to peasants. It is Shakespeare's unique distinction that he has an absolute command over all the complexities of thought and feeling that prompt to action and bring out the dividing line of character. In this paper Shakespeare's famous play 'The Tempest' is taken for study. The plots and sub plots in the drama show different concepts. Among them the concept of forgiveness and freedom is considered in this paper. This paper deals with the characters in the play and the style and diction used by Shakespeare in the play. The actions of Ariel can be compared to the actions mentioned by the great Tamil poet Subramaniya Bharathiyar regarding the breeze and storm.

(Key words – freedom, forgiveness, liberty, slavery, music, diction, concept)

Introduction

'The Tempest' is a picture of freedom and forgiveness, of love and generosity, of service and obedience and also of selfishness and meanness. Forgiveness and freedom are the main ideas. The idea of freedom is based upon service. The different characters, the plots and sub plots introduced by William Shakespeare in the play stand for different concepts.

Freedom and forgiveness

Ariel longs for freedom but Prospero tells him repeatedly that without performing all the tasks that he would ask him to complete Ariel, would not be set free. Prospero means to say that in this world of co-existence and co-operation, everybody has to serve others before he claim to enjoy any kind of liberty. According to Prospero, freedom without service would

mean nothing but selfishness and tyranny, exploitation and cruelty. Ariel being a refined creature understands the full significance of freedom and that is why he gladly performs all the tasks given by Prospero and then he waits for his freedom. But what a contrast lies between Ariel and Caliban. Caliban being of Earth and earthy, regards service as a slavery, and that is why he grudges to serve Prospero. Caliban's conception of liberty or freedom is selfish enjoyment of all things without doing anything in return of all such enjoyments.

So far as the idea of forgiveness is concerned, one can find it richly illustrated in the behavior of Prospero. Prospero, in the beginning of the play, seems very much enraged at the injury or treachery that has been done to him by his own brother in league with Sebastian and Alonso, and finally scatters all the people of Alonso in the various corners of the island of which Prospero is the master. In the beginning, Prospero seems rude and unkind even to Ferdinand who has done no wrong to him. But then, when he has sufficiently punished his enemies by starving them, by distracting their minds and torturing them with all sorts of bodily pains, he feels pity for them, particularly because he finds them repentant at heart. Prospero, the pardoner, implores pardon.

Prospero also stands for the universe. It can be considered that he also stands for omnipotent God. Prospero's art – to make and unmake things like creates the storm, wrecks the ship, scatters all the passengers of the ship, punishes them with horrid sights and sounds and reunites them again in order to show them that God is just, kind forgiving and loving to all – the good and the evil.

Repentance, reconciliation and forgiveness are clearly revealed in the play 'The Tempest'. Prospero says "The rarer action is in Virtue than in vengeance"

'The Tempest' conveys sound moral lessons like a morality play. Forgiveness and freedom are its key notes. Prospero is the embodiment of pardon and freedom. Prospero knew the magic powers. He was able to bring winds and waves under his control. But he used his magic and mysterious power only for truth and right. He did not crush anybody using his magic powers.

The character of Miranda stands for innocence and simplicity. Miranda's words, gestures and conduct were all like primitive woman. There was no insincerity or hypocrisy in her. Miranda was child of nature and she is of soft heartedness. Both Ferdinand and Miranda, like Ariel, fully appreciate the spirit of service, and that is why Ferdinand says to Miranda "The very instant that I saw you, did, My heart fly to your service; there resides, To make me slave to it; and for your sake, Am I this patient log-man" And Miranda also speaks to Ferdinand in the same strain: "I am your wife, if you will marry me ;If not, I will die your

maid; to be your fellow, You may deny me; but I will be your servant, Whether you will or no.”

Ariel, as the name indicates, is a spirit of air. But he is actually the spirit of all the elements because he not only commands all the spirits of all the elements, - fire, water, earth, and air, but also he does many tasks which cannot be performed by a spirit of one particular element. The chief qualities represented by Ariel are lightness, swiftness, restlessness, motion, freedom and many other qualities of the various elements which are possessed by other spirits. That is why he is often called by Prospero as dainty, delicate in accordance with the various tasks he performs in obedience to his master's orders. If Ariel did not love his master, he would not have performed all his tasks so diligently and with so much of delight. Ariel not only possess human emotions but he possesses also a great moral sense for which reason he helps Prospero is righting the wrong, in punishing the wrong doer, and finally, in doing good to all. Throughout the play one can find Ariel doing the right things and not the wrong thing in collaboration with Prospero who is the law-giver in the enchanted island. In this respect Ariel stands different and apart from all spirits and human beings who take part in the action of play. Ariel is invisible, but like the lightning, can take shapes as he acts. Like air and fire he can penetrate anywhere. His natural speech is music or waves of air. His ideas are the ideas associated with the atmosphere – liberty and omnipresence. Like the atmosphere he reflects human emotions without feeling them. Ariel is not human but he can relate himself to humanity. His relation with Prospero was with full of affection. Prospero admires his charm and beauty and his gracious ways. Prospero recognizes something more spiritual in Ariel than his airy charm. He really sympathizes with Ariel's longing for freedom. Ariel wishes to be loved. Even when Prospero grants freedom for him he says that he will be missing his dainty Ariel. Shakespeare has given him a personality touched with the gleams of our humanity.

On the contrary, Caliban regards service as slavery. He grudges to do services to Prospero. He longs for freedom. But his concept of freedom is self-enjoyment of all things without doing anything in return of all such enjoyments. It is because of his wrong conception of his that he enters into a conspiracy with Stephano and Trinculo to destroy Prospero in order to have his freedom. But at last he too realizes his error.

‘The Tempest’ was written by Shakespeare in the last period of his literary career. There were no more Othello, Macbeth or Iago. Passion and fierce judgment faded away into a charitable sunset and peaceful light of mercy, forgiveness, repentance, reunion and reconciliation.

Music in ‘The Tempest’

Music plays an important role in ‘The Tempest’ There are eight songs introduced by Shakespeare in the play. Ariel, Stephano and Caliban do all the singing. Ariel is distinctly ethereal. Stephano’s music is work a day note and Caliban has all the intensity of a primitive in giving vent to his hatred of drudgery. Totally there are eight songs in the play. Among them four songs are sung by Ariel.

Language – Style and diction of ‘The Tempest’

The language used in the play is very simple. Simple and brief quotes in the play reveal the unique style of the dramatist. The following quotations from various scenes in the play are remarkable.

1. ‘The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance’.
2. ‘Most poor matters point to rich ends’.

There are also many compound words used by the dramatist like – ‘sea-sorrow’, ‘still-vexed’, ‘sight-outrunning’, ‘heart-sorrow’, ‘rocky-hard’, ‘sea-swallowed’. There are many expressions which reveal the philosophy of life. For example – “We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is round with a sleep”. In the final Act of the play Prospero’s address to the ‘elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves’ one can find a picture of human power over the elemental forces and also a suggestion of moral and spiritual power beyond the elemental forces.

Comparison of Shakespeare and Bharathiyar

Shakespeare has introduced the character of Ariel and his activities as a spirit of Air. The great Tamil poet Subramaniya Bharathiyar has written a lot about the actions of air as “kattru”. Bharathiyar says that air comes as gentle breeze and gives us comfort and relaxation. It gives us motivation by good sounds and music. The same air comes as tempest and causes destruction. Air is giving life to everyone. This should bring energy and that is what pleaded by the great poet Bharathiyar in his poems.

The last lines of the drama, Prospero says to Ariel that he relates him to everything and he promises that the weather, the wind, the sails... all will be favourable to him. He says that the ship Ariel takes will reach the destiny overtaking all other ships which have already gone to the land of Naples. Prospero promises freedom to Ariel. In no other play of Shakespeare one can find the supernatural element playing such an important dramatic role as in ‘The Tempest’

William Shakespeare has mentioned that learn more than others, work more and expect less – and this will be key for happiness and success. Former President of India, Dr. J.

Abdul Kalam, who always motivates young generationsays that hard work alone will solve all the problems

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