

Women in Shakespearean Comedies: A Subversion of Gender Norms

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Abstract

Feminism can be described as a social theory or movement which is aimed to value women power and their contribution toward society. This movement intends to establish equal social, economic and political rights as well as equal opportunity beyond any barrier of discrimination due to gender. The revolution of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first wave was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the goal of forming equal rights for women in suffrage and elimination of slavery. In the 1960s the second wave was unfolded with the focus of social equality regardless of sex. The third wave took place in the 1990s with the concern to change the stereotypes against women in the media and languages.

Feminist literary criticism tries to understand the role of literary texts in either reflecting or undermining the gender roles and expectations of a society. Feminist criticism studies the portrayal of female characters, patriarchy setting, gender role, power relation between genders in literature and explores issues such as discrimination, objectification, oppression, as well violence against women in writing. Shakespeare lived in a patriarchal culture, in which authority and privilege was particularly invested in the hands of men or patriarchs of the family. This paper aims to study the portrayal of women in Shakespearean comedies to highlight the fact that, Shakespeare has projected some strong female protagonists in his comedies to satirize the social and gender norms of the Elizabethan era. The thesis will try to understand the impact of gender norms and expectations on the narrative structure and the creation of characters in his plays. The hypothesis of this paper is that though Shakespeare has not promoted any precise ideology of feminism, the approaches of his female characters are not used as tools or elements of comedy. Behind the comic plot, Shakespeare has drawn strong female characters, to give a glimpse of the capability of women to the Elizabethan patriarchal society. The study is based on extensive

analysis and reading of three comedies; *As You Like It*, *Merchant Of Venice* and *Taming of The Shrew*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

"It is time that we all see gender as a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals."

- Emma Watson

British celebrity and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson in her speech at the HeForShe campaign compared and contrasted the different gender stereotypes that kept both men and women from feeling equal. Men feel the pressure to be aggressive and women feel the pressure to be submissive. Watson calls for attention to the fact that gender is a spectrum and not a matter debate. Gender norms are the subset of social norms that defines behavior and expectations of a particular sex. Gender norms change from time period to time period and culture to culture. Literature is the best way to get views of gender roles and social settings of different times and culture. William Shakespeare's comedies are full of entertainment but along with it they also reveal customs, traditions as well as beliefs typical of that period.

Shakespearean comedies give the readers a clear view of the social settings of that time.

Shakespeare wrote in the Elizabethan age, when 'feminism' had not yet entered the academic discourse. Renaissance society did not conventionally value the freedom of women. There were only two socially acceptable positions for women, marriage or nunnery. The upbringing of middle and upper class girls was highly focused on the teaching of household management expertise and the values of chastity, obedience and silence. The social system was based on a setting where men were the heads of households or society and women were considered to be inferior. Daughters were the property of their fathers and often used to form alliances with powerful families through their marriages.

Feminism is a social theory or movement which is aimed to value women power and their contribution toward society against the gender norms. This movement intends to establish equal social, economic and political rights as well equal opportunity beyond any judgment. Feminism holds the belief that all people are permitted to independence and liberty and that discrimination should not be made based on gender or biological features of a person. Patriarchal society often becomes obstacle on the way of feminism. This social structure opposes to leave the holds of superiority in society and accept everyone as equal individual human being, without labeling them as male or female. Most of all, men are alarmed that they will not be able hold the same importance as a person if their power as a certain gender is taken away. Feminist movement started on 18th century. From then till now, feminists and scholars have divided the movement in several waves of feminism to uphold the rights of women. The first wave refers to movement of women's suffrage of nineteenth centuries. The second wave refers to the women's movement for legal and social rights in the 1960s. The third wave took place in the 1990s to change the stereotypes against women. Also many novels have been written highlighting strong female characters. Feminist criticism of literary works mainly focuses on the character study and critics scrutinize how the characters are portrayed and presented. It studies the portrayal of female characters, patriarchal setting, gender roles, power relation between genders in literature and explores issues such as discrimination, objectification, oppression, as well violence against women in writing.

Shakespeare's plays are perfect examples of art and literature. At a glance, they seem to be organized with subjects like love, hatred, wars, failures and faults of humans, but deep down they also reflect certain ideologies. Shakespeare wrote at a time when women were believed to be both physically and intellectually inferior to men. Shakespeare's comedies indicate the margin

between men and women existed in the social structure of Elizabethan society. As their responsibilities and positions were strictly divided, men were given power while women had to be obedient and submissive. But, his plays have portrayed female as strong and outspoken, which is quite a feminist approach for that age. A number of his female characters are intelligent, brave, noble and demand equality. That is why, women of Shakespeare's plays are often studied from a modern perspective. Shakespeare has projected the strength and ability of women in front of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century's patriarchal society, through his comedies. It suggests that the disobedient, intelligent, willful female characters of his plays are not merely for the benefit of comic effect just like the cruelty towards an 'outsider' like Shylock was all in the name of comedy in *Merchant of Venice*. Through his plays and characters, Shakespeare has demonstrated an understanding of women's suppression, also that women are not the weaker sex.

In this paper I am going to analyze the female characters in some of Shakespeare's comedies and throw light on the fact that, though the strong female characters appeared in comedies, they are not mere tools for entertainments but portray the subversion of gender norms. The study is based on extensive analysis and reading of three comedies from the viewpoint of feminism. The plays are *As You Like It*, *Merchant Of Venice* and *Taming of The Shrew*. This research has been developed through intense studies of the main female characters of the plays which will, in due course of this paper, bring out the main motive of the acts, that they are signifying the abilities of women and, at the same time, mocking the social structure.

This paper is divided in three main parts. In the first part, which contains one chapter, will clarify the role and position of women in society of Elizabethan era and examine the patriarchal system that repressed women despite of having a female ruler. Also define feminism and introduces the feminist movement. Waves of feminism are explained briefly. The second part

contains three chapters, studies Rosalind from *As You Like It*, Portia from *Merchant of Venice* and Kate from *Taming of The Shrew*, female protagonists of Shakespeare's three well known comedies. It analyses and compares the portrayal of these characters from a feminist viewpoint, showing their extraordinary approaches. The final part is the conclusion which says that, Shakespeare's portrayal of female characters is more positive and honorable than time. The way he has presented his heroines as remarkable women, it is clearly a rebel against the social norms.

Literature Review:

Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide by Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin is divided into four parts. Part One offers introduce to the literary and historical contexts of Shakespearean society, culture, language, theatre, and playwriting conventions as well as their impacts. Part Two is about overviews of Shakespeare's achievements in the major genres. Each overview is a close reading that explores Shakespeare's use of the traditions and boundaries of that genre in one of his works. Part Three discusses current critical approaches to the study of Shakespeare. Each chapter sketches a specific approach and is followed by a reading applying that approach to one of Shakespeare's works. Part Four offers chapters on Shakespeare's intellectual and cultural impact over the ages. In the book, *Shakespeare and The Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre claims that Shakespeare's plays offer a sustained critique of general male thinking about women, in literary and social context. She also argued that presence of male actors to perform both male and female parts in Shakespearean theatre created an awareness of gender as performance.

