



An Analysis of feminist approaches in Shakespeare's comedies with focus to As You Like It, Twelfth Night

RAJKUMAR ADAK

Research Scholar

AH/English/08 (21AHM10PEL110004)

Subject: ENGLISH

Dr. JAILAXMI VINAYAK

Supervisor

University: EKLAVYA UNIVERSITY, DAMOH

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Abstract:

Shakespeare possessed a superb insight into human psychology and daily life. Every age and nation's population shares certain intimate aspects of psychoanalysis, soul-scanning, and primal human desires. He was a playwright who was always true to nature. In his plays, we see that man must act in accordance with the situation and that he does so in accordance with what fate has permitted. He paid special attention to human passions and emotions, which continuously alluded to the work of deadly forces that hovered all around us and condemned us, poor creatures, to death. He uses the human battle to represent the eternal struggle between good and evil. Thus, his characters take on a larger-than-life quality as heroic figures against evil forces. In this article, an analysis of feminist approaches in Shakespeare's comedies with focus to As You Like It, Twelfth Night has been discussed.

Keywords: Feminist, Shakespeare, Comedies



Introduction:

Shakespeare took great pleasure in mocking scholarly and aristocratic lingo. This is likely the cause of the pun usage in some of his plays. Shakespeare's characters are both kinds and unique people. They exhibit certain classes, occupations, and passions in addition to having their own unique quirks and personal oddities. Othello, Hamlet, and King Lear, for instance, all have quite unique quirks. Othello symbolizes resentment, Hamlet the philosophical disposition, and King Lear the pattern of intemperance. All four characters—Edmund, Edger, Iago, and Desdemona—are shown with fairness, thoroughness, and creativity. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, which Shakespeare wrote in 1594–1595, is his first widely recognized play. The Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, and Midsummer Night's Dream are among Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. Shakespeare was a genius with many talents. He writes numerous plays, including notable tragedies. Also, he produced sonnets. English literature from the 16th century includes William Shakespeare. He was born on April 23, 1564, and he was the most influential writer of the Elizabethan era. In English literature, he was regarded as a genius poet and playwright. He can't receive a suitable education. Approximately 36 plays and 154 sonnets are among his works. In his plays and poetry, he discusses themes from life such as birth, death, marriage, religion, and love. His plays are classified as poetic plays since they are written in verse. In terms of dramatic style, these plays fall into four groups. They are historical plays, comedies, tragedies, and comedies. Shakespeare, the eldest son of a Glover and a local gentry member, was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. Contrary to those who assert that such an illiterate country bumpkin could not have written the plays attributed to him, he most likely had a good education for the time, attending a local grammar school, giving him a foundation in the Latin classics as well as in British literature and history, from which many of his dramatic plots are drawn. He married Anne Hathaway when he was eighteen, and they had three children together: Susanna (born 1583) and the twins Hamnet and Judith (1585). According to one narrative, he may have worked as a schoolteacher before relocating to London on his own in the late 1580s under mysterious circumstances. He may have done so to evade poaching charges or to escape the restrictions of small-town home life by joining a traveling theatrical group. The main aim of the study was to explore the



feminist approaches in Shakespeare's comedies with focus to *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*.

Research Methodology:

Sources of Data Collection:

The data were collected through primary and secondary sources for this research.

The following was the research procedure:

→ In-depth analysis of various novels, magazines, publications and works in the field of English literature.

→ The various researches was identified from the literature evaluation, i.e. the untapped region in the subject of English literature.

→ The identification of research was resulted in the development of research objectives.

→ From the standpoint of research aims, an intensive study of William Shakespeare's plays was conducted.

→ The feminist features of the female characters was highlighted.

→ The conclusion was derived to describe how the study objectives were met.

Data Analysis:

We have been look at the following Shakespeare comedies:

As You Like It



With its young lovers, pastoral setting, escape to the green world, the play's indulgence in song, dancing, and laughter, and its conclusion with the ringing of marriage bells, *As You Like It* (1599) is often regarded as a classic example of Romantic comedy. The play will also generally be appreciated for its depiction of the 'development' theme, particularly of Rosalind and Orlando from adolescence to maturity, and for how it deals with Duke Senior's reestablishment of authority.

