

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Victory of Freedom and Philanthropy Over Dictatorship and Misanthropy

P. Sreenivasulu Reddy, C Raghavendra

Asst. Professor of English, GITAM University Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India
Asst. Professor of English, GITAM university, Visakhapatna, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract

Abstract: William Shakespeare, whose skills reached the zenith of perfection as a dramatist, is still a literary wonder, despite human genius has advanced to discover even complexities of human mind. One of his last plays *The tempest* exhibits, probably, his view of liberty, freedom, republic and altruism. Even though many reviewers, including critics, have accepted that the theme of *The Tempest* is colonization and forgiveness, one can, no doubt to say, keenly observe the dramatist's urge for republic through the characters Prospero, Gonzalo etc. After the tempest in the sea the travellers in the ship are safe and secure, Sebastian and Alonso's plan to kill Alonso fails, Stephano and Trinculo fail to kill Prospero and so they do not realise their dream of owning the island, Ferdinand and Miranda unite in marriage according to their wish, villainy persons are not punished, Ariel is liberated and Prospero again becomes the Duke of Milan. All these incidents assert that freedom and philanthropy defeat dictatorship and misanthropy.

The Tempest is a supreme expression of the victory of philanthropy over evil. There are two generations in the play one is younger generation which shows the value of love and the other is older generation which shares both hatred and forgiveness. This play, in one aspect, is about storm and calm which respectively related to the tragedy caused by human passion and the reconciliation. HB Charleton in his "Shakespearean tragedy" suggests that Shakespeare world is moral rather than metaphysical. Here in the play also one can observe morals or human values which help humans to defeat misanthropy.

The play opens with a stormy tempest created by Prospero, the rightful duke of Milan, who was overthrown by Antonio, brother of Prospero, to whom he delegated powers when Prospero spent his time in secret studies as he had thirst for knowledge. Antonio grew ambitious and plotted with Alonso, the king of Naples to depose Prospero. Prospero with his daughter was put on a board with no sails and ropes. Gonzalo, a faithful lord, provided Prospero with essentials and magic books. Prospero lived in an island with his daughter for twelve years. Antonio, Alonso's brother Sebastian, son Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Alonso's advisor and passengers are returning from the wedding of Alonso's daughter, Claribel with the King of Tunis. Having known that all are travelling by the ship, a storm is raised by the powerful magic of Prospero. All the men face the brunt of this storm. Miranda, daughter of Prospero, not knowing that it is happening because of his father's magical powers weeps at the plight of men on the ship. Her words reveal how tender she is at heart:

Miranda: 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 (V- I-78-82)

Prospero separates the shipwreck survivors into several groups. Everyone believes the other to be dead, so as Alonso and Ferdinand. The tempest is raised with a purpose to serve as purgation. Even though Prospero has magical powers to harm or kill his enemies who have caused for the loss of dukedom and comfortable life. Basavaraj S. Naikar says:

the play holds testimony to the conception of an ideal character
a hero noble, who is an embodiment of the ultimate knowledge
of the truth of life and is in possession of those final powers of
the soul of characters and bring, through which to turn the hell
of human life into a heaven on earth.

Even though Prospero has been dethroned from Milan, he never loses his sanity or reason. He never tries to harm the persons responsible for his present state. He has freed Ariel, an airy spirit who has been imprisoned in a cloy tree by Sycorax, an evil witch. Prospero promises freedom after his attainment is accomplished. His heroism is moral and spiritual. He adheres to the high ideal of life by following sublime ethics. This nobility reaches the height of glory. Frank Kernod rightly says:

In Prospero the tempest points a character, whose supernatural
powers and contradictory aspects show as much of JudeoChristian
divinity as dramatic credibility will allow the storm displace his
elemental Jehovah like wrath, and the middle of the play shows
a balance of human traits with god like omniscience. Only in the end
does Prospero embrace simple humanity.

When Alonso, Gonzalo and others are sleeping with the magic spell of Ariel, Antonio persuades Sebastian to kill the king. When they are trying to kill, Ariel who follows the orders of Prospero awakens Gonzalo and others from sleep. It clearly indicates philanthropic nature of Prospero. Ferdinand and Miranda fall immediately in love, but Prospero compels Ferdinand to become his servant, pretending that he regards him as a spy. He asks Ferdinand to carry, not to punish or not take revenge on the enemy's son but to test his love.

Ferdinand: This my mean task would be as heavy to me

but the mistress which I serve quickens what's dead.

And makes my labours pleasures (III- I 4-7) .

When Ferdinand is successful to prove his love and ready to suffer to marry Miranda, Prospero feels happy. Prospero evidently can do and undo things and harass his enemies and take revenge upon them but he doesn't do that.

In the subplot Caliban, son of Sycorax,a villainous island native, who works as Prospero's slave,Trinculo and Stephano come together and their comic conspiracy against Prospero is a fail. So evil is reduced to a helpless state. Good expresses itself in Prospero's magic which gives him supreme control over Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso and Stephano etc. When Prospero has achieved a perfect control over his enemies, he steals a march over them by following a higher and nobler path of thought, feeling and action. Prospero's behaviour is inspired by sublime ethics and highest kind of idealism. Far from taking revenge upon his enemies, he wants to forgive them. When Prospero feels that his enemies have been adequately punished with consequent security, he pities them. Prospero has achieved true greatness of soul through his life on the Island. The consummate maturity and sublimity is evident in his words "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.(V-I 27-28)

Prospero,at the end, attains freedom from the deserted Island.He gives freedom to Ariel as he has promised. So here it is crystal clear that dictatorship is overcome by freedom. One may question Prospero's love of freedom in the case of Caliban. One should not forget that Prospero tries to teach good language also but it's unable to learn, moreover curses Prospero and even tries to rape Miranda. From the words of Caliban one can understand how rude he is

Caliban: 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

So making Caliban a slave is apt decision beyond any doubt. Caliban's conspiracy along with Sebastian and Trinculo to become dictators of the Island is a fail.

This play is generally considered as Shakespeare's autobiography .Henry James considers this play as the finest flower of Shakespeare's experience.The play promotes moral values like faith, patience, charity hope and love. The tempest also offers a wider perspective of life where evil though quite powerful is thrown into insignificance. Good invariably triumphs over evil with the awakening process of repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption. At the end the magical atmosphere of reconciliation can be observed clearly.

References:

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