Alexander Leggatt in his book *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, has analyzed different comedies of Shakespeare. He has compared the comedies and distinguished the differences between them. Also highlights the new combination of essentially similar ingredients with different purpose in different comedies.

The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan is a book which influences the second wave of Feminism. Here she has described how society undermines women's confidence and intellectual ability to keep them in home. She also said, because of early marriage sixty percent of female students drop out from college and that causes "the problem that has no name." The frustration is the result of forced submission to men intellectually, physically and mentally. Simone De Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, explores how men oppress women in every aspect defining them as 'other' and place them in the opposition. Men possess the role of subject and treat women as object. Rosalind and Celia is an article feminist criticism on William Shakespeare's comedy, *As You Like It*, by Barbara J. Wilson discovers different aspects of the play and its characters. Topics like cross dressing and mode of dress being an identity is being presented. Beside, gender issues, romantic power of Shakespeare's comic heroines are also discussed in the article.

In the article "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," Jean Howard has approached cross dressing from different perspectives. She has highlighted the issue of gender struggle through the article. Also discussed about, how real life cross dressing creates gap between women's social status, gender and appearance. Two genders were needed in modern era to create the hierarchy in social order. Jacobean era was satisfied by policing gender boundaries. Howard questions whether cross dressing in theatre was result of audiences' erotic interest and unavailability of women actress or cultural device for policing gender boundaries.

Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, William Hazlitt, in his book has compared and criticized all the characters of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies with other writer. *Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* by W. Reginald Rampone, is a book where writer has explored the theme of

sexuality, gender and marriage in literature and staged plays of Shakespeare. He has compared and criticized Greek, Roman, Medieval and early-modern sexuality.

In the lecture "Our Girls," Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading figure of women movement, shared her personal experiences and practical advises. Besides, she has also urge women to fight not only for their right but also fight for their daughter's right. She shows the connection among femininity, standard dressing and socializing of young girls and how these elements prevent women to achieve their goals. "The Taming of the Shrew: 'This is not a woman being crushed'" is an article published in The Guardian, where Maddy Costa has highlighted different perspective of actors and directors toward the play, whether it is an exercise in misogyny or a love story about a man liberating a woman. Carloe Levin has discussed about the custom, tradition and setting of sixteenth century in his article "The Society of Shakespeare's England." This gives a clear view of patriarchal system and women's position of that era. Margaret Jane in his article Shakespeare's Audience, describes that the audience of Shakespearean play ranges from members of elite society, lawyers of court, students, worker soldier butcher as well attended by few women of different classes. It shows that Shakespeare has been represented his ideology to every division of society.

Chapter 2

Patriarchal Convention & Shakespeare's Women

Nowadays women in Britain enjoy equal rights, status and independence as men, but there was a time, in the 16th and 17th centuries when women had different circumstances. According to Newman, "The men tended to hold the power in their world and women were seen as commodities or 'pawns' for political and social gain." (Newman 23) Elizabethan society was predominantly patriarchal, which means that every part of the society was dominated by men. As Capp has mentioned in "Women, Family and Neighborhood in Modern England" that, patriarchal system was not official but, "rather an interlocking sets of beliefs, assumptions, traditions and practices basically these social arrangements rested on convention rather than law." (Capp 1) Patriarchy is a system of society where men hold the power and women are excluded from it and considered as weaker vessel. People who strongly believe in patriarchal system most of the time stand against feminism. They are actually afraid of change and the idea of being treated as same. If the power of having control over other is taken away and treated equally without categorizing, they may lose their power and importance

Despite the fact that a woman was on the throne, she was arguably only there as supreme ruler, as all her close advisers were men. Women other than the Queen had almost no legal rights to an existence which was independent of men. They were regarded firstly as the property of their father and after marriage, of their husband. Upon marriage any property or land that was transferred with them in the form of dowry became the husband's legal possession. In England in the 1600's, women could not be compelled to marry against their wishes. However, the male attitude towards women were not respectful, because the real purpose of marriage at this time

was social not romantic. It was not concerned with legitimizing a sexual relationship in any spiritual or moral sense, but for ensuring that the product of that relationship, a child, legitimately inherits the wealth of its progenitor. Romantic love as it is frequently portrayed today, a union of two people based on mutual attraction, often needed to overcome differences of wealth and status, was to all effects nonexistent in Renaissance England. Marriage was primarily a business arrangement between the men of two families. In Shakespeare's England, woman 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. As a woman you might turn down the offer of one man in marriage, but you could not, without great difficulty, turn down men and live independently of them. Thus Hamlet's advice to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery, / Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? (3.1.121-122) is seen by him as her only alternative to marriage. There was no other social or economic structure to support a single woman either physically or emotionally. Consequently, women were never seen as independent in their own right, but only as male appendages.

Men and society, attempted to exclude women from almost every aspect of society outside home. Women were prohibited from playing any formal role in church or offices, profession. They were not allowed to vote or receive any higher education. However women could work as nurses or midwives but if they wanted to go further in profession, they were not welcomed. But wives and daughters of low income families used to work to fight poverty, as they could not survive on the income of single person. Some of the wives used to work to help running lodging house, pawn shop, restaurants etc. During this period, most of the women stayed inside the home, hence many women of lower class worked to survive. Since women were not educated properly, it was difficult for them to challenge the suppression, as they were unable to stand a ground in debate.

Patricia claims, "Men's power depended upon keeping women ignorant." (Crawford. 228) Few women of aristocrat families, who received education protested against the system like Margaret Cavendish. In her book *Triumphs of Female Wit* published in 1683, claims that women live in ignorance and kept like caged birds inside the houses. Women had internalized their inferiority and many women writers were apologetic defensive in tone as Capp has observed. Women, who raised voice against patriarchy society for equity, were trying to draw attention to the fact that, though they had weakness, they also had strength.

Feminism can be stated as an ideology or approach to the issues of equality and justice based on sex, sexuality or gender through social theories. The basic idea of this philosophy is that, just because human body structures are different and execute different functions or possess certain organic features, one cannot rule over other kind or command their rights and activities.

Feminism studies the social assumptions about women and examines the inequality between sexes. It notes that women are not treated equally and are discriminated against in many areas of life. The principle, feminism holds as core is that, people are entitled to liberty by birth, deserve equal rights and there should be no discrimination based on gender or sex. Feminism believes that, women should be treated as intellectual, capable and equal as men. It was during the French and American revolutions in the late 18th century that the issue of women rights first came to light. From then till now, the movement to uphold the women rights has gone through significant successes. The whole journey can be divided into three waves. The first wave took place in 19th century and the movement was for women's suffrage. The second wave rose in 1960 and emphasized on the fact of legal and social rights of women. Third wave of the movement refers to the unity and sisterhood of 1990s to change the stereotypes against women.

