

**WOMEN CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEAR'S COMEDIES CITING THE
EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER OF ROSALAND IN HIS ROMANTIC COMEDY
"AS YOU LIKE IT"**

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Abstract

This research paper involves William Shakespeare's portrayal of woman characters in his plays especially of his comedies. With his profound understanding of human nature, he created vivid and interesting characters of women. His characters such as dark lady of sonnets, Portia, Beatrice, Viola, Rosalind etc have elicited a lot of response during second wave feminism. Another important feature of comedies of Shakespeare is that it is heroine rather than hero who guides and governs the action of the play. He has drawn strong female characters to give a glimpse of capability of woman to the Elizabethan patriarchal society. They exhibit a lot of mental strength. They have positive approach. This paper takes the example of Rosalind "As you like it" who is an epitome of Beauty, Intelligence, Courage and Individuality.

Keywords: women characters, comedy, individuality, plays etc

Shakespeare, the world's greatest dramatist of English language left no stone unturned in portrayal of women characters in his plays of dramatic career which was divided into 4 periods: The Early period, the period of Comedies, the period of histories, the period of tragedies, the period of Romances. He is the master of modern English, with his profound understanding of human's nature and his ability to create vivid and interesting characters especially of women. Main Characters such as dark lady of sonnets have elicited a substantial amount of criticism which received added impetus during second wave feminism of the 1960's. Several moons of Uranus are named after women in Shakespeare plays.

In Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies and his plays in general, there are several types of female characters. They influence others characters but are also often underestimated. Another important feature of the comedies of Shakespeare is that it is the heroine rather than hero who guides and governs the action of the play. The heroes are thrown in the back ground in the comedies. Commenting on the feature of the Shakespearean comedy, Ruskin says "shakespeare has no heroes, he has only heroines". George Gordon, like wise, says "All lectures on shakespeare comedies tend to become lectures on Shakespeare's women. For in the comedies they occupy the front of the stage. In none of the Shakespeare other Plays a such feminine predominance can be asserted.

Shakespeare has drawn strong female characters to give a glimpse of the capability of women to the Elizabethan Patriarchal society. His portrayal of female characters is more positive and honourable than time. His comic women have much active behaviour as well as exhibit a lot of mental strength. They have positive approach. He stepped out of his time and liberated his female protagonist from traditional restrictions. His portrait of women in comedies have never been surprised. In brief, shakespearean comedies are dominated by women.

For eg- Rosalind in As you like it, Portia in the Merchant of Venice, Viola in Twelfth night, Miranda in the Tempest, Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing far outshine their respective heroes.

As You Like It: Rosalind " A Female Hero"

Shakespeare presents notable women in his comedies. The play As You Like it, presents an incredible woman, who controlled issues of men rather than being subject to male domination. Rosalind is the heroine, liberated from the restrictions of society and culture by using disguise. While Elizabethan women were generally silenced and considered only an essential part of the household, a witty character like Rosalind was very remarkable for its time and place. Nothing held her back from voicing her opinion. Even the men seemed weak and silly in front of her. She left example to audience of what a woman can do if freed from

male constraint. Literary critic Anne Barton says "Rosalind is extraordinarily important in *As You Like It*, as central and dominating a figure in her fashion as Hamlet in his own, very different play." (Barton 401) It is quite significant to explore an Elizabethan play which gives the heroine many opportunities to speak out, advice, explain and give opinions. Hence, Rosalind is the Elizabethan image for modern feminism.

As You Like It is a play that tells about the struggles of the life of the protagonist, Rosalind. Her father is the banished Duke Senior, who is sent to Forest of Arden by his younger brother, Duke Frederick. Duke Frederick wanted to dominate the kingdom. Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind, lived in court with her cousin, Celia, daughter of Duke Frederick. One day in court there was a wrestling match between Frederick's wrestler and Orlando. In match, Orlando met with Rosalind and then she fell in love with him at first sight. Rosalind got bad treatment from her uncle, Duke Frederick. He banished Rosalind from the Court. When Rosalind gets banished from her uncle's court, she does not cry for the situation instead, she shows bravery and heads for the Forest of Arden to achieve freedom. It displays that, Rosalind is not only adventurous but also has guts. Rosalind escaped from the court with Celia and they are accompanied by Touchstone, the fool of the palace to the Forest of Arden to find her father, Duke Senior. The journey to Forest of Arden is dangerous for Rosalind and Celia, so for safety in traveling Rosalind disguised as a man and changed her name as Ganymede. Celia dressed as a girl with a dirty face and bad clothes and changed her name to Aliena. In Forest of Arden, Rosalind found people like Corin, Silvius, Phebe and Audrey.

They are poor shepherds and Rosalind established good relations with them. She also found poetry hanging in every tree at the Forest from her love, Orlando. Orlando escaped from home and his elder brother Oliver to the Forest of Arden, as he had found out that, Oliver planned to kill him. At the Forest of Arden, Rosalind fought against many difficulties and struggled for her life, for her father, Duke Senior and her love, Orlando. She emerged as a strong and brave woman. She got equal opportunity, right and participation. Finally she gets married with Orlando.

Rosalind is particularly favorite among feminist critics. She is admired for her ability to sabotage the limitations that society enforces on her as a woman. With confidence she disguises herself as a man for the majority of the play in order to woo the man she loves. Also teaches him how to be a skillful lover, which tutorship would not be welcome from a woman. Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede helps her to uphold "strength" to an equal level with the men in the play. There is much comic appeal in Rosalind's mimicry of the conventions of both male and female behavior. But Elizabethan audiences might be concern regarding the behaviors as the assigned roles of men and women of male-dominated society has been satirized. Rosalind's gender role playing game is further complicated by the fact that the actor playing the role of "Rosalind" would have been actually a male, since women were not allowed to perform on Shakespearean public stage. As a result, while the role of Ganymede is

acted there has been no imitation either in actions or in appearance. In the end, Rosalind let go her previous masculinity and become entirely subordinated. Her appearance as an actor in the Epilogue assures that the forest is like the stage and as they all leave the forest and return to the normal life, they will be welcomed by the regular social structure to follow. But before the end, audience got to learn from Rosalind that they contain same potential to make the world better place. As Rosalind is dominant and prejudiced, she defies the traditional 16th-century assumption about women and sets out on her own to discover her individuality. of Beauty, Intelligence, Courage and Individuality.

References:

- As you like it by William Shakespeare