

Exploring the Concept of Cross-Dressing in Shakespeare's Plays: Uncovering the SHE

Tasnim Shahid

Student ID: 09203008

Department of English and Humanities

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BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Tasnim Shahid

Student ID: 09203008

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Abstract

This paper aims to study 'Cross-dressing' as a recurrent and significant element in the plays of William Shakespeare. It will show how 'Cross-dressing' of the characters, mainly of the female characters in the plays of William Shakespeare not only serve as a literary tool to enhance the dramatic appeal but posits avenues of cultural and gender stereotypes to be reviewed in a new light. This paper shows how through 'Cross-dressing' or by altering socially determined attires, the female characters in Shakespeare could subvert the traditional gender roles dictated upon them. To put it in the simplest, 'Cross-dressing' or 'Transvestism' serves as the liberty of the female protagonists of Shakespeare confined in a patriarchal paradigm.

To do so, this paper will give close readings to some of the very successful plays of William Shakespeare in order to go to the depth of analyzing 'Cross-dressing', its possible derivations and its probable effects in and after the play. While analyzing the concept of cross-dressing this paper also finds it significant to discuss about the Elizabethan society and its women in their subordinate position to men as Literature tends to revolve within the socio-cultural atmospheres of its age. It will also talk about the cultural metonymy associated with clothing as clothing is never free from gender-bias and it projects further distancing of women. The paper will also talk about the 'female body' as the center of politics of male gaze and how 'Cross-dressing' liberates the female body in Shakespeare's plays.

This paper will then engage into the debates of whether or not this recurrence of 'Cross-dressing' was after all a well thought de(ad)vice on the part of the playwright which demands our critical attention.

The works of Shakespeare which have been chosen for this paper are as follows: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.

This paper is divided into four segments with an introduction followed by three chapters of close reading of the selected plays which contrive cultural and gender theories for further explanation and finally reaches to the conclusion. In the first chapter I will introduce the key terminologies and concepts which have played a significant role in achieving the framework of the thesis. In the second chapter, I will discuss about the nature of the 'Presence' of the 'Patriarch' or the 'Father' both in the society and in the plays and how they mirror each other. In the third chapter, I will discuss how cross-dressing could weaken this 'patriarchal presence'. In the final chapter, I will show how the female heroines or the 'Damsel in distress' of the chosen plays are uncovering their inner faculty by covering their feminine appearance and henceforth establishing 'Cross-dressing' as an important way out to patriarchal authority. This is how my paper will show, how 'Cross-dressing' helps the heroines to take male disguise and compensate for their loss of control.

Chapter One: Introduction

I would like to start my thesis with a sentence which has always been exhilarating to my thoughts. It's from Simone de Beauvoir as she said in her revolutionary work *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (276). There are no better words perhaps to explain the societal process of making of a 'woman' or 'feminine' where SHE is reduced to be an ersatz of male race. It is clear from Beauvoir that the traditional identity of a woman or the 'Damsel in distress'¹ is less of a real and more of a cultural construct. The female identity is certainly the product of cultural paradigm and stereotyping. This internalization of blending into the given pattern starts early in childhood as Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* said, "Every moment of the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one" (10). Thus from an early age children are being taught to behave in certain manner according to their gender. So, resistance becomes almost impossible. While Gender² studies show that the difference between men and women lies mostly in terms of their biology or reproduction, this difference of biology is however taken as a platform to dictate intellectual difference.

As bodily difference is taken as the cultural barometer to determine intellectual capability, it negotiates women to a subservient position to men. However, this is not as innocent as it might seem. Gender relations are of course relations where power and authority are given a play though it is long denied and debated upon. This barring or omission is done to reduce women to the *Deuxième Sexe* or the second sex. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* further said,

¹ 'Damsel in distress' or the persecuted maiden is a literary archetype who requires a hero to be rescued.

² According to Lois Tyson Gender refers to the Cultural programming as feminine or masculine.

[T]he whole of feminine history has been man-made. Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it is our problem; so the woman problem has always been a man problem. (151)

However, this omission is a part of Literature too, where women are marginalized as the Damsel in Distress. This is where my thesis starts as it will look into some of the very famous plays of English Literature and will try not only to locate where the women stand in them but also to see if these plays call for a different reading. My paper will show how some of the plays of William Shakespeare had a liberating force for women in them. It will show how cross-dressing worked as the metamorphosis for the women characters as they evolve into stronger characters controlling the progress of the play. Since, body or appearance is the controlling force in the exclusion of women, illusion of appearance works as the emancipation.

Women in Elizabethan England: In the society and in Literature

As my thesis talks about the plays of William Shakespeare who was otherwise the most renowned dramatist of Elizabethan age³ I would first like to discuss and initiate my readers to the cultural paradigm of that age. As a student of Literature, my reading of it over the few years has come to the confidence that Literature and human society mirrors each other. Perhaps this is what makes Literature more worthy than just to be fictions. As I was reading and broadening my knowledge of this age I came to understand that this particular age was remarkable for its political and imperial achievements. However, the position of women was invariably not a big difference than the tradition suggests. Walter Cohen in his book *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* wrote that,

At the level of ideology, the analogy between patriarchal family
and patriarchal monarchy is alien to modern distinctions between

³ Elizabethan era defines Queen Elizabeth's I's reign from 1558-1603.

privet and public: the position of women before 1660 was understood to be intimately connected to the nature of the state.

Yet this period also witnessed a crisis of gender relations. (123)

Elizabethan era had witnessed the patriarchy then but today the idea of patriarchy differs from the previous idea because women's position has been enhanced in many ways than the 16th or 17th century. As per Cohen, women were connected to the nature of the state, by this we can assume that women used to be controlled by the person in command of the house, which is normally the father, brother or the husband. Since, women were not having equal rights in the house; the gender relation was not healthier. Therefore that period was facing a crisis of gender equality since there was patriarchy.

There was a misogynist attitude toward women in this era. Women coming from all class were equally exposed to it. Misogyny⁴ was very much prevalent in the society. It is found in *International encyclopedia of men and masculinities* that misogyny is a cultural practice that works with the barring of women from any authoritative position. It is said that,

Though most common in men, misogyny also exists in and is practiced by women against other women or even themselves. Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that has accompanied patriarchal or male-dominated societies for thousands of years and continues to place women in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making. (443)

Even with a rebellious Queen, Elizabeth the first, the age was not yet ready to see women out of the box entirely. Women were given no access to education, law and office. In *Daily Life in Elizabethan England* by Singman Jeffrey L gender disparity in Elizabethan era is discussed. He said that,

⁴ It refers to the hateful view towards women.

Whereas a male child might have some expectation of moving to a position of relative social and economic independence at some point in his life, a girl would exchange subordination to her father for subordination to an employer or husband.

(18)

It is important to note that the gender disparity used to begin from a very early age in the Elizabethan society. A young boy could have some expectations regarding his life and education. Their parents were happy for them because they knew that their son would support them economically in future. However, girls were not permitted for that. The only expectation from daughter was to stay at home and act as their father wished. It shows that women's subordinated position started from a very younger stage. John Wagner on the other hand said in his book *Historical Dictionary of the Elizabethan World: Britain, Ireland, Europe and America* that, "The patriarchal nuclear family was the core social and economic unit of Elizabethan England" (106). So, not only the social but also the economic unit of this era was under the patriarchy. The court was mostly restricted to women even with a queen as the center in it. It was expected and maintained that the women must stay at home and serve their husband and children only. Women were still confined to home with no significant role to play in politics or economy. They were to be taken care of and defended by the male members of the families. The case was more severe with the young and unmarried women. This brings us back to the fact that women were prone to vulnerability if they did not yield to any male authority.