Shakespeare wrote in a time when glimpse of changes started to be seen in English Jacobean society, especially regarding education of women and the position of women in society. Henry viii's queens Catherine of Aragon, Catherine Parr were scholars and were generous to provide education to the young women around them. Lady Anne Bacon, the Countess of Pembroke, Lady Anne Clifford stood in a line which stretched from Lady Margaret Beaufort to Margaret Roper were remarkable women of Elizabeth's court. However these changes only affected the aristocratic families and neither Shakespeare was belong to aristocratic nor all his audiences. Shakespeare spent his childhood and adolescence among women who practiced power, which might have inspired him to create strong female characters. As Rachkin says in *Shakespeare and Women*:

“Because most of the women in Shakespeare's family outlived their brothers and husbands, the family in which he grew up was actually predominantly female. In addition to numerous sisters and female cousins, Shakespeare had eight aunts, including one who outlived her husband by forty-one years. Sixteenth-century legal records show that the women in Shakespeare's family controlled considerable property both in land and in money. They also bequeathed property, served as executors of wills, and engaged in litigation designed to defend and further their financial interests. Shakespeare's mother, for instance, although she had nine older sisters and two older brothers, inherited the only freehold property her father bequeathed and served as one of his two executors.” (Rachkin 195)

For this dissertation, I decided to concentrate on the female characters of Shakespeare's comedies not tragedies because; Shakespeare's comic women have much more active behavior as well as exhibit a lot of mental strength. Also Shakespearean comedies have a positive

approach. According to Aristotle, characters of comedies are presented as inferior than audiences. This feeling of superiority makes the audiences laugh at the comic characters. Renaissance theorists agreed that only high-born people could be protagonists in a tragedy. On the other hand, characters of middle or low condition, ordinary people were to make their appearance in comedy. In other words, Comedies represent everyday life of ordinary people. They criticize the social settings with the audience feeling superior to the characters and have a happy ending. As Sir Philip Sidney says, "We are pleased to realize that things go well in life; we are prepared to identify with the people who are more beautiful and luckier than us; it gives us some sense of gratification if a string of events is crowned by a happy ending." Thus comedies show audiences what goes wrong in society, also provide pleasure and encouragement to them through the positive characters on stage. Audiences can create a bond with Shakespeare's comedies and can identify the characters among themselves. Especially his female protagonists are successful creations of powerful and positive characters.

Shakespeare, unlike his fellow writers of renaissance, chose to represent his female characters in an appealing way. Ben Jonson was a successful writer of 17th century. Often Shakespeare and Johnson were regarded as rivals and both of them dominated the Elizabethan theater. In his poem "To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr William Shakespeare", Jonson says about Shakespeare, 'He was not of an age, but for all time.' Jonson used to write satirical comedies which aimed to entertain the audiences by making them laugh at others' misbehavior. Thus the audiences felt superior to the characters on stage and their laughter reflects their neglects towards the human beings represented in the comedies. On the other hand, Shakespeare excelled romantic comedy. The differences between these two types of comedies are how the audiences look at the characters. While the audience feels superior to the characters of satires, in romantic

comedies viewers sympathize and laugh with the characters. Shakespeare and Jonson not only differ in their methods of entertaining their audiences but also in the ways they have represented women in their comedies. In Johnson's comedy *Epiccœne*, Truewit compares women to artificial works of art, "It is for us to see their /perukes put on, their false teeth, their complexion, their/ eyebrows, their nails?" (I.1, 112-114) This quotation shows that women are not natural beings. They are interested in being attractive and ready to change their natural looks. In the same poem, Morose wishes for a quiet wife, "He has employed a fellow this half year all over England to hearken him out a dumb woman, be she of any form/or any quality, so she be able to bear children. Her silence/ is dowry enough, he says." (I.2 .22-25) Here women are represented as talkative and shallow. Also, a perfect wife should remain silent, bear children and accept her husband as superior. The same image is also portrayed in *Volpone*, as the Volpone says, "The poet/ As old in time as Plato, and as knowing, / Says that your highest female grace is silence." (III.4.88-90) It reflects that the sign of a good woman is silence and it can be considered as virtue.

Contrary to others, Shakespeare through his writing has presented settings where being male or female has no impact on how a person lives his/her life. He has shown male and female of same footing and capacity. Every individual got equal opportunity to present his or her uniqueness and potential beyond any social or gender barrier. Shakespearean comedies give the audiences a new perspective toward individuality and social setting, along with some food for thought.

Shakespeare stepped out of his time and liberated her female protagonist from traditional restrictions.

Chapter 3

As You Like It: A Female Hero

Shakespeare presents notable women in his comedies. The play *As You Like it*, presents an incredible woman, who controlled issues of men rather than being subject to male domination. Rosalind is the heroine, liberated from the restrictions of society and culture by using disguise. While Elizabethan women were generally silenced and considered only an essential part of the household, a witty character like Rosalind was very remarkable for its time and place. Nothing held her back from voicing her opinion. Even the men seemed weak and silly in front of her. She left example to audience of what a woman can do if freed from male constraint. Literary critic Anne Barton says "Rosalind is extraordinarily important in *As You Like It*, as central and dominating a figure in her fashion as Hamlet in his own, very different play."(Barton 401) It is quite significant to explore an Elizabethan play which gives the heroine many opportunities to speak out, advice, explain and give opinions. Hence, Rosalind is the Elizabethan image for modern feminism.

As You Like It is a play that tells about the struggles of the life of the protagonist, Rosalind. Her father is the banished Duke Senior, who is sent to Forest of Arden by his younger brother, Duke Frederick. Duke Frederick wanted to dominate the kingdom. Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind, lived in court with her cousin, Celia, daughter of Duke Frederick. One day in court there was a wrestling match between Frederick's wrestler and Orlando. In match, Orlando met with Rosalind and then she fell in love with him at first sight. Rosalind got bad treatment from her uncle, Duke Frederick. He banished Rosalind from the Court. When Rosalind gets banished from her uncle's court, she does not cry for the situation instead, she shows bravery and heads for the Forest of

Arden to achieve freedom. It displays that, Rosalind is not only adventurous but also has guts. Rosalind escaped from the court with Celia and they are accompanied by Touchstone, the fool of the palace to the Forest of Arden to find her father, Duke Senior. The journey to Forest of Arden is dangerous for Rosalind and Celia, so for safety in traveling Rosalind disguised as a man and changed her name as Ganymede. Celia dressed as a girl with a dirty face and bad clothes and changed her name to Aliena. In Forest of Arden, Rosalind found people like Corin, Silvius, Phebe and Audrey. They are poor shepherds and Rosalind established good relations with them. She also found poetry hanging in every tree at the Forest from her love, Orlando. Orlando escaped from home and his elder brother Oliver to the Forest of Arden, as he had found out that, Oliver planned to kill him. At the Forest of Arden, Rosalind fought against many difficulties and struggled for her life, for her father, Duke Senior and her love, Orlando. She emerged as a strong and brave woman. She got equal opportunity, right and participation. Finally she gets married with Orlando.

