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Shakespeare and Social Utopianism: An Analysis of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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ABSTRACT

This study briefly examines what is Social Utopianism, who propagated the theory of Utopianism in English literature and India, major influences on William Shakespeare which forced him to propagate him to use this philosophy and ideology in his last play, and a critical analysis of *The Tempest* to find the social utopianism in it and Shakespeare's treatment of this philosophy in this play.

Introduction

William Shakespeare is a renewed name in the field of English literature; he does not need any introduction. He wrote thirty-seven significant plays among them some are literary jewels. His plays discuss and unravel several hidden aspects of human life. This study examines the social utopianism in his last play, *The Tempest*. In this play, William Shakespeare shares his ideology of social utopianism. Before going to find social utopianism in this play, firstly, we must need to understand what is utopianism? Secondly, major influences on Shakespeare before writing his last play *The Tempest* for a better understanding of this concept.

Utopianism derives from the book named *Utopia*, written by Thomas More. It is the state of visionary schemes for producing perfection in social and political conditions. A Utopian society is basically a society, that has suppressed aggression, war, hate, and crime while establishing "peaceful" and orderly communities. A utopian society could not exist with the individuality that nature has bestowed on the human race. As long as humans remain unique in their state of mind, utopia is mere fantasy. Thomas More is one of Henry VIII's main counselors. He falls out of favour with the king when he did not sign a letter urging the Pope to divorce Henry and Catharine. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London because his going against the king was treason, he was beheaded. It was strange that a man with such a life, and such an end, was the creator of the perfect world as well as a commonly used word in our language. In his writings, *Utopia* was a place of the perfect person. In India Saint Ravidas who was a great revolutionary saint has also created an imaginative island named *Begumpura* means a city without suffering and pains.

Thomas More's *Utopia* is the first book which has influenced Shakespeare to a great extent. Plato was the second person after Thomas More whose democratic and republican philosophy of equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice in his masterpiece *Republic* influenced William Shakespeare very much. In his last play, *The Tempest*, Gonzalo becomes his mouthpiece

and propagates this ideology of social utopianism.

In his last play, *The Tempest* Shakespeare shares his ideology of social utopianism. When we read and watch this play, we find that he creates a world of imagination and illusion: a competition between the “real world” and the “new world.” Through this play an important idea can be seen and understood: Utopianism. Utopianism is seen in this play on many different levels. It can be seen at social and political levels or a religious level. Shakespeare uses the underlying plots of *The Tempest*. We are limited our focus only on social utopianism in this play but in this limited focus, we cannot the remaining two kinds of utopia that is religious and political because they are interconnected to each other. Our perspective in this study is social level.

In this play Shakespeare allows the audience to appreciate the possibilities of utopian society and whatever this may possess. He presents the good and the bad so that they can see that problems can arise in such a society. So, *The Tempest* is seen as a window into which one can peep and see the dimensions of the utopian societies. While his characters play the role of the leaders of the utopian society. Shakespeare uses his creation to portray how a utopian society should be.

In this play, the word utopia, for different characters means different things. First of all, and maybe most important to all, it is Miranda who says it. Miranda’s utopia consists of a populated world with many other human beings in it. This can be seen as created by the way she has been kept in relative isolation due to her father's exile. Human beings, in whatever forms they come in are a fascination for her and something that she longs to see. Miranda is a girl who is sensitive and humanistic by nature and who likes and welcomes everyone whosoever meets her because she lives along with his father, Prospero on an island who was the right Duke of Milan but because of the result of his younger brother against him he has left Milan secretly and has settled down on an unknown and lonely island along with his daughter. As social science says human beings are social animals and they must need a society. So, Miranda also needs a society. According to me, human beings can live without basic needs which are water, shelter, food, and clothes for some days but without sharing their thoughts human beings cannot have a single second. So, she also needs relatives, friends, and neighbors with whom she can share her moments of happiness, suffering, pain, ideas, thoughts, emotions, etc. Shakespeare projects this philosophy of social utopianism that a human being cannot be without society. Through the character of Miranda, he presents an idealistic utopian who worries about others and suffers from the suffering of others. When Alonso, the king of Naples was trapped in a shipwreck during a sea storm along with his son Ferdinand, brother Sebastian, counselor Gonzalo, and other lords and mariners. When Miranda sees this horrible scene of the shipwreck and she says to her father, Prospero:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallow'd and
The fraughting souls within her.

