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VOL.6 / NO.1-2/SPRING, AUTUMN 2016

**“Evaluating Shakespeare’s ‘*The Tempest*’ in Modern Perspective:
Cautioning the Mankind against the Perils of Wrongful Deeds”**

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Abstract: ‘The Tempest’ (1611) is often considered to be Shakespeare’s last great play, first performed in 1611 during the reign of King James I. It is believed that the chief character of the play, Prospero is an analogue for Shakespeare himself as there are evident similarities between Prospero’s illusory magic and Shakespeare’s poetic genius. The themes of imagination, illusion, and theatre itself play an integral role in the drama. Though it is apparent that the theme of forgiveness is at the heart of the drama, yet it is debatable as to what extent the playwright realizes this forgiveness. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the play in modern perspective and focus on the mannerism of people in the 21st century. The world of present times is witness to the populace indulging in heinous crimes and attempting the irrational and selfish ways to achieve their goals. People in the post-modern era wallow in unruly means to realize their ambitions without even a stint of fear of the Almighty. The present paper focusses on the application of the theory of Karma advocated in legendary epic ‘Mahabharata’ and ‘Brihadaranyaka Upanishad’ of Hinduism to ‘The Tempest’ which accentuates the notion that one must perform good karma and dissent from doing bad karma as good deeds are rewarded and bad deeds are punished.

Keywords: Tempest, Karma, reconciliation, dharma, adharma, punya (merit), paap (sin), forgiveness, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

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‘The Tempest’ – Shakespeare’s Immemorial Creation

‘The Tempest’ (1611), the last play by William Shakespeare, a widely acclaimed English poet, dramatist and actor, focusses on Prospero’s giving up his art of magic which is also indicative of Shakespeare in Prospero’s veil, bidding farewell to the stage. Shakespeare is considered to be the national poet of England and dramatist of wide range of themes and subjects. His plays have such a universal appeal that even in the 21st century, they are repeatedly adapted, translated and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political context throughout the globe. Though Shakespeare did not have any formal education, yet his works have such enchanting quality that they fascinate all the people ranging from intellectuals to the ignorant masses. The initial plays of Shakespeare were governed by the Revenge tradition in drama but the last plays including *The Tempest* significantly highlight the virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation.

‘*The Tempest*’, written in five acts by Shakespeare, opens with a storm raised by Prospero who was the rightful Duke of Milan but was driven away and put into a rotting boat with his three year old daughter Miranda by his usurping brother Antonio. Since Prospero was always absorbed in his books and his magic rather than paying attention to the nuances of the administration of Milan, his brother Antonio took advantage of the situation; conspired against him and left him and his daughter at the perils of fate. The conspiracy to take over Prospero’s power and station was the work of his brother Antonio who plotted with the King of Naples, Prospero’s enemy. The rotting boat carrying Prospero and Miranda reached an island where Prospero stayed for twelve years. Here, he engrossed himself in his books and decided to make good use of his magic. He freed the spirit called Ariel from the torment of the witch Sycorax. When Prospero landed on the island with a native inhabitant Caliban, he tried to nurture this savage and uncivilized creature; taught him language and customs but this did not have any effect on the Caliban, a disfigured and savage offspring of the dead witch, Sycorax. Caliban strikes back, proclaiming that he did not want to be educated by Prospero:

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (Act I, scene ii, p. 39)

Prospero did not drive him away, rather he took him in his little family until he attempted to rape Miranda. Prospero then confined Caliban to a rock and to the status of slave and made him fulfil the daily needs of Prospero like gathering firewood and doing other menial tasks.

Rising of the Tempest

Prospero rises the tempest in order to cast on to the shores of his island, a party of Neapolitans including King Alonso of Naples, his son Ferdinand, his brother Sebastian and Prospero's brother Antonio, returning to Naples from a wedding in Tunis. The party is brought to shore by the spirit Ariel, but Ferdinand is separated from others and is believed to be drowned. Ariel helps frustrate plots against Prospero by Caliban and against Alonso by Antonio. Ariel then appears to Alonso and Antonio and reproaches them for their unjust treatment to Prospero. Alonso, believing Ferdinand dead, is sure that his son's death was punishment for his crime. He feels repentant and his heart wails at the thought of his evil act and injustice done to Prospero. Prospero forgives Antonio but does not fully reconcile with him, saying:

"For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth,
I do forgive thy rankest fault" (V, i, p. 89)

When Prospero is convinced that Antonio and company are chastened, he reconciles all and decides to return to Milan to reclaim his throne. Also he welcomes the love relationship of his daughter Miranda and Ferdinand, son of Alonso. In this way, he reunites the two contending kingdoms – Milan and Naples by agreeing to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Note of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Prospero realizes that his project is almost complete. All his enemies are gathered together in one place. Ariel describes the sorrow and emotions of the company, adding that anything human would certainly feel compassion for them. Taking this cue, Prospero decides to show mercy. His reason and not his passion takes control. In a soliloquy, he reveals that, once he

restores the sanity of his enemies, he will forever renounce magic: "*But this rough magic/I here abjure*" (V, i, p. 86) He realizes that "*the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance,*" (p. 85) and since his conspirators are apologetic for their crimes, he has accomplished his purpose. Ariel is sent to release them. Prospero uses his magic one last time to create music to sooth the senses and spirits of the conspirators.