The first characteristic that draws our attention towards Rosalind is her humble spirit. She demonstrates this through her loyalty to her cousin Celia. Her father has been exiled, yet Rosalind stayed in the castle and became a companion to her cousin. Rosalind must have felt hatred for her uncle who cheated her father out of his throne, but she doesn't show any bitterness. Rosalind and Celia have been attached to each other since they were very young. Rosalind accepts the situation and guards her emotions, regardless of her own sadness over her father's banishment. She does admit her feelings to Celia in Act I,

“Dear Celia, I show more mirth than I am mistress of;
and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could

teach me to forget a banished father, you must not
learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.” (1.2.2-5)

This feeling shows how much she is hurt and trying to forget all her sorrows to be happy, though failing from time to time. But she resolves to forget the condition of her state and joins other's happiness so that others around her do not feel discomfort. As she says, “Well, I will forget the condition of my estate, to rejoice in yours.”(1.2.12)

Like *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare has presented cross-dressed heroine which allows the audiences to explore the flexibility of gender. The general assumptions about Shakespearean plays are that male actors are only used to act in women's characters because women were not available or allowed to perform on stage. Also, audiences are amused watching males acting as women in order to fit in the creation of significant female roles.

But in *As You Like It*, cross dressing is a very significant feature. Shakespeare wanted his audience to perceive Rosalind or Ganymede not as an exclusive female but as an inseparable being from distinguishable male qualities. In the character Rosalind, Shakespeare offers a diluted representation of gender by moving Rosalind from one sexual identity to another as she takes on and abandons the Ganymede disguise throughout the play. In the way to the forest of Arden Rosalind put on the disguise of Ganymede for safety but, after reaching the forest she does not let go of her disguise. At home, in front of Celia and Touchstone she is Rosalind. When she goes out, in front of others, she plays the role of man as Ganymede. She is frequently changing her identity and role. Also it seems like, she does not feel any pressure or anxiety playing the both role and shifting repeatedly. Her easy going attitude give the audience a feeling that, in reality

roles of men and women do not have much to separate strictly. Anyone is capable to take responsibilities of any gender.

When Rosalind runs away to the Forest of Arden with Celia and Touchstone, she knows that, there are possibilities of dangers like rape and robbery on the road. So she decides to disguise herself as a young man for the safety of the journey. While Rosalind disguises herself as an attractive young boy named Ganymede and ventures into Arden, she challenges the traditional ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman. Also, her actions question the views of society about women being passive and silent in sixteenth century. Even though Touchstone has accompanied them, Rosalind knows that he is not able to provide safety to the girls as he knows nothing about fighting, also, as his appearance is weak, his presence will not help as well. She identifies the hidden fear of being a woman. Also she is able to recognize that masculinity can be imitated or faked. If a coward man can pretend to be a tough guy by "swashing" around with an axe on his thigh and a boar-spear in his hand, then Rosalind can mimic that too. In other words, Rosalind understands that gender is a social role that can be imitated and faked.

“A gallant curtal-ax upon my thigh,
 A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart
 Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will
 We'll have a swashing and a martial outside—
 As many other mannish cowards have
 That do outface it with their semblances.” (1.3.124-129)

Again, audiences can see Rosalind's selfless strong nature as they set off towards the Forest of Arden. She is extremely exhausted, but her disguise as Ganymede helps her keep her attention off her own problems. She says,

I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's
 apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort
 the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show
 itself courageous to petticoat: therefore courage,
 good Aliena!(2.4.7)

Rosalind authoritatively buys the cottage at the edge of the woods. Banishment may have disappointed someone less strong, but Rosalind does not let the situation upset her a bit. She takes charge of everything and makes the best of a very challenging situation. Regardless of her own discomfort, she takes her mind off of her own problems and focuses on the needs of others, finds shelter and food for herself as well for her companions.

After they reach the forest safely and when Rosalind's disguise is no longer necessary, Rosalind remains in disguise. For many literary critics, Rosalind stays in her man disguise because it offers freedom. Alexander Leggatt mentions in *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, that Rosalind's disguise is "truly liberating." Leggatt also says that "the role is a device allowing Rosalind a freedom of comment impossible in a conventional love affair." (Leggatt 202) It can be argued a step further that Rosalind's disguise gives her a chance to tutor Orlando about love, to make him an ideal romantic lover. The character Rosalind is ruled by motives. Even her love is controlled, as she does not let Orlando know her real identity and expresses the same passion toward him, until she has schooled him upto a level which is acceptable. Also she stops herself from celebrating after she has discovered that Orlando has written a love poem in her honor. Basically

she is extraordinarily self-composed as well as romantic. Yale professor and literary critic Harold Bloom says that "Rosalind is unique in Western drama, because it is so difficult to achieve a perspective upon her that she herself does not anticipate and share." (Bloom 56) Bloom also praises Rosalind for being the first real lover of modern literature. According to him, she is the first who makes fun of love and also let herself fully comprised by all its pure ecstasy and silliness. Though she is disguised as a boy, she willingly pretends to be a girl, so that Orlando can practice his moves on Ganymede. When overemotional Orlando goes claiming that he will die if he does not get Rosalind, she argues with him that "men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (4.1.112-113). Another time, When Orlando announces that he will love Rosalind forever, Rosalind says "No, no, Orlando; / men are April when they woo, December when they wed: / maids are May when they are maids, but the sky/ changes when they are wives" (4.1.156-158). Rosalind states sarcastically about love. She worries that, Orlando may lose interest in her after marriage. So that she tries to measure the seriousness of his love. She knows that love is not all hearts and flowers, but she is willing to take a chance on loving Orlando. Rosalind is well educated and strong. She does not let herself melt down by the sweet talk like common assumption about women but stay composed.

Rosalind dominates the play with her guarded emotions, the delicacy of her thought and the fullness of her character that no one else in the play can compete with her. Orlando is handsome, strong and affectionate, yet he seems a little less brilliant when she chooses him as her mate. In the scenes between Rosalind or Ganymede and Orlando, it always showcases Rosalind as Orlando's equal or better, until the final scene of the play. She has also proved herself as wittier and smarter than Orlando especially about Love by taking a superior position to him as his tutor on wooing a woman. Here she holds the strongest position of any woman in a Shakespeare

comedy. She does not only get her man, but also teaches him to be exactly the lover she wants. Also, Touchstone and Jaques, might shine more brightly in the play, but they seem slightly dull whenever Rosalind takes the stage. Jaques refuses to participate in life but say much about the foolishness of people around him. On the other hand, Rosalind gives herself over fully to situation. She disciplines Silvius for his irrational dedication to Phoebe and she challenges Orlando's crazy thoughts about Rosalind with a Platonic ideal. But still she becomes restless by her lover's delay and faints at the sight of his blood.