(Act I, Scene II, 1-15)

So, through the character of Miranda, Shakespeare wants to show an idealistic utopian citizen, he clears to the audience and readers that that this is the first characteristic of a utopian who suffers from the suffering of others and finds joy in the happiness of others.

Though Prospero is a firm believer of the master-slave theory as he makes Ariel, the angel spirit his slave by his art of magic but Shakespeare presents him as a humanitarian. Prospero asks

his angel spirit, Ariel about the safety of the men on the ship which traps in a storm created by him by his magic. He asks:

PROPERO: But are they, Ariel safe?
 ARIEL: Not a hair perish'd;
 On their sustaining garments not a blemish,
 But fresher than before: and, as thou badest me,
 (Act I, Scene II, 252-255)

In *The Tempest*, Gonzalo, the wisest counselor of King Alonso, is the propagator of social utopianism. Shakespeare speaks through him the philosophy of a republican and democratic state or the theory of social utopia that will be based on equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice. When Gonzalo reaches the unknown and lonely island, he is astonished to see the natural beauty of the island and appreciates the beauty of the island: "How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!" (Act II, Scene I, Line 51) He feels very happy and thinks that if he were ruler of this island how he will rule and what kind of society and nation he wants to build? So, he is fascinated by the natural beauty of the island and then gives his views about the republican and democratic governance which he will establish:

I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
 Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
 Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
 Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
 And use of service, none; contract, succession,
 Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
 No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
 No occupation; all men idle, all;
 And women too, but innocent and pure;
 No sovereignty; --
 (Act II, Scene I, Line 155-160)

These lines give an ample idea of the social philosophy of Shakespeare of an idealistic state. Where will there be no punishment because there will be no crime? In this Commonwealth words like riches, and poverty will have no place. No one serves anybody. There will be no contract among the citizens, which means the relationships will never be treated as a burden but for the happiness of life. Gonzalo continues his description of this idealistic state that there will be no use of any metal, corn, wine, and oil. People need not choose any occupation as they will not need money for livelihood. Women will enjoy the same position as their male counterparts. They will be innocent and pure and they will remain naturally beautiful because they will need not any type of cosmetic. This is the viewpoint of Shakespeare of a new social setup or new world. On this Sebastian, the younger brother of King Alonso points out and asks Gonzalo that if nobody will work in his idealistic commonwealth then how they will survive? On this Gonzalo utters:

GONZALO: All things in common nature should produce
 Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
 Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
 Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
 Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
 To feed my innocent people.
 (Act II, Scene I, Line 165-170)

Gonzalo makes clear in these lines what kind of state this will be. He declares the characteristics of this idealistic state. In short, he says that he will implement a republic and democratic government there which will be based on equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice. Morality will be the real lord of this stateless state. In Gonzalo's Commonwealth remains the absence of status, property, and profession which assumes a unity and uniformity of humans.

Gonzalo thinks of it as a Commonwealth where he will want to crown himself as a king but later, he sums up the reasoning of a stateless state in the phrase "No Sovereignty" which means no one will dominion over anyone else. Gonzalo corrects his outlines of a utopia and he

allows himself to become the king over the island just long enough to abolish both kingship and sovereignty. Through Gonzalo, Shakespeare presents an idealistic utopia a “new world” which will be based on equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice.

On the other hand, Shakespeare presents the “real world” and another “world of illusion. This “world of illusion” Shakespeare presents through the character of Prospero. Shakespeare wants to present a comparison and contrast among three worlds, first is an idealistic “new world,” the second is “world or illusion” clearly the world created by Prospero and thirdly the “real world” which presents by Sebastian and Antonio. Prospero only uses the part of the guidelines for a utopian society. He does not believe that everyone is equal. He has faith in inequality which is why he thinks that he is higher than everyone. He does not believe in any religion and that there should be one religion because it is clearly seen that he uses magic throughout the whole play and then towards the end he fails in hurting everyone, he asks for forgiveness and asks to be broken from the bonds of magic.

Shakespeare shows a nice comparison in the social utopia of Gonzalo and Prospero. Gonzalo’s “utopia” has the dramatic effect of questioning Prospero’s “utopia” early in the play before the main conflicts have been fully developed. For example, in Gonzalo’s utopia, there is no war or hate, so we ask ourselves, what about Prospero’s utopia? Prospero’s war against Sycorax was fought and won before the play begins therefore, we can see that Prospero’s “utopia” offers peace but not the democracy of Gonzalo’s utopia. In Prospero’s perfectly ordered world anarchy, conspiracy, and rebellion is so prevalent. Caliban, Antonio, Trinculo, Stephano, and Sebastian are busily plotting murder right under Prospero’s nose. It can be obviously understood that Prospero does not have order on his island because he is too busy with his magical conspiracies against everyone else.

Gonzalo would not have any of these problems in his utopia because everyone would love each other and have peace with each other. If anyone had a problem, they would talk it out and solve it. More than anything, Gonzalo’s utopia would not have a glimpse of evil unlike Prospero’s Island where evil is lurking everywhere on his island and he is a part of it.

Prospero’s use of magic is also something that Gonzalo would be against. Prospero has no fear of God as he used to when he was a human living in the “real world”. He lost his dukedom because he spent too much time studying books and not enough time ruling his kingdom. Studying books, Prospero discovers, is not in itself not enough, but from his books, Prospero is able to gain the art, the patience, and the wisdom to control Caliban. The magic that Prospero is able to perform seems to derive from not only the books he has, but his knowledge as well. From the knowledge Prospero has he has divine power to tell the near future. In the last act, however, as the evil plots are stopped and Prospero gains full control over his enemies, a more Christian utopian act is seen. He goes towards the course of forgiveness and gives up the black magic that he was once bound to.

Through this comparison of social utopianism of Prospero and Gonzalo presets a worthy contrast between the “world of illusion,” “new world” and “real world” That is why the audience chooses and selects the right one if anybody wants to take this great challenge of establish social setup base on Plato’s *Republic* and Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Shakespeare creates the options so that it is easy to choose anyone who wants to do this for the service of humanity. He presents right and wrong, both the angles and dimensions of this social utopianism. Firstly, Prospero wants to create peace and control over each and every individual but his tools to gain this aim are immoral. Secondly, he does not believe in the theory of equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice. He wants to rule and have complete control over all humans. On the opposite side, Gonzalo propagates the republican and democratic setup in which representation is lifelong essence and this is governance by the people, of the people, and for the people. Hence Gonzalo wants to rule as a king as long as possible to establish equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice among the society. To the fulfillment of this aim, he promises to use tools of morality and love not of magic and conspiracy like Prospero.

So, Shakespeare through this play paved the way for republican and democratic governance.

In the present time if anybody wants to take this great challenge to such kind of society then he

or she must need the ideology of equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice. As a great Western political thinker and philosopher John Steward Mill says if you want any type of change in the world then first of all you must change the thinking of human beings, according to him changing thought is the basis of all kinds of change further he adds that ideas rule the world and moves the society. Shakespeare gives us an idea of social utopianism in this play and propagates it through his leading characters.

Shakespeare being a Christian also propagates Christianity through the forgiveness of Prospero and his giving up of the art of magic. Shakespeare advocates the philosophy of a religion that teaches us equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice. But according to me, we can respect that religion which teaches us the four things. In reality, humanity is the greatest religion and morality is the real God.

To conclude one can say that William Shakespeare shows social utopianism in his last play, *The Tempest*. He also paves the way for future republican and democratic states in the time of monarchy. Though this play does not establish such kind of social setup Gonzalo's "utopia" still has a chance to exist, but it can only work when someone takes this great challenge and creates such type of ideology based on republican and democratic background and struggles to change the social order of inequality, slavery, hatred and injustice which make the sole aim to transmit the thought of equality, freedom, fraternity, and justice among all human beings because it is the current demand of suffering humanity and special requirement in India because India is suffering from the social order of inequality from a very long time that is casteism.

Work Cited

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