Ariel fetches Prospero clothes showing his true status as Duke of Milan. When the company revives, Prospero greets them and accuses them for their crimes. Alonso begs forgiveness and asks about Prospero's life on the island. Everything is in order except that Alonso regrets deeply the death of his son. Prospero says that he too has suffered a similar loss; he has lost his daughter. Then he bids the company to look into his home. There they see Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess. All are happily united at the end. Ariel leads in the sailors and announces that the ship is safe and sound. Prospero breaks his magical staff; declares that he will drown his books and exchanges his magician's robes for the clothing he wore when he was the Duke of Milan.

Caliban and his conspirators, entangled in stolen clothes and tottering due to intake of heavy drinks, are led forward. Caliban has a change of heart; he realizes that Prospero is a true master, not the drunken Stephano. He vows to serve Prospero henceforth. The company retires to hear the story of Prospero's life after which he promises them safe journey home.

Ariel and Caliban – Epitome of Modern Civilization

The conflicting attitudes of Ariel and Caliban towards their master Prospero is indicative of the different ways in which human nature responds to modern civilization. Though both Ariel and Caliban are essentially oppressed by Prospero, yet their relationship to their master is based on their natural character. The first appearance of Ariel establishes his character as that of submissive and reverent subject. He says:

All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail! I come
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride

On the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding task
Ariel and all his quality."(I, ii, p. 32)

Ariel's willingness to serve his master strongly contrasts with Caliban's attitude of derisive unruliness. When Ariel greets Prospero with a feeling of reverence, Caliban greets him with a curse.

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye
And blister you all o'er! (I, ii, p. 37)

Ariel is portrayed as a submissive servant, while Caliban is characterized as rebellious and spiteful. Caliban's rebellious attitude is a reaction to his feeling that he is being unjustly used and bullied.

Many critics opine that Caliban is symbolic of what happened to victims of European colonization in the centuries after Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan remarks:

Caliban stands for countless victims of European imperialism and colonization. Like Caliban, colonized peoples were disinherited, exploited, and subjugated. Like him, they learned a conqueror's language and perhaps that conqueror's values. Like him, they endured enslavement and contempt by European usurpers and eventually rebelled. Like him, they were torn between their indigenous culture and the culture superimposed on it by their conquerors. (Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History, 145)

This interpretation of Caliban can be prevailing and socially relevant, especially in film and stage productions where Caliban is portrayed as a colonized, New World subject. Yet, it is important to remember that Vaughan and Vaughan pointed out that this interpretation of Caliban is symbolic of what appears to the observer and not what Shakespeare may have had in mind. During the course of the play, Miranda also suggests that Caliban's "vile race" and lack of

language makes him deserving of his status as a slave. (This, of course, is exactly what European imperialists said about the people they colonized.) What is interesting is that even Caliban seems like he lives to serve. When he conspires with Stephano and Trinculo to kill Prospero, he promises to serve Stephano:

I'll show thee every fertile inch o' th' island,
And I will kiss thy foot. I prithee, be my god. (II, ii, p. 60)

Caliban both mirrors and contrasts with Prospero's other servant, Ariel. While Ariel is "*an airy spirit*," Caliban is of the earth, his speeches turning to "*springs, brine pits*" (I.ii.341), "*bogs, fens, flats*" (II.ii.2), or crab apples and pignuts (II.ii. pp 159–160). While Ariel maintains his dignity and his freedom by serving Prospero willingly, Caliban achieves a different kind of dignity by refusing, if only sporadically, to bow before Prospero's intimidation.

Ariel and Caliban, both represent different aspects of oppression. Ariel was the colonized subject that did whatever the master wanted, and never objected to one act suggested. While Caliban was the colonized that got trapped into the mind set of being oppressed due to his own lack of respect for himself. In fact it is Prospero's art that controls both Ariel and Caliban, binding them to their master. Prospero's magic art could be viewed to stem from his connection to modern civilization. It is evident how he utilizes his art, akin to modern technology, in order to stifle and overpower his subjects.

Concept of "*Karma*"

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, "*Karma means action, work or deed*". It also refers to the spiritual principle of cause and effect where intent and actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of that individual (effect). It is believed that good deed contribute to good karma and future happiness whereas bad intent and bad deed contribute to bad karma and leads to future suffering. The law of karma operates independent of any deity, religion or divine judgment. It is true that "*As a man himself sows, so himself he reaps*." No man inherits the good or evil of another man. It is the person's deed whether good or evil that ascertains his future. The idea of karma may also be associated with a person's character; it is the person's habitual

thinking and action (karma) that determines the personality of a person. In the thirteenth book of the epic '*Mahabharata*', also called the Teaching Book (Anushasana Parva), sixth chapter opens with Yudhishtira asking Bhima, "*Is the course of a person's life already destined or can human effort shape one's life? "The future"*", replies Bhishma, "*is both a function of current human effort derived from free will and past human actions that set the circumstances.*" (Chapple: pp 60-64)

One of the earliest association of karma also occurs in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of Hinduism. It states:

Now as a man is like this or like that,
according as he acts and according as he behaves, so will he be;
a man of good acts will become good, a man of bad acts, bad;
he becomes pure by pure deeds, bad by bad deeds;

And here they say that a person consists of desires,
and as is his desire, so is his will;
and as is his will, so is his deed;
and whatever deed he does, that he will reap. (4.4.5-6)

The effect of karma need not be immediate; it can be felt later in one's life or may extend to future lives. It can be explained through a blooming lotus flower which is one of the few flowers that simultaneously carries seeds inside itself while it blooms. Seed is symbolically seen as the *karma*. Lotus reminds that it is possible to grow and remain unstained even in *muddy* circumstances. (Maria: pp 69-70) Halbfass remarks that "*Good karma is considered as dharma and leads to *punya* (merit), while bad karma is considered *adharma* and leads to *pāp* (demerit, sin).*" While evaluating one's action, it is necessary to review one's intentions, attitudes and desires. A karma theory takes into account not only the resultant action, but also person's intentions, attitude and desires while performing the action. The karma concept thus encourages each person to seek and live a moral life and keep oneself away from immoral life. The meaning and significance of karma is thus as a building block of the ethical theory.

Application of Karma Theory to "The Tempest"

Through a variety of characters ranging from Prospero, Gonzalo, Miranda, Ferdinand & Ariel to a different set of characters such as Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, Caliban, Stephano and Trunculo, the Karma theory is aligned with one and all. Ariel, the devoted spirit, that works for Prospero is released from bondage in the end. Antonio realizes his mistake of usurping the dukedom of his brother Prospero and asks for forgiveness which is granted to him. Prospero tells Caliban that he can now be king of the island and Caliban regrets over thinking that Stephano was his master. He calls himself a "*thrice-double ass*" (95) for worshipping the dull fool Stephano. Caliban responds to the fact that he was turned out of Prospero's cell because he tried to rape Miranda. He is not remorseful, but wishes, had it been done, he would have peopled the island with little Calibans.

Rather than viewing the relationship between Prospero and Caliban as that of master and victim, one can consider that Prospero uses force to control Caliban not because he wants to dominate or enslave this natural man but because this is the traditional means to subdue a beast. Caliban's behaviour is more closely aligned to the beast than to man, and thus, he could be controlled in a similar manner. Caliban's world is neither the ideal world nor the antithesis of the civilized world. It is only a different existence, one that Caliban is content to occupy. Caliban is malicious, cowardly, false, and base; and yet he is essentially different from the vulgar knaves of a civilized world, as portrayed occasionally by Shakespeare. He has picked up everything dissonant and thorny in language to compose out of it a vocabulary of his own.

Alonso is reunited with Ferdinand and the two fathers Alonso and Prospero seal their peace with the marriage of their children Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero regains his kingdom that he had lost twelve years back and returns to Milan as the duke.

'*The Tempest*' is an excellent play as it shows Shakespeare's final treatment of themes - good and evil as well as justice and mercy. It effectively ascertains the concept that good action is rewarded and evil punished. It also reiterates the hypothesis that if one confesses the wrong deed committed by him, he could be granted forgiveness. '*The Tempest*' suggests that nature is more complex than it seems at first glance. The conclusion works to illustrate the best that

human nature has to offer, through resolution and promise. Harmony and order are restored in a world where chaos has reigned — the natural world that Caliban covets.

In ‘*The Tempest*’, Shakespeare allows the audience to appreciate the possibilities of utopian society, the good, and bad, so that they can understand the problems that the pursuit of a utopian environment may cause. ‘*The Tempest*’ is a window into the dimensions of utopian societies. Shakespeare's play portrays the good and the evil sides of the perfect life. While his characters take on the role of the leaders of the utopian societies, Shakespeare portrays the social questions and beliefs of society of how a utopian environment should be.

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