If this was the scenario with the home and the court, let us move to the theatres of this age. Elizabethan age is marked with its immense success in drama and dramaturgy. Globe Theater is still considered as the most legendary theatre for the dramatists of the world for its structural innovations. The Literature and the theatre of this age were blessed with playwrights

like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlow, John Webster and many more. Going to the weekly productions of these theatres was a part of the lives of London dwellers. Then this could be inferred that these theatrical productions worked as a meeting point of new ideas and a platform to build public opinion. The exciting plays of these dramatists depicting the tragedies, comedies and the political upsurge of the English life must have been more than just entertainments. They not only entertained the audience but must have accelerated the thoughts of the spectators.

Jennifer Drouin said in her essay that, “The goal of theatrical cross-dressing is usually the goal of realist theater itself – to present the audience with a situation that mirrors real life” (25). So, theatre was such a place where the reality was being shown. The present social, political and economical conditions were being depicted in the theatres. Elizabethan theatre showed the changed gender roles. Acknowledging that in mind, this paper argues that cross-dressing was used by Shakespeare as a device to show that change in gender roles. Peter Berek in his article “Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Absolutism in the Beaumont and Fletcher Plays” discussed about Elizabethan era as well as the theatres. He wrote,

Gender roles were changing during the course of the seventeenth century, as were the relationships among what we would now call gender and sexualities. The theaters both reflected such changes and helped create them. (373)

It seems that the society and the theatres were not two diverse objects but representing each other. By depicting the changing gender roles happening in the society, the theatres also challenged the traditional thought of gender inequality.

However, this theatre business excluded women. Women had no access in the theatre as actress. They could of course go and enjoy a play by Shakespeare or Webster but they could

never take up the profession of a theatre actress. As a result, the female characters were played by the male actors. Critic Lois Potter said in the book *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide* that, “In the adult professional theatre [Globe theatre] boy actors played most, perhaps all, women’s roles” (58). While reading the plays of the famous dramatists of this age I found it interesting to consider the exclusion of women from the theatrical productions. It is stated in the book *Mastering Shakespeare* by Richard Gill that,

The audience is sometimes expected to remember that in Shakespeare’s day boys played girls on stage. And sometimes it’s even more complicated; in *As You Like It* a boy would play Rosalind, who dresses us as a boy and then, while still in disguise, pretends to be Rosalind. (99)

The audiences then must have felt this gender switching to be something different and diverting.

Given that, as female roles were performed by the male actors this must have added many dynamics to the psyche of the actors, as well as the audience. With this cultural paradigm was it possible for the playwrights to write plays where the female characters would be anything more than ‘Damsel in distress’? Clearly the mindset of the audience was not ready to see women breaking the circle of patriarchy; achieving an active role and defending themselves on their own, at least not in their feminine shape. Could this be directing the creative mindset of the playwrights to negotiate an alternative? This is where my thesis begins as I would debate over why some of the celebrated female characters in Shakespeare go through cross-dressing or dressing up like the opposite gender. My paper will show that the female characters in Shakespeare who change their attire to male clothing, experience a considerable change for the rest of the play. However, this dramatic innovation was seen in the comedies. Therefore, my paper will focus on the comedies. Here, I would like to quote Mills Perry from his book

Shakespeare: As You Like It where he suggested that Shakespeare's comedies provide new avenues to consider from a feminist perspective. He said,

Shakespeare's comedies hold a special curiosity for feminist critics. Unlike the tragedies or Histories, women characters have the major parts, and speak as many words as men. They are witty and intelligent...and their actions powerfully influence or direct the development of plot. (97)

From his words we come to understand that the Tragedy and History plays of Shakespeare depict men as the center of power and dramatic crisis and women as the periphery. But the comedies were different. Most of his comedies portray powerful female characters who hold the entire play together. There women become the center. Their action directly influences the progression and the successful completion of the play. They achieve and show the heroic quality of defending themselves and defending others.

It is also noteworthy to consider that this change was perhaps not sensitive to the eyes of the Elizabethan audience thus giving the playwrights the opportunity to break the traditional pattern of the 'heroine' who would only appear as per requirement of the Hero. I will also talk about the possible outcome of this dramatic illusion since "cross-dressing and gender ambiguity raise important questions of sexual politics" (Perry 98).

The discussion so far may raise the question to whether it was only Shakespeare who employed this dramatic element of cross-dressing or not. As I was reading more about the plays written in this age I found that besides William Shakespeare many other dramatists such as John Lyly, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher used cross-dressing in their plays. Both Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher was contemporary dramatist of Shakespeare. Besides Shakespeare they had also shown cross-dressing in their plays. It is said by Berek in his article that,

“Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays indeed imitate Shakespeare’s cross-dressed heroines” (360). Hence, their writing can be compared with Shakespeare’s in terms of the portrayal of cross-dressing. Beaumont and Fletcher’s collaboration *Love’s Cure* shows two brother and sister who switches over their gender by disguising them. Berek further said, “The main plot is virtually a ‘nature vs. nurture’ experiment, in which Clara is a martial maid dressed as a man and her brother, Lucio, is disguised as a woman” (362). Studies thus show that the practice of using cross-dressing in the plays was in fact a fascination to the Elizabethan dramatists. Thus it becomes clear that all of three dramatists were responding to the same reality. Writer and theorist David Cressy in his article said that, “Literary Renaissance scholars were fascinated by cross-dressing, by men wearing women’s costumes or women dressed like men” (439). I believe that Renaissance⁵ which is marked with intellectual and cultural advancement must have led the dramatists to experiment with the traditional, passive female characters what their audience had seen so far. As for England with a female ruler, the English playwrights must have had searched for a new tool to depict this cultural and political cross-road that the nation was experiencing. Female characters putting on cloths and masking themselves as men was appropriate to depict this new cultural-political phase. In the theatres when the audience viewed female characters undergoing cross-dressing and male actors performing the roles of women this must have been a revolution in itself as it prepared the audience for the new.

In this paper, I have only worked on the plays of William Shakespeare. I was particularly fascinated in Shakespeare as many of his plays employ cross-dressing. Perhaps it will not be wrong to say that the plays of Shakespeare popularized the concept of cross-dressing. Cross-

⁵ Renaissance means the ‘re-birth’ and it was a cultural movement that changed the way people perceived Art and Literature so far spanning roughly from 14th to 17th century.

dressing gradually became a popular dramatic tradition. Phyllis Rackin in his essay “Shakespeare’s Crossdressing Comedies” reflected on Shakespeare and said,

Of the thirty-eight surviving plays attributed to Shakespeare, about one fifth involve(s) cross-dressing. In seven of these plays female characters disguised themselves as young men. (114)

From the above statement of Rackin we come to understand that about one fifth plays of Shakespeare have shown the concept of cross-dressing. We can find the female protagonists cross-dressing in plays *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Cymbeline*. Cross-dressing is also found in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Richard Gill further said that, “This ‘cross-dressing (literally, a transvestite is one who cross-dresses) has a central place in *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*” (98). As we study these plays we find that cross-dressing is not only the central to conflict but it also brings the resolution of the play. Given that, Shakespeare was the most acclaimed playwright of the Elizabethan age. Thus, it becomes more crucial to study these plays to understand the cultural impact that they were able to confer.

As for my paper, I have chosen three plays of William Shakespeare; *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* where the female protagonists Portia, Viola, Rosalind and Celia cross-dress to enter the world of men. These characters face different crisis and they decide on cross-dressing as a way out from the crisis. It gives them the opportunity to carry out tasks they could never do otherwise. This paper would then argue that Shakespeare’s plays give us a scope to have an understanding of how the society was still not an equal place for women. This paper will explore how this idea of women taking male attire to achieve equal role takes an

interesting turn via cross-dressing. Through cross-dressing a woman becomes a man though not biologically but socially. Her identity changes because of cross-dressing and she starts evolving masculinity in herself. The moment she alters her female attire she wears this potency in herself. Thus, her pseudo identity gives her the opportunity to resist patriarchy. This paper will then argue that depiction of cross-dressing conveyed a message to the Shakespearean audience that the regular gender identities were stereotyped.

Cross-dressing and the politicized ‘female body’

The discussion so far brings us to the role of clothing as it is the key element of cross-dressing. It is noteworthy to mention that clothing is a part of the gender biased customs that dictates different clothing for different genders. One could argue that these fixations were determined as per biological role but these biological roles are often negotiated by the society. These fixations are more relaxed these days which indicate that much of it was dictated upon the grounds of gender chauvinism. Clothing is the product of the advancement of human civilization. The primary idea of clothing was to cover nudity but as attires differ per gender it acquired an intricate relation to Gender studies. Cultural studies would show that cloths are no longer a mere way to cover one’s body but it is also one of the ways of how we perceive/determine our identity. To put it in the simplest, it symbolizes Gender fixation. G. G. Bolich in his book *Crossdressing in Context: Dress, Gender, Transgender and Crossdressing* urged, “... in our Euro-American culture dress is a chief way of presenting perhaps enacting - gender” (17). To further explain the idea I would say clothing not only enacts gender issues in all culture but it can equally alter the understanding of gender. I may quote Bolich as he further said,

These *things* [cloths] we put on become a part of us, both representing whom we experience ourselves to be and expressing how we want others to experience us.

How we dress matters to us and how others dress also interests us. If this were not true, cross-dressing would be a completely unremarkable phenomenon. (17)

The cloths we put on then start to negotiate our identity. As it represents ourselves it also represents what we have experienced, how we want others to experience us and our expression also.

On the other hand, Gender and Cultural studies have always considered the 'female body' as a politicized issue. Female body was mostly seen as a taboo. Patriarchy forces much of its notions on the female body as it views the female body as the 'female wound'⁶ and finds it important to estrange and distance it. As Dymrna Callaghan said in her article "And all is semblative a woman's part: body politics and *Twelfth Night*" that, "The Renaissance body, then, especially in the arena of theatre, has been recongnised as political" (49). Therefore, the traditional idea associated with the female body was not to be challenged as it might hurt the Male gaze⁷. The male gaze could view the female body as sexually arousing and feeble but not as a strong one which can fight and protect itself. Laura Mulvey said in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly. (4)

Though Mulvey's work mostly talks about the representation of women in film, I believe it works for Literature too. The representation of the female body was always politicized, irrespective of the medium. It was designed to satisfy the Male gaze. Literature as a mode of

⁶ Sigmund Freud in his article "On the Sexual Theories of Children" wrote that the female child suffers from penis envy as she lacks penis and therefore considers herself to be a female wound.

⁷ According to Laura Mulvey Male gaze is the practice that forces the audiences to 'view' characters from the perspective of a heterosexual male.

representation too, has always depicted the female body as the feeble one which is subject to violation. So, in the Renaissance theatre the female body was not only a biological issue to think of but also a platform of power play. They dominated the female body and imposed their authority on them through the villains and the heroes, one violating it and the other saving it.

On the other hand, cross-dressing is defined as “the most important form of disguise” (Gill 98). Cross-dressing is more complex than it might seem. It is not merely a same sex camouflage; rather it occurs in man dressing as woman and woman dressing as man. However, it is capable of changing the paradigm of gendered notions associated with the ‘body’. This is how gender politics associates itself with it. It then becomes capable of subverting the stereotypical gender identity. Cross-dressing works as an illusion of identity which releases the female characters from the burden of being passive. It can work without hurting the Male gaze. Cross-dressing does not only mean to change the attire but it also subverts identity. It liberates the ‘female body’ from the pattern of coy, feeble and defenseless. Winfried Schleiner in his article “Male Cross-Dressing and Transvestism in Renaissance Romances” wrote that, “Just as the cross-dressing allows for the topic of homosexuality to be raised, so it highlights, possibly in all literary periods, male-female differences and cultural gender stereotypes” (615). This statement conveys that cross-dressing not only raises the topic of homoeroticism but also gender disparities. This shows that from the early times society hold a traditional idea of gender disparity and puts a label on women that they cannot be intellectually equal to men.

Susan Guber on the other hand, defines cross-dressing in her article “Blessing in Disguise: Cross-Dressing as Re-dressing for Female Modernists” and she said that, “... cross-dressing becomes a way of ad-dressing and re-dressing the inequalities of culturally-defined categories of masculinity and femininity” (479). This statement of Guber plays a significant role

in my paper. Undoubtedly, from the statement it becomes clear to us that in the theatre the inequality between the masculinity and femininity was being depicted with an assistance of cross-dressing. With the help of further analysis, my paper will show the gender disparity, happening in the selected plays. Since, women were viewed as the 'femme fatale' and must be tamed, changing of cloths must have been the only option for the heroines of the selected plays Portia, Viola and Rosalind to survive and merge in the conservative society. This is also reflected in Berek as he said, "By reversing Shakespeare's use of cross-gendered disguise, the play ratifies the principle that agency and perceptiveness belong to men, not women" (366). This statement gives us an image of Shakespearean cross-dressing plays where the social activity and wisdom are such things only associated with men.

The following chapters will study *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like it* and examine in what circumstances did Portia, Viola and Rosalind from the respective plays cross-dress as men and how they are changed with it. My paper will discuss, how on the pre-atmosphere of cross-dressing the female heroines overshadowed by the male figure and how cross-dressing liberates them from this fragile state without upsetting the traditional Male gaze.

Chapter Two

Presence of the Patriarch/Father

It is important to point it out to my readers that my thesis talks about three female characters from three plays of William Shakespeare who are tied with two very significant aspects. While I was reading the plays I discovered that not only that they are women who go through cross-dressing in the course of the play but they share a common providence. They are mostly known as daughters. Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* is the daughter of a rich Venetian noble man who arranges a casket game to marry his daughter off before his death, Viola is the daughter of another noble man whose death unleashes predicament to his daughter and Rosalind is the daughter of the Duke senior who is usurped and banished from his own court. In my paper, I will also talk about Jessica who is the daughter of the most famous Jewish character in English Literature, Shylock. Shylock is of course an outcast. I was astonished to recognize that their personality, crisis and resolution in the plays mostly stem from their positioning as daughters. In this chapter, I will discuss about this interesting positioning of the father-daughter relationship in my selected plays to show the phenomenological⁸ presence of these fathers who represent the patriarch and how their daughters are overshadowed in their presence and finally how it controls the action of the daughters and the fate of the plays.

Before I talk about the presence of the father and the context of these plays I would like to point out to my readers is that in all of these plays none of the heroines have mother or even a mother like figure in their lives. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* are about families where there is no mother. The daughters live in a close proximity with their fathers. Mills Perry noticed about this fact and talked about *As You Like It* in particular that,

⁸ Phenomenological it is the premise which believes that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness.

“Feminists also note that the play is remarkable for its ‘absent mothers’. On the contrary, all the three daughters have fathers who strongly affect the action of the play” (98). Perry further said, “The absence of mothers is a common feature of many of Shakespeare’s plays, and reveals much about the minor position of women in Elizabethan England” (98). Perhaps I can argue then, that this juxtaposition of dominating fathers and absent mothers makes these heroines more prone to vulnerability where they fail to assume a strong female personality. They are more likely to be exposed to the influence of their father.

As to explain my naming of this chapter as Presence of the Patriarch/Father I would point to the atmosphere of the plays which are essentially patriarchal. They talk about societies which are male dominated in nature where women must seek shelter and protection from men in order to survive. The female characters are often controlled by the male characters. Even then the absence of the male member results in the desperate search of another. They live in the perpetual fear of the patriarch. At this point, I would like to discuss about the nature of patriarchy and what constitutes this patriarchal fear. Peter Brooker in his book *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* defines patriarchy as “A form of society ruled by men through the figure of the father [the patriarch] to whom all others, including younger males, are subordinate” (188). Patriarch is a Greek word which stands for father or the head of the family or clan. Thus patriarchy conveys the meaning of ‘rule of the father’. I should clarify that the ‘rule of father’ of course includes husband, brother and all male relations that form the circle of shift dependency for women. Patriarchal society follows the pattern where the father or the male members are taken as the center of power, decision making and inheritance. Lois Tyson on the other hand points out in her book *Critical Theory Today* that, “Patriarchy is thus, by definition, *sexist*, which means it promotes that belief that women are innately inferior to men” (85). According to Tyson, this society draws a margin

between men and women. Thus to Tyson patriarchy is a sexist society that functions by excluding women.