Rosalind is particularly favorite among feminist critics. She is admired for her ability to sabotage the limitations that society enforces on her as a woman. With confidence she disguises herself as a man for the majority of the play in order to woo the man she loves. Also teaches him how to be a skillful lover, which tutorship would not be welcome from a woman. Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede helps her to uphold "strength" to an equal level with the men in the play. There is much comic appeal in Rosalind's mimicry of the conventions of both male and female behavior. But Elizabethan audiences might be concern regarding the behaviors as the assigned roles of men and women of male-dominated society has been satirized. Rosalind's gender role playing game is further complicated by the fact that the actor playing the role of "Rosalind" would have been actually a male, since women were not allowed to perform on Shakespearean public stage. As a result, while the role of Ganymede is acted there has been no imitation either in actions or in appearance. In the end, Rosalind let go her previous masculinity and become entirely subordinated. Her appearance as an actor in the Epilogue assures that the forest is like the stage and as they all leave the forest and return to the normal life, they will be welcomed by the regular social structure to follow. But before the end, audience got to learn from Rosalind that they contain same potential to make the world better place. This would not be the case if she were

intended to be accepted as a woman when seen as Ganymede. Through these arrangements in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare makes it clear that gender roles can be copied and performed not only in theater but also in real life. Rosalind's disguise of a male gives her the freedom to explore her identity because it permits her to behave in ways that is considered socially unacceptable for women. As Rosalind is dominant and prejudiced, she defies the traditional 16th-century assumption about women and sets out on her own to discover her individuality.

Chapter- 4

The Merchant of Venice: Triumph of Portia

Feminist values are highly prominent in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. In this comedy Shakespeare draws attention by creating female characters that rebel against the norms of society. The women of Shakespearean plays are always an interesting subject to explore and Portia is one of the most discussed female characters. Portia has been considered as one of the most perfectly developed female protagonists. She is intelligent, quick-witted, noble, educated by a wise father, cultured and refined. In the book *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, William Hazlitt has accused her of being unfeminine, masculine and pedantic because of her intellectual ability.

The Merchant of Venice opens with Bassanio, an aristocrat nobleman with financial troubles and in need to borrow money in order to compete for the hand of beautiful and wealthy heiress Portia of Belmont. Bassanio approaches his friend Antonio, a wealthy merchant of Venice who has previously helped him out financially. Antonio wants to, but he has used all his money in seafaring ventures and unable to give Bassanio loan. They approach Shylock, a Jewish moneylender and convince him to give a loan of three thousand ducats. Shylock agrees as long as Antonio signs the contract upon one twisted condition: if Bassanio is unable to repay within the specified deadline, Shylock may take a pound of Antonio's flesh. Meanwhile, in Belmont, Portia is approached by several suitors. Before his death, her father had demanded that all her suitors must select one of three caskets in order to marry her. Among the three caskets, one made of gold, one of silver, and one of lead, all contain different messages. Only one of these caskets contains a picture of Portia. The suitor who picks the casket with the picture of Portia inside will

be permitted to marry her. But all the suitors failed to choose the right casket and Portia is tired of it. In this situation, Nerissa, companion of Portia, mentions Bassanio, as a possible suitor which brightens up Portia's mood. Once he visited Belmont, Portia was impressed with him and fell in love with him. Portia wants Bassanio to choose the correct casket. So she gives instruction to the musicians to play music full of clues, which could have influenced Bassanio to choose the right casket. He nonetheless succeeds and wins the hand of his lady love. Portia is overwhelmed by her feelings for him and gives him a ring to seal their engagement and prepare to get married the next day. Gratiano, who has accompanied Bassanio to Belmont, says that he and Nerissa wish to be married as well. Back in Venice, a romantic subplot develops when, Shylock's daughter, Jessica falls in love with Lorenzo, a close friend of Antonio and Bassanio. One night, she elopes with Lorenzo, disguised as a boy and manages to take a good amount of her father's fortune with her. At the same time there are rumors rising in Venice that many of Antonio's ships have sunk or been lost at sea. Shylock becomes furious as a Christian has stolen his daughter and money as well. He is reminded of the many insults caused by Antonio, a Christian. He wants revenge and nothing will satisfy Shylock except the legal fulfillment of the bond. Shylock has Antonio arrested and brought before the Duke of Venice, who supervises the court of justice. Bassanio gets a letter from Antonio which says that he has lost all his money and as penalty must give a pound of flesh to Shylock. Portia orders him to take six thousand ducats and return to Venice to pay Shylock and cancel the contract. After Bassanio and Gratiano have left, Nerissa and Portia also depart for Venice disguised as men. Shylock refuses to accept the money Bassanio offers, preferring the revenge of killing Antonio. At this point, Portia enters the court, disguised as a lawyer; Dr. Balthazar with Nerissa dressed as her law clerk and tells the Duke that they are sent from Padua by a learned attorney, Doctor Bellario, to deal the defendant's case.

Portia pleads Shylock to be merciful, but he will not listen. Then she offers him triple the amount of money owed him, but again Shylock refuses. As Portia is unable to find any loopholes, she grants Shylock his pound of flesh. Shylock overjoyed, holds a knife ready to cut into Antonio's chest. Portia then informs Shylock that he must be very careful to cut off exactly one pound of flesh and must not spill one drop of Antonio's blood. If he fails, all of Shylock's lands and money will be seized. Shylock, clearly unable to fulfill with this law, asks to be given the six thousand ducats but Portia refuses his request. Shylock then offers to take only the original three thousand ducats, but again Portia refuses, reminding him that it was he who demanded strict interpretation of the law. Portia further explain the law in Venice, that if any foreigner conspires against the life of a Venetian, half his wealth is to be given to the man against whom he conspired and half is taken by the state. Later Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity and Antonio declares that he will keep his share for Jessica and Lorenzo. Antonio and Bassanio want to pay the lawyer whatever he wants and he demands the ring in Bassanio's hand. Bassanio unwillingly gives away Portia's ring. Nerissa also cleverly manages to get the ring from Gratiano. Then they left for home. When Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio return to Belmont, their wives ask about the missing rings. They question their loyalty. After putting their husbands in discomfort, they reveal the truth and return the rings. The play ends happily, as Portia informs Antonio that his ships have arrived safely in port.

The language used in the play suggests that money is a source of power and desire, mostly for males. The play begins with Bassanio asking Antonio for money so that he may woo the beautiful and wealthy Portia. His penniless state makes him weak and less masculine. As, wealth is the key element of power in the society, lack of wealth makes Bassanio weak. On the other hand, Portia is known as wealthy heiress, which makes Bassanio inferior in front of Portia. But

according to social order men should be superior, whereas, lack of money has stricken his masculinity too.

. . . Many Jasons come in quest of her.