In this play we have been discuss that Shakespeare used disguise in *As You Like It* to rebuke the bad attitudes, behaviours, and customs that were most common at the period. In this drama, disguising occurs both voluntarily and involuntarily, for a variety of reasons such as fear, love, and protection. In her disguise, Rosalind interacts with a variety of people that embody various outdated societal norms. Her cover helps dispel these misconceptions and evaluate her lover's character. Orlando's devotion to Rosalind transcends reality, and he often escapes into the romantic and dream worlds. She chooses to treat his love sickness and folly after seeing him scribble poetry and hang them from the trees like a mad lover. She declares that her love is greater than his love and, in response, downplays her own passionate nature in favor of her partner's treatment. Thus fully utilizes her disguise to influence her boyfriend. Without the mask, maybe she was not have succeeded.

Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night, or *What You Will* (1601) is a Shakespearean comedy that appears to provide a succession of possibilities to its viewers, readers, and critics through the playwright's choice of title, sub-title, and even the conjunction 'or' used between the title and the sub-title. Each of them will offer the flexibility to appreciate, comprehend, and construe the play in a way that corresponds to contemporary critical practice of approaching a text by considering it 'open' to numerous meanings or readings, some of which may even be mutually exclusive. This flexibility and change will inextricably be linked to the way gender identities will be established in this drama. Feminist critics has been investigated and



explore the conceptions of masculinity and femininity, focusing not just on Viola / Cesario / the Boy Actor's sexual indeterminacy, but also on the play's political and cultural surroundings, family dynamics, and social hierarchy.

In this play we have been discussed that in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, like other comedies, makes significant use of disguises and assumed identities to create comedic elements. It is essential to the play's narrative that Viola poses as Duke Orison's page. As a result, the disguise generates the crucial element of intrigue; mystery, uncertainty, and misunderstandings progress the main narrative and its following subplot. The intentional humorous misunderstanding is caused when Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, returns because of how much he looks like her. In addition, it is because of him that Olivia and Duke Orison are at odds. The suspense of the play's unfolding events is enhanced by Viola's disguise. The storyline hinges on appearance deception. The protagonists fall in love with one another while being unaware of one other's real gender and identity.

Analysis and Discussion:

As You Like It

The play *As You Like It* (1599), with its young lovers, pastoral setting, escape to the green world, indulgence in song, dancing, and laughing, and its conclusion with the ringing of wedding bells, is widely regarded as the ideal example of Romantic comedy. The play has also generally been lauded for its portrayal of the "growth" concept, particularly as it relates to Rosalind and Orlando as they transition from adolescence to maturity, and for the way it handles the restoration of Duke Senior's authority. The play's title conveys, similar to *Twelfth Night's*, a sense of liberation that is conveyed by the characters to the reader or audience. The play also depicts a unique female link that acts outside of patriarchal authority but is ultimately subject to it, as well as the use and abuse of power that leads to conflict



between brothers. The play's conclusion appears to support the traditional patriarchal structure as Rosalind simultaneously "gives" herself to her father and her lover, saying, "To you I give myself, for I am yours" (V. iv. 110). Other parts of the play with enough subversive energy to challenge ideas of gender identity and models of behavior, intelligence, courage, and other qualities that are typically considered to be typical of either the masculine or the feminine include Rosalind's sexual disguise as Ganymede in the forest of Arden and her appearance in the epilogue. *As You Like It* is a particularly strong discursive field, according to feminist critics of the play, where gender roles are flipped inside out to reveal that what patriarchal society perceives as masculinity and femininity are actually a collection of gestures and acts that are simple to copy.

Since Juliet Dusinberre has discussed *As You Like It* extensively over the course of 25 years, her analysis of the play may be used as the starting point for this discussion. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, her analysis of the play, focuses mostly on the interchangeability of gender roles in feminist and theatrical contexts. Dusinberre describes how moralists denounced crossed-dressed women in Elizabethan and Jacobean society for displaying in public their disobedience of religious and ethical rules outside of the theater. The same sexual masquerade tendency was criticized by anti-theatre propagandists in the theater world, where boy players played female characters. From this point on, women and playwrights formed a sort of alliance because they were both accused of breaking the same social mores. The playwrights' defense of their use of theatrical cross-dressing against accusations really hinted at the feminist component of the entire gender-bending debate.

A new, wealthy bourgeoisie made up of traders, attorneys, and other professionals challenged the notions of an established, hereditary nobility at the beginning of the sixteenth century, signaling the beginning of a new period in which women also gained their freedom. Dress codes in regard to status and gender were disrupted as a significant social act of disobedience. So, clothing became a disguise or a symbol of a vast social liberty that aimed



to eliminate artificial inequalities between individuals and ceased to represent a person's true identity.