While we study this pattern, we come to see that the presence of the patriarchy was inevitable as it was reinforced through religion, economy and through social customs thus rendering it omnipresence. The religious and moral doctrines that ran the society were in the favor of the patriarch. Mills Perry found an association between religion and male superiority. He said, "Religion was a powerful instrument to enforce the belief and practice the male superiority" (70). Religion was implementing the idea of male superiority and also internalizing this idea in the package of reverence to God and his son. Both are essentially men. Women are not even in the scene. When religion itself is the ideology of father and a son being God, then the inherent meaning we get is that women can only be human not God. Though there was Goddess in Greek mythology but in Christianity we do not see that. As a result, in the society people developed this father-son ideology in them. Religion has always been essential to society, customs and our thoughts. To modern men and women religion may seem to have reduced to a personal life but to the Elizabethan people religion determined the lifestyle, the law and code of conduct. If religion is gender biased then society could not function otherwise. Susan Rakoczy in her article "Religion and Violence: the suffering of Women" said, "The oppression of women through patriarchal social structures increases in the religious context since the presumed 'maleness' of God and the male identity of Jesus are used to justify women's subordination" (31). Kate Millett also echoes Racozy and said, "In most forms of patriarchy this has generally led to the granting of religious support in statements such as the Catholic precept that 'the father is head of the family'... (13).

The Shakespearean society was largely influenced by the religion. They developed their belief that if God's portrayal is like father and son, in the society male will be in charge of controlling it. The influence of the religion in a patriarchal society is viewed in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. As I was analyzing the play, I found it important to talk about Jessica who is the daughter of a Jewish father Shylock. She changes her religion to go far away from her dominated father but the presence of the father does not leave her. After changing her religion her husband becomes the dominating father figure in her life. Jessica elopes and goes against her father's will but she only does that to be saved by another man. For any Elizabethan woman, going against the father/male was not really an option. By not following the traditional Elizabethan women's character she becomes the most hateful person to her father. Moreover, as she fails to fulfill the expectations of Elizabethan society, she is viewed to some extent as a negative character in the play.

Jessica is tormented by her domestic situation. She says to their servant Launcelot, "Our house is hell" (II.iii.2). She elopes from her house with her father's money and jewelry. She is not obedient toward her father Shylock. Being a Jewish girl she elopes with a Christian man. Most strikingly she steals one of her mother's jewels. She cannot be thought as a perfect Elizabethan woman because she is not obedient towards her father. The presence of her father is so threat full to her that she cannot tolerate that and left her home. Though eloping with jewels from her father's place is an inconsiderate action of Jessica but if the background is considered then we could give this character a more justified reading. Patriarchy was responsible for Jessica's action in a great way. The commanding approach is more visible in the figure of the father than affections. Jessica was less loved than commanded upon. The last time Jessica bids farewell to Shylock, she says to herself, "and if my fortune be not crost/ I have a father, you a

daughter, lost” (II.vii.55-56). An anguished tone is found in Jessica’s words. Leaving her father’s place is considered as ‘fortune’ to her.

However, it is ironic that though she elopes from her father’s house but she cannot break the circle of patriarchy. She moves from one father to another. The presence of the patriarchal domination is still survives in another form. She moves away from her father, but then she becomes dependent on her husband Lorenzo. Shylock’s servant Launcelot Gobbo tells Jessica that she is damned because her parents are Jewish. Than Jessica replies, “I shall be saved by my husband, he hath made me a Christian” (III.v.19). She is not happy living with her father, moreover, she is not happy with her Jewish identity. Her word shows that she is convinced that only another man can save her from her father. Her rebellious characteristic is weakened here because ultimately she is confined in the presence of her husband. She could not be free of dominance afterwards.

As for the other three daughters of my paper, they are equally burdened by a father figure, either by having it or not having it. Diane Elizabeth Dreher in her book *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* said about the plays of Shakespeare, that “Shakespeare’s plays are overflowing with anxious and angry fathers who insist on controlling their daughters’ futures, thwarting or arranging their marriages to their own advantage” (43). From her statement it becomes clear that fathers are the controlling figure in their daughters’ life and daughters’ destiny had to arrange by their father. To some extent their marriage used to be arranged by their father for their personal benefit. Let us first consider Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*. Even though Portia’s father is deceased by then, his presence is more powerful than the presence of his living daughter Portia. *The Merchant of Venice* portrays a society entirely ruled by men. The central conflict of the play is between Shylock and Antonio. Portia, Nerrisa

and Jessica come as per requirement of a female companionship. Venice and Belmont where the play is situated both are male authoritative societies. Rob Smith in his critical analysis of the play stated that, “The *Merchant of Venice* reflects the subordinate position of women in Elizabethan England” (70). We come to know about Portia who belongs to a rich family; the kind that Bassanio would prefer as social climbing. She represents the traditional Elizabethan woman who does not go against her father’s will. When we first meet Portia we find her as the head of the household because her father is deceased by then. Portia as the play suggests can take decisions to run the family but only after confirming to the values and doctrines given by her father. We are not even introduced with the name of Portia’s father. It seems a nameless deceased person have full control over the alive heroine of the play. Even though Portia’s father remains an absent figure throughout the play, his authority is far reaching. Portia’s life is mapped out by her father. Portia has no right to take her own decisions. We find Portia uttering her true state to Nerissa that, “... yet a maiden hath no tongue, but thought” (III.ii.8). An unmarried woman must not voice her thoughts or her wish. She might have intelligence and wisdom but she is not permitted to express them but hide.

It is interesting to see that Portia, who manages to hold the position of the head of the family, still must pursue a husband as she cannot be expected to take care of herself and the people under her. It is with choosing of the husband where the play takes a dramatic turn; the casket story. As the bond of casket suggests that choosing of the husband is not a matter of choice rather a game of destiny. In the play we find Portia dependent on her father. She gives immense importance of her father’s will regarding her marriage. She says to Nerissa, “If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my father’s will” (I.ii.98-99). Here she is expressing her wish that even if she has to continue living

her life for centuries like the Mythical character Sibylla who begged eternal life to the Greek god Apollo, she (Portia) will not marry against her father's will. She adds that she will not regret to be unmarried like another mythical character Diana who was a goddess according to Roman mythology who never married.

Thought death marks the natural stopping point for everything but it does not happen with Portia's father. He is dead but his words and decisions are not over. Portia's father had organized his daughter's marriage with the casket game before his death. He had planned three caskets - gold, silver and lead and only one contained Portia's portrait. The suitor, who would choose the proper casket with Portia's portrait, would become her husband. Portia's destiny is already framed by her late father. Now, some may argue that the way the casket riddle is designed it might seem very wise of her father. However, what an Elizabethan audience might not notice is the severity of the condition that, the father in reality played a gamble on Portia's fate, without leaving any choice for her to intervene. Portia says to the Prince of Morocco, "Besides, the lott'ry of my destiny/ Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" (II.ii.15-16). Portia herself is mentioning it a lottery of her destiny where she is unable to choose her husband. This is surely not less than a gamble. The casket test takes away the right of her free will. Though the figure of her father is not present but the authoritative power was still there and Portia cannot break that.

In a patriarchal society, even a dead father was more influential and authoritative than a living daughter. The reason might be that, "traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale" (Millett 13). As per the traditional idea of patriarchy, male have full authority toward women and they can do whatever they had wished. Only the presence of the

father, no matter dead or alive, could do anything to a woman because the society was male dominated. Portia cannot or does not dare to resist her father's authoritative power. For Portia the situation is surely painful and she is expressing her sorrow to Nerissa. However, the condition is not agreeable to her at all. She might not protest or resist but regrets that. Portia is regretting about this to Nerissa and says, "O me, the word 'chooses!' I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike—so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa that I cannot choose one nor refuse none" (I.ii.17-19). To Portia the act of choosing her mate is an unfamiliar experience. In *The Second Sex* Simon de Beauvoir explains this behavior as the result of external factors and social constructions which force the women to merge in a state of lethargy where she is unable to take control of her life. Beauvoir said, "Everything combines to restrain her personal ambition" (369). Therefore, Portia cannot choose anyone whom she likes or cannot deny the one she dislikes. She is confined in an overwhelming psychological inertia. Is it this profound moment of powerlessness which prompts her to take male disguise and compensate for her loss of control?

The pathos shows how a woman had to sacrifice her life to the game of caskets and seat idle while it slips to any random guy. Another interesting thing is even though Portia is not unaware of the fact that her life is being framed by a deceased person who cannot even be there to see how it turns out, still she does not protest. She expresses discontent only. She is abided by her father's decision. She is charmed by Bassanio but she does not reveal the secret of the right casket to him and does not take control of her life in its vital decisions. Therefore she does not disobey her father's will and remains the most obedient to the patriarchy. Being an ideal Elizabethan woman, she cannot resist but later on acquiring male attire she does resist against the patriarchy. The following chapter will show how she is breaking the circle of patriarchy. As to

explain why Portia who later takes the risk of disguising as a man and saves Antonio would remain so passive when it comes to saving her own life I would like to quote Kate Millett who explained this passivity as, “patriarchy has colonized women’s minds by cultivating stereotypically feminine thought and behavior in them” (49). We may also read Ross who said that, “Millett's analysis implies that to gain social power, women must learn to develop those traits encouraged only in males” (50). It becomes clear from Millett’s point of view that if women want to achieve social power and authority then they need to develop those characteristics which are encouraged for men only. This paper views cross-dressing as one of that traits that can help a woman to gain that social power and show their intelligence.

The internalization of patriarchy was so subtle yet so powerful that Portia who emerges as the hero of the play remains passive regarding her own life. She evolves the hero within herself as she wears off her feminine identity. The society has fixed two categories for women and the one which is not submissive is castrated out as the evil one. Lois Tyson put it as “...patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a ‘good girl’; if she doesn’t, she’s a ‘bad girl’”. (89) As a daughter Portia knows she better not risk it.

As Portia’s father had designed her marriage by the casket game, the dependency will remain there for Portia even after her marriage. When Portia will marry, her husband will take over the control on her. Even if she escapes from her father’s authority, she then enters in her husband’s cage of dependency. Consequently, the presence of the father figure will never vanish from her life. She says to Bassanio, “This house, these servants, and this same myself/ Are yours, my lord’s” (III.ii.175-6). This line of Portia shows that she not only gives her house and servant to Bassanio but also devotes herself to him. Her father did not give her the choice to look after

her own wealth. She needs a man to defend her honor as well as her wealth. It shows that the patriarchy removes women from all economic freedom. Hence, she represents an ideal Elizabethan woman who has to surrender herself completely to her husband.

Presence of the father or male domination is also evident in the play *Twelfth Night* but in a different way. Once again we have our heroine who is fatherless in the play. She also loses her brother in a shipwreck. The moment she is not under the support or authority of the male figure, living life becomes difficult for her. As the society is male authoritative, it does not give her enough scope to live independently. Cristina Malcolmson's findings about *Twelfth Night* is that it was "written during a period before a woman's place was imagined as a separate sphere, since, for the Renaissance, a woman was considered to be analogous to other social inferiors in a hierarchical society" (161). According to the traditional idea of that period, women were inferior to men and for that they would stay at home and would be under male supervisor. Though Viola's father is dead like Portia, but because of the presence of the 'father' as the male dominated society, she cannot go out as a woman. For that reason she has to hide her femininity by taking cross-dressing and then enters in men's world.

Like the other Elizabethan women Viola has no economical support. The reason is that she has no male protector in her life. Moreover, being a woman she cannot play her own economical role either. As a result, to protect her honor and to have economical security either she needs to get marry or change her feminine attire. The play shows us Viola chooses the second option and by taking cross-dressing she manages to have the economical steadiness and protects her honor by her own. The following chapter will show us how Viola's crisis gives her an idea to choose cross-dressing to gain gender equality in the male dominated society.

Olivia is another important female character in this play, who just like Viola has no male supervisor in her life. As she is from a high social rank, she does not need to earn her livelihood by entering in male dominate society but she has no equal position in the society as men. Rather, she is staying in her house mostly and cannot engage herself in any public or social work. When a sea captain and Viola continues a conversation about Olivia then the captain says, “A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count/ That died some twelvemonth since; then leaving her/ In the protection of his son, her brother,/ who shortly also died” (I.ii.36-39). The word ‘protection’ is used when a person cannot protect her/himself. When we say that a mother protects her child, we mean by it that the child is not matured enough to protect its own self. However, that society thinks women as immature that they cannot protect them by their own. For that reason they need men to protect them. If she is not married then she needs to be under her father or brother’s protection. When she will not have her father or brother any more then she must be married off. After that she can be under the protection of her husband. If any woman not follows this conventional way, she might be seen in a negative angle in the society. As a consequence, the presence of the father figure always remains there in a woman’s life.

The traditional belief was that women could only be fulfilled by marriage and motherhood. However, from Peter Reynolds’s book *As You Like It: A Dramatic Commentary* we get to know that, “In Shakespeare’s England, women did ultimately have the right to refuse a marriage, but they had little practical alternative other than to live a life of seclusion in a convent or at home” (90). This statement shows even though women at that time could choose not to marry but that used to be though as a worst option. By doing so, they would become detached from the society. If a woman did not want to get married then joining nunnery could be a better option for her. Hamlet in the play *Hamlet* tells Ophelia, “Get thee to a nunnery” (III.i.121). It

shows that it was only alternative to marriage which is becoming a nun. Reynolds further said, “There was no other social or economical structure to support a single woman, either physically or emotionally” (90). However, this paper explores another alternative which is cross-dressing. The heroines show us how taking cross-dressing they could support them emotionally, physically and economically.

In *As You Like It* Rosalind and Celia are under the supervision of Duke Frederick. He is the father of Celia and uncle of Rosalind. He is a threat to Rosalind and Celia because he is very much dominating. After banishing Rosalind’s father and Duke Frederick’s elder brother Duke Senior, he also wants to banish Rosalind. He says, “Within these ten days if that thou be’st found/ so near our public court as twenty miles/ thou diest for it” (I.III.39-41). His line shows that he has no mercy for his niece. He not only wants to banish Rosalind but also wants to kill her if she is found in the court after the given time. When Rosalind asks what is her fault then he replies, “Thou art thy father’s daughter, there’s enough” (I.III.54). Duke Frederick plays a merciless character in this play. It seems he has represented the patriarchal society which is as merciless as him toward women. Celia being Duke Frederick’s only child finds it impossible to live there in his excessive domination and decides to flee away. She says, “No, let my father seek another heir/ therefore devise with me how we may fly/ whither to go and what to bear with us” (I.III.95-97). Like Jessica, the presence of the father is beyond tolerance to these girls. Therefore they decide to flee from the male supervision. However, being women it was not possible to roam around the society alone. For that reason they had to choose cross-dressing.

Toril Moi in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics* discuss about women and patriarchy. She believes the fact that just because “women often enact the roles patriarchy has prescribed for them does not prove that the patriarchal analysis is right” (90). Women have to act as the

patriarchy wants because the society itself a patriarchal society and inside the house women are also under the threat of male as patriarch. My paper argues that Shakespeare first showed women's neglected and subordinated position in the patriarchy and then established cross-dressing as a device to destabilize circle of patriarchy.

Chapter Three

Casting Off Patriarchy with Cross-Dressing

I would like to start this chapter with a story of Shakespeare's twin sister, Judith. In the book *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf created a hypothetical character as Shakespeare's sister named her Judith and mapped her possible journey. Woolf described Judith's life as, "Let us imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith" (54). She imagined if Shakespeare had a sister with equal talent she would hold the same keen interest in art and aesthetics and would want to explore the writer in herself eventually. Of course her parents would not really appreciate it and try every possible way to wipe this impossible dream out of her. Judith then having no other way would run away as her father would have wanted to marry her off. Woolf then made her imaginary Judith to go to London and join to the theatre by the help of an actor cum manager named Nick Greene. Shakespeare also went to London, joined the Globe theatre and the rest is history. However, poor Judith could not fulfill her dreams as she was eventually raped by the theatre manager. Her dream of becoming a playwright ends in disgrace and death as she commits suicide. Woolf said,

...so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village. (56)

This essay of Woolf voices out the bare truth that Shakespeare became Shakespeare because he was a man of talent; but first of all a MAN. Even though Shakespeare's imaginative sister had equal potential and talent being the twin she could not flourish as a playwright with a female

genitalia. However, let us not stop there and stress this imaginary journey a little further. Let us take this hypothesis further as to what if Judith went for cross-dressing? Would she be then as successful as Shakespeare? Would she be able to carry out this momentary camouflage forever? Would her life end somewhere else? Perhaps yes. Perhaps not. But from this imaginary journey of a female Shakespeare we may come to understand what makes Portia, Viola and Rosalind dress up as men.

Women have always been under the male supremacy in the society. Before getting married, they are subject to the authority of their father, followed by the brother sometimes. After they get married, this subjugation shifts from the 'Father' to the 'Husband'. Later when they are aged, their son takes over the control. As a result, a shadow of a 'Male' figure continues to haunt the female existence and her conscience throughout her life. This shift dependency never ceases to be. Subsequently, in a patriarchal society most women throughout their life never have the chance to live their life with their own decision. Even if they are given the scope to make some choices, those have to confirm to the patriarchy. Now, some may suggest that for Modern women this circle of dependency is less severe. However, the cycle remains the same, only the dynamics change.

The arena of discussion of my paper is the 'Elizabethan' women as we see them in Shakespeare's plays. The portrayal of the 'ideal' woman living in the Elizabethan era had a different dynamics than ours. They had to confirm to compliance to the fullest, in a more vulnerable form. Patriarchy had a fixed range of behavior for women and they could not afford to go beyond that. If any woman would not follow that fixated behavior, she was rejected and abandoned. If we take a look of some other plays of Shakespeare, for example *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the female characters, Gertrude and Lady Macbeth are portrayed with a 'contempt'

which is essentially 'Male' in nature. They are gradually castrated. Both of these female characters are held responsible for all that goes wrong in the play. They are either murdered or driven to the stage of insanity.

Now, if we attempt and try to look beyond the Elizabethan notions of right and wrong, we will in fact find out to our shock that the violation of morality that these women are condemned of are in fact making their own choices! Gertrude remarries a man she finds suitable and Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth to kill Duncan and takes over the kingdom. In the first case, it is after all a matter of choice. For Hamlet the problem is less of Gertrude marrying the killer of his father but more of the fact that she remarries and according to her choice. He says to his mother, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (I.ii.146). The moment a woman goes against the traditional behavior, she is thought to be negative in all perspectives.

On the other hand, Lady Macbeth used to be thought as the fourth witch in the play. She enacts her husband Macbeth's lack of ambition, courage and masculinity in a broader sense. The consequence is rejection and death. The male dominated society does not want to give them any opportunity to go against the fixed behavior. The moment they deny the stereotyped 'feminine attitude' and want to play more active role, they are defamed as disloyal wife and witch.

The society which is essentially a patriarchal one, would only force women to the edge. They are caught up between their urges and their limitation to follow them. My paper attempts to give this a more of a theoretical understanding that Portia, Viola and Rosalind decide to give up their feminine attire and consequently become a pseudo-male. They cross-dress to appear as 'male' to meet the demands of the society. They not only participate but also show their intelligence. Therefore they prove the society wrong that women should only stay in a boundary made by patriarchy.

Since, Jessica elopes from her father's place, she cannot be thought as a perfect Elizabethan woman because she is not obedient toward her father. The reception of this character is no doubt negative to the Elizabethan audience. To some extent Jessica's character is a rebellious one where she takes control of her life by going against her father. However, the moment she tries to break the traditional shift dependency becoming a rebellious one, she is framed as a disloyal and negative character. The analyzing of the play shows us that for the Elizabethan women it was very difficult to come out from the traditional subordinated position.

Portia on the other hand who is being the 'ideal' woman and the 'Heroine' of the play can never afford to act like Jessica. She needs to conform to the audience in their customary expectations and remains a passive character who fails to stand up for herself. My analyzing of the play shows that Portia can only breaks the shift dependency by cross-dressing. When she chooses cross-dressing she becomes one of the most important characters in the play because another important character Antonio's fate is on Portia's hand. Then the conflict regarding the bond is resolved only by her. Therefore she becomes a pseudo-hero from a heroine in the play.

We may find two plots in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. One is the casket game and the other one is the bond between Shylock and Antonio. In the casket game Portia's fate is dependent on her father's will. She cannot deny that will and cannot break the shift dependency and the circle of patriarchy. She remains an obedient Elizabethan woman and surrenders to male dominance. However, in the bond story, Antonio's life is dependent on Portia's intelligence. Here, only Portia can save Antonio's life. To save his life Portia needs to change her female attire and takes male disguise. Only then she can enter in the court room. She says to Nerissa, "And I wished for all that,/ that I had not kill'd them;/ And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell" (III.iv.73-74). The moment she hears about Antonio, she decides to save him. No matter how

many lies she needs to say. She says that she would never forgive her if she fails to save Antonio.

She succeeds in the court by her intelligence. She challenges Shylock's clever bond and saves Antonio's life. The moment Portia is in male attire, this change happens in the play. By the use of cross-dressing Portia is casting off the patriarchy and enters in the male dominated society. At this point male authority is under the threat of Portia's intelligence.

The play shows us that the moment Portia thinks to save Antonio by going to the court, she also thinks about cross-dressing. As soon as she cross-dresses, she gets the opportunity to become a lawyer. That particular society never accepts a woman to become a lawyer. As a result, Portia comes up with this remarkable idea of cross-dressing. She is bound to go for cross-dressing to enact and cross her boundary without even crossing it.

She goes against the norm of the cultural underpinnings of her society without even violating it. After she dresses herself as the lawyer Balthazar, she enters into a transition where she achieves a temporary drift from her female identity. This is a moment of freedom and self-assertion for Portia and it is also the starting point of her casting off the circle of patriarchy, if not permanently. After dressing as Balthazar, the lawyer, she is able to show her intelligence like any other men. Jean E Howard in the book *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing* stated about Portia that,

Portia's actions are aimed not at letting her occupy man's place indefinitely, however, but at making her own place in a patriarchy more bearable. She uses her disguise as Balthazar not only to rescue Antonio from death but also to intervene in the male/male friendship of her husband and Antonio and to gain control over her sexuality while setting the terms for its use in marriage. (35)

This is being made clear here that her Transvestism is not for eternity but only to stay in the patriarchy for a given period. Without cross-dressing, going in a court was not possible for a woman at that time. Moreover, her cross-dressing as Balthazar has many reasons. She wants to save Antonio, because he is the best friend of her husband Bassanio. Also she wants to achieve authoritative power being a woman. She never says directly in the play that she wants to gain authoritative power by cross-dressing. We find a suppressed voice of her in those acts where she is in her female attire, but her authoritative voice is found in the court scene where she is in male attire. There she strongly places her points.