O my Antonio, had I but the means

To hold a rival place with one of them,

I have a mind presages me such thrift

That I should questionless be fortunate. (1.2.172-176)

Unlike other female characters of Shakespeare, Portia's speech shows a common quality of a man's mode of speech. It is heavily loaded with financial expressions. In her dramatic offering to Bassanio, she says, "A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich/ That only to stand high in your account/I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,/Exceed account." (3.2.154-157)Portia uses numbers like; "thousand" and "ten thousand" naturally in her speech, which is unexpected from a woman of Elizabethan era. Further, she puns on the word 'account,' to mean Bassanio's estimation of her and her own potential value. In both the cases, the term seems more appropriate to praise an object than a potential wife. Portia continues, ". . . But the full sum of me/ Is sum of something which, to term in gross,/ Is an unlessoned girl, . . ." (3.2.157-159)Here Portia once again uses phrases "the full sum" and "to term in gross" which are appropriate for financial or numerical matters. Though by the phrase "the full sum" she means "to describe it fully," the phrase puns on "gross" as it is a rate at which product is sold and "gross" as in "gross profit," or profit without reductions. Portia's language reveals how comfortable she is in the masculine, financially responsible world, and indirectly, her unwilling to leave it. Portia is a rich woman though all her money is bestowed upon her, she has wisely held her position after her father. Later, Portia's speech suggests that Portia has

survived and flourished after her father's death, that she is highly knowledgeable in financial matters, regarding her property. Her speech demonstrates her intelligence and eloquence. The description she gives of herself is very interesting:

“ . . . an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised,
 Happy in this, she is not yet so old
 But she may learn; happier than this,
 She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
 Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.” (3.2.159-65)

Portia is hardly 'unlessoned' or 'unschooled.' her strange references to herself as raised for intelligence and possessed of a "gentle spirit" make her sound as if she were a domestic animal, gives the idea that she is mocking the social norms. Indeed, Portia has shown to be far from obedient to male instruction. Portia's father had left a clause in his will that the suitor who will pick the correct casket should marry her. Portia cannot deliberately break her father's verdict, but she already has in her mind the person who she wished to marry. In this case, her intelligence serves her well in her pursuit of Bassanio. Portia manipulates the test for her own purposes. It shows that, the event of choosing casket is a mere show; actually, Portia is controlling the whole situation according to her own will and treating all the suitors as her puppets. In act I, it is shown that Portia is jokingly plotting with Nerissa that if the German Duke takes part in the contest, they will place Rhenish wine to prevent the alcoholic suitor from choosing the right casket. In act III, readers find Portia's servants singing Bassanio a song with a number of clues to influence him to choose the right casket. In the novel *The Young Unicorns* by Madeleine L'Engle, one of

her characters said in defense of free will, “to take away a man's freedom of choice, even his freedom to make the wrong choice, is to manipulate him as though he were a puppet and not a person.” It proves that Portia is wise and strong enough to practice her power over everyone around her. On the other hand, men around the world are vying for her attention and long to marry her. But in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austin, readers see the opposite that, all the maiden girls were trying their best and prepare themselves to get the attention of eligible bachelors and secure their hand in marriage. Here Jane Austin has mirrored the social setting and mind set of 1813, whereas, Shakespeare has written his plays on sixteenth century when the society and setting was stricter. It seems like both Austin and Shakespeare are representing same scenario in hundred years’ time difference, but Shakespeare was far ahead of time to realize the lacking of social norm and signifying the ability of women. Though it is the normal scenario of that age, Shakespeare’s brave protagonist obviously swims against the stream. In the book, *Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* by W. Reginald Rampone, it is stated that, “regardless whether women were reading or weaving, men constantly scrutinized women’s intellect and eroticism, so that they could contain their desperate energies” (Rampone 160). But in contrary, we can see how Portia scrutinized each of her suitors, in act I. Portia analyzes each man with a kind of clinical precision, enjoying particularly in questioning their masculinity. Her evaluation of her suitors is sarcastic. According to Portia, the prince from Naples reminds her of a horse and the Count from Palatine is humorless. The British Baron is too ignorant even to speak to Portia and has no dressing sense. Portia’s comment about the French lord is, “God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man” (1.2.47). These remarks reveal that she apparently believes herself superior and therefore in a position to judge men’s masculinity. Whereas, it is supposed to be the opposite, according to the social system of Shakespearean era. Even in Shakespeare’s

Taming of The Shrew, readers experience that men decide whether the woman is desirable or not as well the definition of femininity but, with the exception that women also decide the same about men.

After Bassanio successfully chooses the lead coffin and wins Portia's hand, Portia gives a congratulatory speech. Though the speech is submissive and feminine on the surface, it contains a number of distinctly strong undertones. Considering her sharp tongue and wit, it raises doubts about the sincerity of her effort to play the role of a traditional subordinate wife. Though language of her speech is full of submission and respect, Portia refers indirectly to her strength and power repeatedly, that would have made any Elizabethan suitor uncomfortable. “. . . But now I was the lord/ Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, / Queen o'er myself; . . .” (3.2.167-169) Portia mentions herself as the 'lord' of the mansion and the 'master' of the servants. She has not used adjectives like beautiful and kind to describe herself, classic model of feminine caregiver is absent. Then again by using few nouns she has painted an image of her control and dominance. Elizabeth Cady Stanton a leading figure of the early woman's movement, in her lecture "Our Girls" has mentioned the same quality for girls to embrace, "I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns." At the ending of her speech, Portia indirectly includes a threat, though Bassanio is too over excited to notice,

This house, these servants, and this same myself

Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring,

Which when you part from, lose, or give away,

Let it presage the ruin of your love

And be my vantage to exclaim on you. (3.2.170-3)

Here once again, Portia finely pulls off a male role by giving herself away, a duty that is usually reserved for a bride's father. Though it is not clear whether Portia has already planned to test Bassanio's love or planned to regain her property, she has deliberately left herself a loophole to reclaim her power. She states clearly that if Bassanio loses the ring, he will lose wife and property that has come with it as well. However, later as the play moves forward, Portia hardly seems to have given away any power. After receiving the letter from Antonio, while Bassanio has been devastated and crying over the unfortunate situation, Portia does not even get tensed but takes control over the situation and starts advising. Portia offers the money and gently but firmly ordered Bassanio to repay Antonio's bond. Her statements also sound as if she is rectifying Bassanio's mistake. She is heard saying,

Pay him six thousand and deface the bond!

Double six thousand, and then treble that,

Before a friend of this description

Shall lose a hair thorough Bassanio's fault. (3.2.299-301)

Though she has pledged all her property to Bassanio a few moments ago, actually Portia holds the control of her wealth. By giving six thousand ducats instantly and also by mentioning that, she is able to give thirty-six thousand ducats for Bassanio in comparison to Antonio's three, she suggests power and superiority. Though Portia is ready to give a large amount of money to Bassanio right away, it is not without knowing what is actually written in the letter. So she insists on reading the letter first, which proves her as a responsible business woman, who has taken control over estate after her father and flourished with her wisdom. She has taken control over her wealth and the responsibilities have come with it. Portia does not only embrace the superiority in her to govern her father's property but also grown the power to dominate any

individual. Here Shakespeare has drawn the picture that, if there is no boundary how far a woman can grow, just like Betty Friedan says in *The Feminine Mystique*, “Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love?”