Rosalind chooses to travel to the Arden Forest, where she has heard her exiled father lives, after being expelled from the court of her usurping uncle, Duke Frederick. She considers masculine disguise a type of defense that she would require in the outside world. She appears to view masculinity as a performance and masculine appearance as the main determinant of this performance's success as she considers donning a male disguise.

Rosalind assumes the identity of Ganymede and displays heroic masculinity. She feels the need to comfort Celia, who is now hiding as Aliena in the terrifying forest, despite the fact that she is scared at heart, like many "mannish cowards" do: "I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show themselves courageous to petticoat" (II. iv. 6). Rosalind encounters the afflicted Orlando in the wilderness while posing as Ganymede and "performs" being her love interest so that, through practice, he can muster up the courage to propose to the "real" Rosalind.

As Celia continually proclaims and refutes Rosalind's boyhood, the double entendre begun by Rosalind playing her own role in Orlando's male fantasy is continued. The gender bending becomes more interesting if we remember that all of Shakespeare's heroines were portrayed by boys. Rosalind, Celia claims, has always been a teenage girl at heart, even when she portrays Ganymede. Like Viola in *Twelfth Night*, she is unable to show her love for the object of her affection despite his close proximity because of her male clothing. Shakespeare succeeds in keeping his heroines and the boy players distinct because,



according to Dusinberre, "at their [heroines] most boyish, they are still women watching their own performance as boys" (ibid., 252). This observation makes a connection between the concerns of masculinity, femininity, and theatricality. Shakespeare also wrote his heroines' words in such beautiful language, according to Dusinberre, that it helped the boy actors who played the heroines seem more feminine.

Thus, especially in the comedies, the Shakespearean heroines were a fusion of masculine experience and feminine feeling, making them more complete human beings. In this regard, Dusinberre brings to mind Virginia Woolf's description of Shakespeare's inventiveness as fundamentally an "androgynous, man-womanly mind" (Woolf 93), free of gender bias and indicating a mature level of artistic ability. In her capacity as a feminist writer, Woolf believed that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman, pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (ibid., 98).



Twelfth Night

Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1601) seems to offer its audience, readers, and critics a variety of options in addition to the festive spirit through the playwright's selection of the title, the sub-title, and even the conjunction "or" used between the title and the sub-title. Each of these options gives the flexibility to appreciate, comprehend, and interpret the play in a way that is consistent with modern critical practice, which views a text as being "open" to a variety of readings, some of which may even be mutually exclusive. The way the gender identities have been formed in this drama has a significant bearing on this openness and alterity. Feminist critics, who pay particular attention to the play's political and cultural backgrounds, familial structures, and social hierarchy, as well as Viola, Cesario, and the Boy Actor's sexual indeterminacy, investigate and explore the conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Since the publication of two volumes (*Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, and *Alternative Shakespeares*, edited by John Drakakis) in the mid-1980s, which revolutionized Shakespeare criticism, the issues of class and cultural identities have also come to be of equal importance to feminist critics. Shakespeare criticism, like all postmodern critical practices, began to move towards a heteroglossia, a way of looking at the text as a field of multiple, valid meanings rather than only one clear, universally acknowledged meaning, as a result of a demand for opening the Shakespearean playtexts to interdisciplinary studies (travel diaries, joke books, anatomy, family portraits, and so on), by contextualizing and politicizing the readings. Since then, *Twelfth Night* has been the focus of a number of feminist readings and rereadings that have both influenced and been influenced by other critical perspectives like Marxism, Deconstructive critique, Cultural Materialism, or New Historicism.

Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, by Juliet Dusinberre, was initially published in 1975 as a ground-breaking work for feminist Shakespeareans.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola disguises herself as Cesario and works for Orsino, the Duke of Illyria. Viola resembles her identical brother, Sebastian, when she is dressed as a man. The play is



interpreted by Dusinberre in terms of sexual disguise, which broadly considers two aspects of gender identity: the contrast between society's idea of Viola as Cesario by trusting the disguise (appearance) and Cesario's idea of "herself as Viola by trusting her reality"; and a scrutiny of the concepts of "masculinity" and "femininity" as social constructs and thus subject to contestation and subversion. Dusinberre uses the planned battle between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Cesario as his point of comparison and claims that society's conception of masculinity and femininity is based on dress code and other cosmetic factors rather than any absolute virtue or vice. When Antonio is forced to accept to battle with Andrew, his 'rival' for Olivia's hand, as Cesario, she is terrified: "Pray God defend me! A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack a man" (III. iv. 286-7). For his part, Sir Toby advises Andrew, the knight, who is equally terrified of Cesario's alleged bravery: "Swear horrible; for it comes to pass oft that a terrible oath, with a swaggering accent sharply twang'd off, gives manhood more approbation than ever proof itself would have earned" (111. iv. 170-73).

Viola creates a strong emotional connection with the audience through her lonesome melancholy. Dusinberre contends that the thing that affects us the most about Viola is the agony of suppression, since Viola must suppress and nourish her unspoken longing beneath her male persona. Finally, she must give up her masculine disguise and her identity as Cesario once she has won Orsino's heart. But Sebastian, her twin brother, from whom she has been estranged until the end of the play, is Viola's alter ego, not Orsino, with whom she is to be united in marriage.

Conclusion:

Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest writer in history. All of mankind and the environment are included in his creations and genius. In his writings, studying nature is akin to traveling to a foreign nation, and studying man is similar to touring a famous city. His work demonstrates that, in the long run, good always triumphs over evil. Shakespeare's plays had a greater impact on me than any book, person, or event in my life, according to Goethe, who uses this statement to illustrate the importance of Shakespeare. He is excellently described in the



lines, "His life was gentle, and the elements." He had so many different elements in him that Nature may exclaim, "This was the man!"

The greatest beauty of a poetical composition frequently lies in the harmonic mingling of the tragic and comic parts, which almost imperceptibly merge into one another. Both may coexist harmoniously in the same play as well as within the same character. The majority of great performers share a similar trait, making it difficult to determine whether their imitations are funnier or more heart-breaking. One of the features of superlative art is this joyful blending and contrasting of tragic and humorous colouring; it offers both solace and suffering and peace and strife. Shakespeare appears to have particularly enjoyed using it. No aspect of his method is more widely understood or appreciated. His comedies almost always have a serious undercurrent and occasionally a tragic backdrop, while his tragedies seldom fail to have humorous interludes. Life is not all misery or all joy; the sun will be hidden by clouds, but the clouds will be illuminated by the sun, at least on their periphery.

Even though their connections may be faint and their interactions may be quick, the Comic is not the tragedy. They are based on several, perhaps opposing, philosophies. Criticism must aim to clarify their differences for understanding and not be satisfied with a general appeal to the aesthetic experience. The profound ethical principle that drives the individual is where tragic earnestness comes from. However, he violates another ethical principle, making him guilty. Additionally, the tragic character must possess a power and ferocity of will that prevent it from ever giving up on its goals. Reconciliation is unattainable; the only way to end the battle is via death. In comedy as well, there is a conflict between the individual and some ethical principles; he intends to violate them but is unsuccessful in doing so; he is defeated by external deception or crumbles due to internal weakness; he desires that total immersion in some lofty goal that is the unique quality of the tragic hero. The ethical world and its collision are, therefore, the shared space of tragedy and comedy. Their primary distinction can be found in how the main characters relate to this moral universe. The first issue that needs to be resolved is now in front of us: What exactly is a comic individual? But it takes multiple people who are engaged in action and counteraction to create a comedy; therefore, the second half of the subject will be the Comic Action. The third component of the subject is the necessary conclusion, which



follows logically from the preceding elements and provides the Comic Solution. Each division will be handled in the order that makes sense.

He has been the target of deceit in some way. He battles a ghost of his own mind or seeks an outward appearance, but both of these actions are deceptive since they are not what they seem to be. His goal is folly, and his approach is futile. He may have a noble goal and a realistic objective, but he lacks the capacity to carry it out. His delusion is that he thinks he can do everything he wants. Even though his goal may be ludicrous, he pursues it with the same tenacity. The person is pursuing an appearance and is therefore the victim of deceit, regardless of whether it is referred to as a foible, a folly, or an infirmity. He may even be aware of the ludicrous and elusive nature of his end. It is important to pay close attention to these two constraints. The comedic person cannot succeed in transgressing the moral standards with which he disagrees since these are the highest, most important interests of man and cannot even be threatened without inspiring anxiety, which kills all comic tendencies. Successful adultery, treason, successful seduction, and other crimes of state and family law are not funny, and neither is villainy that succeeds in its goal. Even if such wrongdoing is intended, it must never be carried out; instead, it must be stopped and punished. Therefore, the delusion shouldn't extend to the point where it leads to a transgression of moral standards. Every dramatic action comprises these key components, which may be broken down into the Thread, the Movement, and the Collision. The Comic Individual is motivated to take action by his delusion; he has a goal that he wants to achieve. He doesn't typically stand alone; instead, he is surrounded by his tools, his allies, and his foes, much as in real life. He is also connected to a number of people who must provide him with various prescriptions. This makes up the Thread. The bearer of the guiding idea is typically the one central character around whom the others congregate; the others may support or undermine the core objective. Throughout the play, characters frequently transition from one Thread to another. Shakespeare always has at least two of these Threads, frequently three, and occasionally more could be discovered with careful investigation. However, there is a suitable limit that should not be exceeded. Both the number of Threads and the number of characters within a Thread must be in the proper range. Genuine theatrical instinct will steer clear of both dearth and excessive complication. These Threads, or groupings, as they are sometimes referred to, are interconnected, run parallel to one another, and share



some fundamental idea of harmony, contrast, or opposition. They progress through one stage of the action together; this is referred to as a play's movement. Then comes a changeover into a new stage, which must immediately develop from the previous stage. The major connections in the work are these transitions; therefore, pay close attention to them. This is the movement that unites all the Threads and propels the play into a new stage. The comparison may be drawn to a river that flows continuously when crossing from one nation to another, with all of its parallel currents, eddies, and counter currents. Every play written by Shakespeare contains two or three of these Movements, but rarely more. Here, the critic might be reminded of his obligations. He ought to summarize the core idea of each Movement, draw attention to its limitations, and lay the foundation for the changeover to the following Movement. This entails dissolving the appearance and restoring reality. It is necessary to remove the reason for the Comic Individual's hallucination because it is false and not real. Since the action is based on some sort of lie, either internal or external, the source of the errors and complexities must be revealed and made clear to each character. However, the Solution will change depending on the tool used. Natural Resemblance is a situation in which similar people are finally brought together and the likeness that has caused so much hardship is found. The inexplicable events of the previous moments can then be explained to everyone. Since the entire mess in the case of Disguise rests on the mask, this is taken off, and the plotter is arrested, or at the very least, made known. A small amount of vengeance for the perpetrator's deceit may also enter into this situation. It is encouraging to discover that disguises are not risk-free.

Feminist criticism is fully aware of how crucial men's bonds and male identity are to comedy, in addition to focusing on the identity and independence of women. Here, we came to the following conclusion about the thesis:

As You Like It

As You Like It (1599) is frequently regarded as a classic example of Romantic comedy due to its young lovers, pastoral setting, escape to the green world, the play's indulgence in song, dance, and laughter, and its finale with the ringing of marriage bells. The play's portrayal of the 'growth' topic, particularly Rosalind and Orlando's transition from



adolescence to maturity, will likewise be generally praised and for how it handles Duke Senior's restoration of power.

Shakespeare employed disguise in *As You Like It* to criticize the poor attitudes, behaviours, and practices that were prevalent at the time, as we have discussed in this play. Disguising happens both willingly and unconsciously in this scenario for a number of motives, including fear, love, and protection. Rosalind connects with a number of people while wearing her disguise. People who represent a variety of outmoded societal norms. Her cover aids in debunking these myths and assessing the personality of her partner. Orlando frequently withdraws into the romantic and dream realms because of his unwavering attachment to Rosalind. When she sees him write poetry and hang out, she decides to remedy his love sickness and stupidity them like a crazy lover from the trees. In response, she downplays her own ardor in favor of her partner's treatment and asserts that her love is greater than his. Thus, she fully makes use of her disguise to sway her boyfriend. Perhaps she wouldn't have been successful without the mask.

Twelfth Night

Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1601) seems to offer a series of options to its audience, readers, and critics through the playwright's selection of title, sub-title, and even the conjunction 'or' used between the title and the sub-title. Each of them will provide the adaptability to understand, value, and construct the play in a manner that is consistent with modern critical practice, which involves viewing a text as "open" to a variety of interpretations, some of which may even be antagonistic. The degree to which gender identities are constructed in this drama will be directly related to this adaptability and change. In addition to concentrating on Viola, Cesario, and the Boy Actor's sexual indeterminacy, feminist critics have also looked at the political and cultural context of the play, the play's family dynamics, and the social hierarchy.



Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, like previous comedies, heavily uses disguises and assumed identities to produce humorous elements, as has been highlighted in this play. Viola's disguise as Duke Orison's page is crucial to the play's plot. Therefore, the disguise creates the essential element of intrigue; mystery, doubt, and misunderstandings advance the main story and its subsequent subplot. Due to how closely Viola's twin brother Sebastian resembles her, when he returns, there is a deliberate comical misunderstanding. Additionally, he is the cause of the conflict between Olivia and Duke Orison. Viola's disguise heightens the suspense as the play's events develop. The plot's central idea is appearance fraud. The main characters fall in love with one another without knowing each other's true gender or identity.

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