Furthermore, when Shakespeare gives her that opportunity to save a man in the court then it is understandable that he gives a woman that authority but because of the patriarchal society that woman has to choose cross-dressing. She must not disturb the patriarchal eye. It seems after reading Portia's change of personality that she challenges the gender disparity by choosing cross-dressing in the court. Portia's cross-dressing expresses her talent as she is free of her sex. She shows even a woman can be a shrewd lawyer who can turn the table. She compensates her lack of control by saving a man. Thus, she becomes a female hero.

In the court room as Portia twists the bond the audience is left enthralled. The court room scene is therefore a perfect taming of the male gaze and twisting it equally. For a moment we all forget that Balthazar is a woman. Portia evolves masculinity in her. This change of personality is breathtaking comparing to her previous weakness. The one who could not stand up against the will of a dead person stands in front of a group of men and saves Antonio. She is not shaken by Shylock's presence. She defeats Shylock by in his game. She says,

“The words expressly are ‘a pound of flesh’

Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh

But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
 One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
 Are (by the laws of Venice) confiscate
 Unto the state of Venice. (IV.i.303-308)

No one in the court thinks about this important point that the bond only talks about taking one pound of flesh. There is no mention of blood because it is obvious that while cutting of human flesh, blood will be shed. However, no one gives importance to this point that only a little trick can save Antonio's life. Here Portia, being Balthazar is reminding Shylock that if he goes against his own bond and shed one drop of Christian blood of Antonio then his wealth must be seized by the law of Venice. As to Shakespeare, he only makes Portia to understand the weakness of the bond drawn by Shylock, not Antonio, not Bassanio or any other male. It is quite significant to consider.

For Antonio, Portia comes as a blessing because she saves his life. To Portia, her cross-dressing is the blessing because it is the only way for her to enter in a 'males allowed' court. She breaks that conventional patriarchal shift by taking male attire. Consequently, it reverses the notion of patriarchy. Now, for an Elizabethan audience this might seem to be a subplot, but my paper makes an effort to show the dynamics of this apparently seeming subplot. It shifts Portia's status from a 'Heroine' to a 'Pseudo Hero' who is in no way less significant than Antonio and Bassanio or even Shylock. The court scene presents us a dramatic revulsion of identity and a defeat of patriarchal fixations about women being the 'incompetents'.

Portia's choosing cross-dressing is really a profound moment of defeating patriarchy. Before being defeated Shylock himself was praising Portia on her wisdom and intellectual judgment. He mentions Portia as the 'most rightful judge' and the most 'learned judge'. It

indicates that Portia played a lawyer's role so perfectly that no one could find out a single flaw on her.

Additionally, she comes up with such an innovative idea to save Antonio's life which is very much impressive to others. Though Bassanio is a good friend of Antonio and he is very much depressed about Shylock's bond but even he cannot come up with a twisted idea to save Antonio. Even the Duke of the court could not think anything to save Antonio's life. He says to Shylock, "Forgive a moiety of the principal" (IV.i.26). Duke could only requests and asks for forgiveness to Shylock but could not think of any other solution. The remarkable solution to save Antonio's life comes from Portia only. What most men could not do, Portia successfully does that. If they would get a hint of Portia's cross-dressing then they would not think her as intelligent because of the stereotype patriarchal attitude. As a result, Portia gets a chance to challenge the stereotype patriarchy through her intelligence. Though society sketches up imaginary behavior of male and female but a woman can have the behavior of a man and vice versa.

Similarly, in *Twelfth Night* Viola goes through a similar change of identity. Like Portia, she too evolves masculinity in herself. A close study of the play will help us to understand better the sexual politics hidden within the realms of cultural doctrines. Viola like her name violates the conventional female behavior. She lost her father and brother. Living her life alone in a male authoritative society all by herself was very complicated for her.

She then decides to work but taking male attire. Howard said about Viola that, "Viola adopts male dress as a practical means of survival in an alien environment" (33). The environment is alien in that sense it is not quite welcoming for women. It could be easily

perceived that cross-dressing as a man makes her feel safer and stronger given the cultural domain of the society. She says to the sea Captain,

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
 For such disguise as haply shall become
 The form of my intent.
 I'll serve this duke. (I.ii.53-55)

She asks the captain to help her choosing disguise and expresses her inclination to work in Duke Orsino's court. She does that because she is well known about the fact that, women are not permitted to work in the court. For living a better independent life, working in the court becomes incredibly essential for Viola. For her, the concept of cross-dressing comes as a blessing. Without using it, she would never be able to join the Duke's court.

By cross-dressing Viola manages to enter Duke Orsino's court with a new identity and a new name 'Cesario'. In Viola's case, not having a father or a protective male figure becomes an imperative issue. She replaces herself as a pseudo male and instead of getting married and looking for another protective figure she takes control of her own life. As we read the play, we find how Viola's life gets complicated. Soon after her father's death Viola lose her twin brother Sebastian too in a wrecked ship which no less symbolizes her life. Afterward, she takes the decision to cross-dress as a man.

In Viola we see an extremely strong female character who does not give up. She struggles to survive as a free woman without any male shadow over her. She could choose to marry anyone and be dependent on him but she does not do that. Nonetheless, she chooses to become a Duke's attendant in his court. This decision is rebellious for any Elizabethan woman. She risks her security. She risks consequences and still pursues an independent life unimaginable for a

female in her time and context. The society she lives in would never allow a woman to become an employee in a court and indulge in free occupation. Howard further said about Viola that,

... when she adopts male dress, she proves herself more than competent to enter the masculine arena of the courtroom and to hold her own as an advocate in that arena. Her men's disguise is not a psychological refuge but a vehicle for assuming power. (35)

We can find a sense of competence in Viola's choosing cross-dressing. Her transvestism shows that she does not lose hope rather she tries to compete with the men in the court. However, for that she has no other option but taking cross-dressing.

Hence, via cross-dressing she becomes self dependent in a court which is ruled entirely by men. She changes her position from a spectator to an active participant. In that society women's role was not any active role rather they were being spectators. Viola challenges that stereotyped role of Elizabethan women. Like Portia, she needs to change her social identity because for a single woman it was beyond option at that time to live alone. It is because of the society with its restraining customs that Viola has to take her twin brother Sebastian's identity.

Gradually, she becomes Duke's trustworthy employee and it shows that she is not less accomplished than any other men in the court. Duke is impressed by her dedication in work. A gentleman attending on the Duke named Valentine says Viola that, "If the Duke continue these favours towards you/ Cesario, [Viola] you are like to be much advance" (I.iv.1-2). By this statement it becomes clear that Viola's true dedication to work might help her to be promoted. He also says that even though Viola (Cesario) passed only three days in the court but to the Duke she is no more a stranger. It is evident in the play that she has enough potential to compete with other men. She proves her intelligence by changing her female attire. She succeeds to prove that

intelligence does not depend on gender. As men gain power and authority by their intelligence, women can also gain that because they are not less intelligent than men.

Rosalind and Celia from *As You Like It* also take cross-dressing to survive. Rosalind flees from the court as she is threatened by her uncle and her father is banished. Having no father figure to protect her she follows her father into the Arden but in disguise. Her uncle could easily undermine her as she was a maiden. Could Duke Frederick usurp the crown so easily if Rosalind was not a maiden? Unlike Portia, her troubles stem from the lack of the father. As she must change her attire to enter in the Forest of Arden it reveals an interesting fact that pattern of the society pervades in the forest too. Rosalind must therefore disguise as a man to keep herself out of danger. When Celia informs Rosalind that they must escape from the court, then Rosalind says, “Alas, what danger will it be to us/ Maids as we are, to travel forth so far/ Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold” (I.iii.104-6). The kind of society in which Rosalind lived travelling for girls could be very dangerous. The line as “Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold” exposes the pathos that women were insecure everywhere, in palace, out of palace. Rosalind says that beauty provokes thieves more than gold. For such beautiful women, travelling alone is not a safer option.

At that moment they needed a vehicle that could help them to escape from the court successfully. Since, escaping is one suitable solution for them to avoid the brutal and dominating court, they also acknowledge the fact that it would not be safe for beautiful women. Celia suggests they must disguise as poor but Rosalind brings a better suggestion which is cross-dressing. Rosalind suggests, “Because that I am more than common tall/ That I did suit me all points like a man” (I.iii.111-12). She says that according to her physical feature she must take the outfit of a man rather taking disguise of poor. Here, cross-dressing comes as a better option

for these two ladies. They can use cross-dressing as a vehicle, and start their journey in the forest. As a result, they get liberty to flee away from the male dominating court. In addition, they get chance to travel alone in a male dominated society. It is said by Stephen J Lynch in the book *As You Like it: A Guide to the Play* that,

In the boyish attire of Ganymede, Rosalind will control and direct much of the subsequent action in the play. Fleeing the corrupted artificial world of the court, Rosalind and Celia seek 'Liberty' (1.3.136) in the more natural world of the forest liberty in the broadest sense, including political, social, and gender liberty. (49)

The reason of Rosalind's being Ganymede is different than Portia and Viola. Rosalind and her cousin Celia seek freedom or liberty from their dominating Uncle or father. So, they decide to go to the forest. As it was not safe for women to travel alone especially in the forest, they choose cross-dressing. Their cross-dressing gives them liberty and this liberty is not only liberty of travelling alone but also it is related with some other essential issues. Since, living life in that dominant court was becoming impossible for them, they flee away from there and thus they get a political liberty. Moreover, Rosalind's life was under threat in the court. Subsequently, she needed to flee away from there unless she could have been murdered by her uncle.

She enjoys a gender liberty when she flees away in male attire. Only then she finds it possible to join other men and interacts with them without any hesitation. The story of Rosalind shows us that even though she needed to flee, but she could never do that with her female attire. For fleeing away from the court to the forest she had to cross-dress as a man. Only then she could get safety. Her cross-dressing gives her liberty and safety. Otherwise she would not find liberty and safety in her life. This play shows us that cross-dressing comes as a solution to Rosalind and Celia for not only one problem but many more.

Marilyn L Williamson in the book *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* said that, “When banished from the court, she is fearful and depends on Celia to suggest a refuge in Arden; only then she decides to disguise herself as a man and the disguise helps her control her fears” (30). Rosalind was fearful before her cross-dressing. After Celia’s suggestion of cross-dressing, Rosalind to some extent manages her fear. In the forest, she becomes independent and starts taking decisions. In this way, Rosalind’s cross-dressing is a blessing for her because with the help of it she manages to control her fear. Cross-dressing also gives her self-independency. After Rosalind’s cross-dressing her life is not dependent upon others but only on her.

Maurich A Hunt stated in the book *Shakespeare’s As You Like It: Late Elizabethan Culture and Literary Representation* that, “The transvestite role of Rosalind as Ganymede and the ways in which it has made possible the exploration of male and female sexuality as well as androgyny in *As You Like It*” (133). Transvestism has played an important role in this play via Rosalind and Celia. The theme of androgyny⁹ is explored by Rosalind’s transvestite¹⁰ role. Before choosing cross-dressing Rosalind perfectly holds up feminine characteristics and during cross-dressing she also holds up masculine characteristics. She acts so perfectly in her male attire that no one gets a hind about her cross-dressing. Most importantly, Phoebe who is a country maiden and shepherdess falls in love with Rosalind who is in disguise as Ganymede. Phoebe is proposed by shepherd Silvius but she refuses him and tries to have Rosalind’s love. Phoebe says, “I had rather hear you chide than this man woo” (III.V.65). Here Phoebe says she would prefer Rosalind (Ganymede) to scold her than Silvius’s proposal. It shows Rosalind could perfectly attain masculinity in herself and thus Phoebe falls in love with her.

⁹ Androgyny refers to the blending of feminine and masculine characteristics.

¹⁰ Transvestite refers that person who wears cloths which is associated with the opposite sex.

These three heroines choose cross-dressing because they face different crisis in their life. Their problems may vary but they share the common providence of suffering from male authoritativeness. They show us that after choosing cross-dressing they achieve power and control. They also acquire liberty and freedom. They acquire financial, political and gender liberty when they are no more in their feminine attire. But most importantly it frees them from a lack of defense. Instead of looking for a defender they take control and defend themselves. As to the theatrical productions when the audience viewed this remarkable personality of the heroines it must have had broader effect on them. They were ready to behold women as female heroes. With the help of Shakespeare's unique device cross-dressing these heroines successfully breaks the circle of patriarchy.

Conclusion

Cross-Dressing in Shakespeare: Uncovering the SHE

Although cross-dressing conveys the meaning of covering one as the opposite gender, my paper shows the paradox that it rather uncovers the female self to its fullest assertion. The heroines from the selected plays are able to uncover the more active, capable women who are rendered weak in the overpowering shadow of the patriarchy. Not only that, they alter the archetypes of Literature as they inhibit a 'female hero' within.

The concept of the hero as we know is the one who is the defender of right and the weak. He is also the defender of the heroines who are the synonym for weakness in general. On the other hand, the concept of the heroine is the female character who needs to be rescued by the hero. They are 'Damsel in distress' who must to be persecuted by one man and then saved by the other. However, Shakespearean plays make a radical change in this archetypal pattern. Shakespeare rendered his heroines, Portia, Viola and Rosalind with the triumphant quality of the defender. Thus they become female heroes and become the defender of truth, justice and sometimes of men. After cross-dressing they do not need a hero any more. They become the Female hero. They not only rescue but shift the course of the play.

By analyzing these three plays of Shakespeare it will not be wrong to say that the female characters choose cross-dressing to hide their feminine identity because that feminine identity does not give them equal opportunity. They had to choose that because they are subordinated in position compared to the men. When women choose cross-dressing and change their attire as men, their sexual identity is also changed. By reading Shakespeare's female protagonists Portia, Viola and Rosalind one could argue that cross-dressing gives them freedom, safety, political and

gender liberty. The moment they wear it, they attain the opportunity to enter into the pattern of patriarchy and weaken it.

Shakespeare portrays Portia as an ideal daughter who never tries to cross the boundary made by the patriarchy only when she is in her feminine attire. However, same Portia is being portrayed by Shakespeare as the stronger one who is fighting against the patriarchy but this time she is no more in her feminine attire but in her cross-dress. Similarly, Viola acquires the financial solvency and a place in the court through her cross-dressing. Rosalind on the hand overcomes her fear and saves her father as a capable son would do. Thus, I have come understand that these plays need a different reading and cross-dressing cannot be only viewed as a Dramatic element. It inhibits cultural and gender issues in it. It works as liberation for the female characters in an age where depicting them otherwise was not possible.

This paper not only intends to explore the fictional characters but also tries to relate them with the Elizabethan society. As a result, society and plays becomes entwined. The first chapter talks about the Elizabethan era and the politicized 'female body'. The second chapter talks about the background to why the selected heroines from the plays were confined in the presence of the father or the patriarch. The third chapter shows how cross-dressing weakens the circle of patriarchy and gives the heroines power, authority, liberty and safety as they evolve as female heroes. With the final chapter my paper comes to view cross-dressing in Shakespeare in a new perspective. My paper shows that cross-dressing is indeed more significant then we have considered it so far. My dissertation helps to view Shakespearean plays and Shakespearean heroines in a new light. According to Martin Stephen, "Sometimes the conclusions are left to the audience, or the experience on offer simply cannot be summed up that easily" (122). If we further elaborate Stephen's observation we could say that cross-dressing then not only liberated

the Shakespearean heroines but it must have expanded the Elizabethan mindset by uncovering the SHE. It liberated the heroines by bringing out the 'She' self uncompromised, uncompromised of any cultural or gender stereotypes. It liberated the women and their possibilities long restrained under the coat of gender politics.

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