Portia sends the men away with money to save Antonio but not much satisfied, she plans to go to Venice in men's clothing to reassure their safety. In comedies, cross dressing is always seems as a comic element but in Shakespeare's comedy, cross dressing is not just a course to comedy, it is also a passageway to the characters desires. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, has exercised more freedom than many females of her time and Newman has named women of her kind as “unruly women.” Portia shows her unruliness by leaving her estate and entering the world of men, posing as the most masculine of positions, a doctor of law. Cross dressing allows Portia to leave Belmont and enter the masculine world of Venice to save Antonio and Bassanio. Portia slips into her masculine role with ease and displays extreme skill in court. Jean Howard in her article ‘Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England’ explains that women with this kind of passion hold “Challenges posed to masculine authority and the traditional gender hierarchy” with their wealth and desires. Audiences discover Portia's resourcefulness, intelligence and wit through her dealings with Shylock in court. Portia enters court by saying that she is Balthazar and has been sent to replace doctor Bellario. At first, Portia offers the double, even triple amount of money Antonio has taken, but Shylock refuses. Later she pleads to Shylock to have mercy, but Shylock being stubborn in quest of revenge insists on strict interpretation of law. Then she considers that, it is her duty to show Shylock the foolishness of exact interpretation of the law that has no mercy. So, she allow Shylock to take the amount of flesh mentioned in the bond, but without taking a drop of Antonio's blood when he takes his

pound of flesh. Since this is impossible, Shylock begs to just be given money, but now Portia is merciless. She unleashes another law that states that if any outsider tries to take life of a Venetian, his wealth should be sieged and will be split between the state and the victim. Portia has cleverly tricked Shylock at his own game. Her manipulation of Shylock is efficient and brutal. She shows no mercy that women are strongly recommended off, leaving Shylock penniless and even forced to Christianity, which is hardly a feminine approach. Antonio's display of his heroic nature by risking his life for Bassanio and the efforts of Bassanio to save Antonio from death are quite insignificant next to Portia's showdown of her quick wit to rescue both the men from the mess they are in.

Portia's final but most effective assumption of a masculine role takes place after the survival of Antonio, when Portia disguised as Balthasar suddenly asks Bassanio for his engagement ring as a token of gratitude. It indicates to a very complex situation. As, if Bassanio gives the ring, he also gives away his wife and property as well it establishes that he values his friendship with Antonio more than his marriage. Therefore, Portia has smartly exploited Bassanio's failure of her test of loyalty. As a consequence, Bassanio loses control over she had given him and Portia regain the full control. At the end of the play Portia has become financially independent and she has more social power than any of the male characters.

Though in modern feminist context it may fall short, Portia's empowerment is a triumph for Elizabethan feminism. Portia seems to navigate with system better than their male counterparts who often turn out to the exchange wealth only after they have wasted away their own. Shakespeare has provided Portia with a stronger voice, a stronger sense of identity and freedom. Portia is a complex character with qualities, those reflects Elizabethan notions of womanhood and challenges them at the same time. Shakespeare has created Portia, a character who is

liberated, unrestricted and much of a feminist that, he might isolate potential audiences of his era. Feministic values are highly noticeable in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. The constant tension between the male and female characters in the play, in their competition for superiority over the other directs that Shakespeare had a deep and thoughtful knowledge about the power relation between men and women.

Chapter-5

The Taming of the Shrew: Taming of Society

The Taming of the Shrew is a well-known but unusual comedy of Shakespeare which presents hilarious encounter between a man and his wife, whom he rather treats as an object of his affection. In other words, it is a play, where the audience can see a man's conquest over a woman's social and emotional independence and the taming of a free spirit. Kate's will is broken as a matter of entertainment and this setting reveals a denial of essential feminism. *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play which is ahead of its time in its views regarding gender roles within society. Kate is presented as a figure of social disorder, unfit for society, as she rejects the traditional institution of marriage and the idea of love. Kate is shown as an independent, sharp-tongued woman whom the male dominated society has demonized, as they see her as an obstacle which is preventing courtship of the younger sister Bianca, who is according to society modest and therefore more desirable. In his other comedies, Shakespeare shows appreciation for women's situation and his female protagonists are admirable and self-sufficient. But here, he has characterized Katherine as an evil who needs severe taming to transform her into an efficient wife and proper member of society. Shakespeare has contrasted stubborn and tough Kate with desirable Bianca to show the duplicity of marriages in society.

Katherine is reputed throughout Padua as a shrew, short-tempered and sharp-tongued at the start of the play. She repetitively insults and degrades the men around her and she is prone to display her anger, during which she may physically attack whoever angers her. Shakespeare has created Katherine as a woman who is intelligent, strong and not afraid to state her views on any given

situation. As she is intelligent and independent, she is unwilling to play the role of the maiden daughter. She clearly abhors society's expectations that she obey her father and show grace and courtesy toward her suitors. As she is portrayed as an unruly woman, the plot demands her taming and Petruchio is shown as the only one who is wise enough to accomplish this mission. At the end, everyone celebrates the victory of Petruchio for transforming a violent, bitter shrew into a happy and graceful woman. Whereas, she is found crushed and unhappy, at the end.

American psychologist Robert Ornstein in his work, *Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery*, has described Petruchio as a bully and his treatment of Katherine is cruel. He subjects Katherine to unnecessary humiliation and torture. He also mentioned that Petruchio's action is far beyond justification. His action proves that, he knows Katherine is stronger and more intelligent than him, which leads him to play unfair to establish his superiority. About this kind of actions, Simone de Beauvoir has said in *The Second Sex*, "No one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility." (Beauvoir 9)

The play is full of sexist remarks and the main character, Kate is the one that all of the sexist remarks and actions are directed towards. The language throughout this play shows that women are inferior to men. Bianca and Kate are the main focus of the suitors' interests in the play. Petruchio and Lucentio win Kate and Bianca but it takes taming and money to get them. The fact that women had to be tamed and the big amount of dowry showed that women are like objects that are bought, not loved. In the play Lucentio says, "'tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so" (5, 2, 194). The fact that women has to be tamed, is the most sexist and discriminating against women. In the play, readers see that, many men bet on to see who would win the younger sister Bianca,. This form of choosing wife and marrying is very degrading to women.

Shakespeare has shown the way they were being treated in his time, how they were treated like objects and showing love towards them was absent in the marital process during that time. As, Hortensio says about payment of wives, "Yea, and to marry her, if her dowry please" (1, 2, 183). This statement shows that he will marry her if the amount of money he offers is enough for her father to approve their marriage.

The play reflects the way wives were being treated at the time but for twenty-first-century feminists, it is hard to watch. When Petruchio drags Kate away from her own wedding reception, insisting she is his "chattels", also when he deprives her of food and sleep until she learns to bend her wills to his, it is even discomfoting to watch. According to Ornstein, Katherine is not shrew but quite courteous as her "behavior at her wedding is remarkably restrained given the anxiety and humiliation she suffers from Petruchio's behavior."(Ornstein 167) What is more interesting about Kate's "taming" is the means in which she is subdued. Following her outrage at the spectacle of the wedding, Petruchio denies Kate food, insisting that it is for her own good. Later, he denies her access to the ornate clothing provided by the tailor. Before leaving for their return to Padua, Kate implores her husband that they make haste, as they are late. Petruchio sputters that he will not go, and that she is reading the time incorrectly, but despite the abuse, he fails to turn her into the compliant wife he wants. Her words to Petruchio before he first decides they will depart for wedding express her disapproval at being denied the dress the tailor has made for her: "Be like you mean to make a puppet of me" (4.3.109). Though it is clear that she wants the dress (4.3.107-108), her objection expresses hurt pride, a sign of a strong sense of self, and there is nothing to suggest that she is backing down or willing to agree to Petruchio's demands. Therefore, he agrees to head for her father's house, but immediately changes his mind when Kate disagrees with his proclamation that they will arrive by dinner time,

‘Petruccio -I think ’tis now some seven o'clock,

And well we may come there by dinnertime.

Katherine- I dare assure you, sir, ’tis almost two,

And ’twill be supper time ere you come there.

Petruccio -...I will not go today, and ere I do

It shall be what o'clock I say it is.” (4.3.185-195).

Despite the fact that she has shown no sign of submitting to his notions, he has agreed to set out. When Petruccio almost calls off the trip when Kate fails to agree with him that, they will arrive at Baptista’s by dinner time, Kate realizes that he will demand utter obedience. still she shows no change of heart, when once again tests her, “Petruccio. Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!/Katherine. The moon? The sun. It is not moonlight now.” (4.5.11-12) Kate challenges Petruccio, and she continues to challenge his absurd declarations until Hortensio pulls her aside and says, “Say as he says, or we shall never go” (4.5.13). Immediately Kate gives in. The sudden change in her attitude and the fact that Hortensio suggests her to pretend make it clear that her change is motivated rather than evidence of any genuine change of heart. Further Petruccio pursuit to make Kate obedience through absurd claiming upon Vincentio. Petruccio asks Kate to claim, that Vincentio is a beautiful young virgin, “Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly too,/Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?” (4.5.30-31); “Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet, / Whither away, or where is thy abode?” (4.5.38-39) only to immediately suggest she must be mad and made her apologize for her mistake, “Why, how now, Kate! I hope thou art not mad./This is a man—old, wrinkled, faded, withered—/ And not a maiden, as thou

say'st he is."(4.5.49-53)The effect of this act is comedic because it plays with gender and age. Petruchio uses this classic abusive behavior to get Kate's obedience, destroying her confidence, causing her to fear him and doubt herself. But she knows Vincentio is no young virgin girl. Kate has made a conscious choice to say what Petruchio insists on hearing to save her from more trouble. Here we can visualize the true picture of patriarchy and female subjugation. Shakespeare has highlighted the fact that, how a strong will woman has turned into an object of her husband. This is the same problem Simon de Beauvoir has mentioned in her book *The Second Sex*, "during history it was and in some cultures still is a common principle that most rights for women were gone after their marriage. Often they are objects in the hands of their husbands." (Beauvoir 145) Kate relies on her husband for survival, warmth and freedom of motion. According to the social system, Petruchio becomes her husband as well her guardian, leaving Kate with no independence. He is brainwashing her, torturing her by keeping her hungry, clothed her the way he seems fit, restricting her motion and even forcing her sense of time. Shakespeare's message here is the lack of female liberation and the consequences of unusual female action. Kate is portrayed as making her fate through her hostility and frightening society with her violence before marriage. The more a woman drifts from the path society has for her, the harsher the "punishment" is waiting for her in future marriage.

As the play progresses, Petruchio and Katherine rejoin the rest of the characters. They have known Katherine for years, as confident sharp tongued woman who will never bend in front of others' will. The three husbands Petruchio, Lucentio and Hortensio have a competition to see whose wife is most obedient, and of course Katherine wins it. They cannot believe it. They congratulate Petruchio thinking how wise he must be but, unfortunately, they haven't seen the horrors he has put her through. They are too blind to the physical evidences and just see a polite,

agreeable woman, who is helping her husband. But failed to think for a minute, what would be able to break a strong willed woman. Though stubborn, Kate is intelligent too. Katherine has understood lately that, to get what she wants, she has to pretend and verbally agree with Petruchio. So by following, this tactic, she is gaining her way and ultimately taming everyone cleverly. In her apparent surrender to her husband's mad will, Kate realizes "she can take the wind completely out of his sails, deprive his weapon of its power, even turn it against him—tame him in his own humor" (Marvel 52)

Ornstein has mentioned Petruchio as the real shrew. He has indulged his shrewdness under the guise of taming Katherine, who does not need to be tamed. In medieval period the word shrew was applied for men, "wicked, evil- disposed, or malignant man."(Ornstein) But, by the sixteenth century the word shrew take a three-sixty turn and indicate a riotous woman. According to Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the word shrew means in 1755, "peevisish, malignant, clamorous, spiteful, vexatious, turbulent woman." Shakespeare's indirect portrayal of a man as a shrew indicates through the play he has questioned the idea of shrewdness and the process of tormenting a confident woman in the name of taming, which the society praise proudly. Here Shakespeare has not just portraying female subjugation, but questioning the values of society. As Costa quoted director Edward Hall's view in her article "The Taming of the Shrew: 'This is not a woman being crushed'", it also echoes "He's challenging an audience's expectations of how a woman is supposed to behave. What if, as a human being, she doesn't want to roll over, as was expected in Shakespeare's day? I actually think he's championing the woman's rights." Shakespeare has shown in the play that, how woman are forced to follow men's lead and become submissive. As de Beauvoir mentioned, "Men make women to what they are and their existence depends on the rights which are granted

by men.” (Beauvoir 85) In some sense, in this play as any other, Shakespeare proves to be a visionary.

Chapter-6

Conclusion

Drawing from physiology and religion, the concept of femininity and masculinity suggests a binary opposition between the male and female and categorizes them as strong and weak.

Shakespeare's female characters have never followed these kinds of defined characteristics which clearly represent gender roles. Shakespeare has not only exemplified women's weakness and men's strength but also has shown women's strengths as well as men's weaknesses. In reality, people are featured with a combination of strength and weakness. Shakespeare's characters are complex. He has layered his characters with such individualities and significance that, they are relevant even in the twenty first century four centuries after they were drawn. In some of his works, his female characters are portrayed as inferior and bound in social norms but readers find his female characters active, empowered and able to accomplish their goals through brave actions. Sometimes they are stronger and morally more righteous than men. Shakespeare's comedies suggest evidence of complex and opposite nature of gender and power. Though sometimes we find them being victimized but often they have played crucial roles in overcoming their own weakened states and attaining some form of success and happiness.

Historical surroundings of Shakespeare has always influenced his writing, here, it is England's greatest female monarch, Elizabeth I. Though society was largely patriarchal, the monarchy was led by a queen. Queen Elizabeth did not marry, nor would she fit into society's mold of the typical woman. Shakespeare's characters were daring for the time as well, as they also broke the mold of Elizabethan women. Shakespeare lived in the Elizabethan era and most of his spirited

female characters went against the norms of society. But, Elizabethan society was oblivious of women empowerment and ignored the possible ability of women. Furthermore, if “feminist” characters like, presented in the comedies, existed in real life of that era, were being oppressed by overpowering male dominance like Katherine of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Female assertion was a taboo in the society. If the dominant themes of Shakespeare’s plays were the liberation of women, audience and society wouldn’t accept them. That is why, most of the Shakespeare’s dominant female characters are presented in comedies, questioning whether or not to take them seriously as well, whether they may exist outside stage or not. Under the shade of comedy, Shakespeare projected feminist ideology in Elizabethan society.

Shakespearean females are usually individuals who contribute to the development of plot as significantly as the male characters. However, all the three Shakespearean female protagonists of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* are magnificent and can be described as heroes. In her book *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*, