

A GLANCE INTO THE STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ‘JULIUS CAESAR’

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ABSTRACT:

This study is intended to have a glance into the study of William Shakespeare with some special reference to his best-known historical play 'Julius Caesar' and the usage of words by Shakespeare that makes the readers generally feel no difficulty at all in understanding the conversations of the characters. Shakespeare has chosen a historical story with a simple language expressed mostly in prosaic form all the conversations or dialogues of the characters but a few in poetic forms to enable the readers to comprehend the story easily. He used poetic English words, Shortened forms of verbs and modal auxiliaries, Double Superlatives, and Latin /Greek words. Besides the usage of words, he created images in different ways. The imagery in the play 'Julius Caesar' reinforces the personalities of the characters whenever they articulate. It also heightens the atmosphere of the drama. It can best be illustrated in the part in which images of blood and destruction in the play are vividly well in this drama. Likewise, the impracticable lofty ideals are emphasized in a clear-cut way by the use of images from the theatre. Yet in all the individual scenes, the main idea of the scene is stressed through all the imagery. Thus, the diction language and imagery of the play have an important role in the total meaning and impression of the play. In addition, the images Shakespeare's use of the Blank-verse is note-worthy.

Keywords: *image, character, ambition, honourable, historical*

INTRODUCTION

Now, as teachers of English language and literature, it is our bound duty to have a glance into the study of William Shakespeare with some special reference to his best-known historical play 'Julius Caesar' among ten ones. I also think almost all students of English literature have gone through his thirty-six plays at least in brief in addition to his most renowned poetry. Moreover, none is left out without hearing something about this world-acclaimed English dramatist of the period of Queen Elizabeth, especially in his native country, England.

As regards his birth, he was born on 26th, April 1564 as the third child and first son, among the eight children of John Shakespeare, a London shoemaker, and the mother Mary Arden, at Stratford-Upon-Avon. Yet, Richard Shakespeare, his grandfather is stated to have worked as a yeoman farmer at least seven years before 1552.

He happened to work in different theatres like black friars first as a horse boy for some time to earn his bread, and then step by step he used to act taking minor roles and then major roles. After his wedlock with Ann Hathaway, eight years older than him, bore three children. And then, he penned gradually thirty-six plays, classified into comedies, tragedies, and histories in addition to some poems like 'The Sonnets', etc.

A comedy is a play dealing with happiness and marriage with the hero and heroine etc. A tragedy is defined as a play in which the hero is brought down from the heights of glory to the depths of degradation. A historical play alludes to some historical aspects of kings and emperors etc.

'Julius Caesar', is regarded as one of the seven great tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony, and Cleopatra and Coriolanus including it among thirty-six different plays by Shakespeare. The said plays are marked as 'great tragedies', for Shakespeare probes into the human heart and soul. The scene alludes to the country of Rome, near Sardis; near Phillippi with such major characters of the play, 'Julius Caesar', as Marcus Antony, and Marcus Brutus. Caesar was a great, good, kind-hearted, helpful, amicable, calm-going, and unselfish emperor of the Roman empire; yet he was not ambitious. Marcus Brutus, one of the conspirators happened to murder him, because of his being self-centered and also a power-monger. As he was ambitious to become the emperor of the Roman empire, he mercilessly killed the emperor 'Julius Caesar' secretly with his friends and servants. Then he went on delivering his emotional but unreasonable speech to make the mob believe him and support the cause for murdering him. He killed the emperor for his vicious character and bad quality of ambition. He also wanted to drag the mob to his side with his emotional as well as fine oration hiding the good nature of the emperor. The mob simply trusted the cunning and traitor Brutus first without being unaware of the fact.

Soon after his exit from the scene, Marcus Antony came carrying the corpse of emperor Caesar placed in a coffin to prove what brutish Brutus spoke of to be wholly wrong by delivering

his emotional but reasonable speech. He was one of the followers and well-wishers of the emperor Julius Caesar. As he was also a very fine orator, good-natured, helpful, amicable, unselfish and faithful, and trustworthy like Caesar; he was very close to the emperor, and yet he loved him more than he did in the case of the Roman empire. He went on attracting and making the entire mob believe him completely with skilled techniques and the power of his oration. He also pricks indirectly the conscience of Brutus and conspirators by stressing the phrase '*honourable all honourable men*' many a time. He dwells on the blow of Brutus: '*The unkindest*' cut of all.

It is one of the best-known historical plays by the actor-playwright, William Shakespeare and is divided into five acts with different scenes, and with different characters. The theme is '*greediness and selfishness*' (self-centeredness) for the political emperorship. Shakespeare has chosen a historical story with a simple language expressed mostly in prosaic form all the conversations or dialogues of the characters but a few in poetic forms to enable the readers to comprehend the story easily. Though there are poetic English words *Thy, Thee, Thou, Thine, Art, Ye, Yea, don't*, etc. The readers generally feel no difficulty at all in understanding the conversations of the characters. Shortened and also double negatives forms of verbs and modal auxiliaries are there here and there. Soliloquies are not found. Double Superlatives '*unkindest cut of all*' is used. Latin /Greek words like '*Summum Bonum* (Supreme/the highest good) '*Placebo*' (I please you), '*Clario distinct percipio*' (it refers to the meaning of what is clearly and distinctly perceived is also not found), etc are not mentioned. Images are there in different ways.

Image of civil warfare:

The play is to a large degree, up to the assassination concerned with conflicts within and between conspirators: Brutus's tormented communings with himself, Cassius's notion of himself as a rival to Caesar. Moreover, in addition to these, Portia's and Calpurnia's struggles to wrest concessions from their husbands are there. When Caesar is killed, there is outward, physical conflict developing into civil war. Antony joining his hands with Octavius, as a leader of great armies fights against the armies of Brutus and Cassius. Brutus at first does not come forward to murder Caesar because of his love and affection for him.

Storm image

The mind of Brutus is not at peace to act for the murder of the emperor Caesar; he goes on doubting whether to take action against Caesar or to keep silent though tempted by the conspirators. Storm image also reveals some correspondence between the microcosm (man) and macrocosm (Universe). Yet the metaphor of civil war extended to the storm shows a forewarning of Caesar's death. At the same time, it symbolizes something going on in the minds of the characters of the drama. It also reflects the conflicts on a universal level and also on the human level.

Image of strife

The image of strife is also there. When Brutus goes to the Capitol, Portia gets her mind completely agitated and imagines that she is hearing '*a bursting rumour, like a fray*'. Nothing is heard by Lucius. When Antony delivers his speech to the citizens/plebians and ends it, there appears real mutiny in the country of Rome. Italy is plunged into the bloody discord which foretold over Caesar's murdered body. This image forms one of the principal themes of the drama.

Caroline surgeon remarks that there are no floating or leading images except the aforesaid ones. Also, it was not penned under the particular stress of excitement which leads to a very significant image. However, there is a certain persistence in the comparison of the characters to animals: Caesar is likened to a wolf, a lion, a falcon, a serpent's egg, an adder, a stricken deer; the Romans are sheep, hinds, and bees; the conspirators are apes and hounds; Brutus is a lamb; Lipidus is an ass and a horse; Metellus and Casca are curs; Cassius is showy, melt some steed which fails at the moment trial, and Octavius and Antony are bears tied to the stake. But this animal imagery is not nearly so marked as in either '*King Lear*' or '*Othello*'. It also lacks completely some consistency of character, so it fails to produce the cumulative effect so strongly felt in both those plays.

As a critic, John Crow has drawn attention to another recurrent image in which the characters are seen in terms of metals; in which contrasts are brought out or implied between the sharpness and bluntness of metal objects, between loveliness and dullness, between preciousness and baseness. For instance, in his first full speech Brutus speaks in the play as follows:

'I am not gamesome: I do lack some part

Of that quick spirit that is in Antony.'

Thus, Brutus brings to our notice a contrast which is to be most glaringly exemplified in act III; Scene I where the nimble-witted Antony leads him by the nose and makes him look very dull. When Brutus and Cassius depart after their first interview, Cassius declares that Brutus's '*honourable mettle may be wrought from a hat it is disposed.*'

The imagery in the play is not insignificant or uninteresting, although it is not as gripping as the imagery in the seven great Shakespearean tragedies including '*Julius Caesar*,' '*King Lear*,' '*Macbeth*,' '*Othello*,' '*Hamlet*,' '*Antony and Cleopatra*' and '*Coriolanus*'. The play '*Julius Caesar*' reinforces the personalities of the characters whenever they articulate. It also heightens the atmosphere of the drama. It can best be illustrated in the part in which images of blood and destruction play vividly well in this drama. Likewise, the impracticable lofty ideals of Brutus are emphasized in a clear-cut way by the use of images from the theatre. Yet in all the individual scenes, the main idea of the scene is stressed through all the imagery. Thus, the diction language, and imagery of the play have an important role in the total meaning and impression of the play. In addition, the images Shakespeare's use of the Blank-verse is note-worthy.

As regards criticism, Greene one of his contemporaries has attacked him as below;

'Shakespeare is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide.'

According to the critic Irving Ribner the two tragic heroes refer to Brutus and Caesar. If Caesar is a hero, Brutus is an anti-hero/dramatic hero. Harold Wilson remarks that Shakespeare makes a fresh start in the tragic form of Julius Caesar. The play also differs from the tragedy that precedes it chronologically, 'Romeo and Juliet', in the subject matter, in the tragic conception, and for the most part in technical execution. Yet the play draws upon the historical authority of Plutarch, as do the later Roman tragedies, an authority which Elizabethans held in great veneration. He also comments that the playwright, Shakespeare undoubtedly made a careful effort of historical imagination for 'Julius Caesar' and his other Roman plays. In the writing of 'Julius Caesar', he has brought the rich experience of the English historical plays, he had already produced. The play contains perhaps the most philosophical of all Shakespeare's dramatic interpretations of human history.

Irving Ribner has also pin-points vividly that Shakespeare needs contrast to Brutus who will logically accept the immorality of Caesar's death and who still shows the audience the self-deception of Brutus.

As a critic, A.W. Verity points out that the construction of 'Julius Caesar' is remarkably regular and even. He also comments that the play substantially is true history and gives a vivid picture of the period and crisis of the Roman empire. Warde Fowler criticizes the lives of Cicero, Caesar, Brutus, and Antony, the same tragic story is repeated four times, in each case concerning a different type of personal character.

Keeping aside all the comments made by the various afore-said writers, I remark that Brutus is individually very good by nature in all aspects including his amity with Caesar. But, when he yields to the vicious and crooked conspirators by their bait of sovereign power, he loses his character. It also shows his weak mind and inconsistency in doing anything. So, he does not come forward at first to act turning against the kind-hearted, broad-minded, and ambitionless Roman emperor Caesar. Moreover, keeps mum for a while or rather hesitates to take action for the assassination of Caesar because of his close amity with him. His mind is just like that of junior Hamlet to avenge his father's demise by his uncle. He stands just like a cat on a single wall doubting whether to jump this side or that.

So, I can mention that Brutish Brutus does not deserve to be even the second tragic hero (among the two tragic heroes Caesar and Brutus of the play) because he is a traitor to the emperor. He may rightly be regarded as a dramatic hero because of his ambition and losing all his character or virtues as some critics remarked. Antony who is virtuous and well-wisher and follower of Caesar in all aspects and comes forward to avenge Caesar's demise without any ambition and hesitation may unmistakably be considered to be the second hero of the play by

using all his skill and techniques of the refrained word 'honourable' etc. in his excellent thrilling inspiring and thought-provoking funeral, oration not only to Brutus but also to envious and unscrupulous conspirators.

The play also discloses in a clear-cut way, how politics played a great role in the bygone days of Roman history, as they do nowadays for individual or political power. The play also reminds us of Mandhara's vicious device and Sakuni's plan of '*the game of dice*' in the great Indian epics like 'the Ramayana' and 'the Mahabharatha' respectively which created an unpleasant atmosphere in the kingdoms of Ayodhya and Hastinapura. Ultimately, I pin-point Caesar faces ups and downs due to a lack of insight. Lastly, I exhort students to keep themselves aloof from filthy politics, as they spoil their precious life and better read the play 'Julius Caesar' meticulously to be aware of something about Roman history. Apart from these, I allege that Shakespeare has not emulated the principles of the Greek and Roman dramatists, Aeschylus and Euripides and so on in writing his thirty-six plays, because of following his principles. Above all these, his autobiographical elements is visible. Caesar is no more than Shakespeare. Matthew Arnold has referred Keats to Shakespeare and remarks '*He is with Shakespeare*' because of the nature description in his poetry. A critic Meera S. Sashital pinpoints *Shakespeare as likened to Kalidasa, As Shakespeare to England so also Kalidasa to our India*.

Our distinguished and world-acclaimed Professor of English literature, Professor K.R. Sreenivasa Iyengar after his sincere and devoted study, made a remark '*There is no English literature without William Shakespeare.*' I can also pinpoint that Shakespeare may unhesitatingly be included in the list of university (Oxford) wits of the Elizabethan age like Green, Peele, Lyly, Nash, Marlowe, and Thomas Kyd because of his profound knowledge in the realm of English dramas including his poetic world.

Coming to the use of the part of Grammar, Shakespeare is least bothered in writing his thirty-six plays- comedies, tragedies, and histories. After going through his most renowned play, 'Julius Caesar' heedfully, regarding prepositions, shortened forms of verbs, Modals, the addition of 's' or es to III person singular subjects, present indefinite, present perfect and future indefinite, etc. For instance, referring to prepositions, he says avoiding the preposition/ to infinitive through the character of Cassius as follows:

'I pray.... you do'

As regards the shortened form of verbs, Casca says as follows:

'Besides- I ha' not since put up my 'sword'.

As for the Modals, Brutus says

'Send him but hither, and I'll fashion him.'

Concerning double negatives, he mentions

'I don't do anything.'

Referring to the characteristics features of his plays, we come across ghosts, Julius Caesar's ghost, (the ghost of Sr. Hamlet in 'Hamlet') revenge motive, greediness, self-centered nature, love/sympathy, hatred dialogues, jealousy, love-making, storms, fights, whoredom banishment history, and villains, etc.

CONCLUSION

Above all these, I personally and ultimately remark the term 'Shakespeare', when we cut it in the middle, it refers to a popular English playwright, who is shaking the entire world irrespective of the spelling 'sphere' with his 36 plays, like the word/name Wordsworth. It also pinpoints and offers the meaning referring to a celebrated Romantic poet who knows how to make use of words in his poetry when the word is cut in the middle, as we do in the case of the name Shakespeare. His dramatic power of dialogues and conversations can best be comprehended through the speeches of Brutus and Antony, etc. Despite the irregular formation of lines/sentences, we have to take his greatness in the way of writing his 36 plays and in the selection of fine and thought-provoking, inspiring, and thrilling love stories, tragic stories, and historical stories by keeping aside his grammatical errors according to modern grammar.

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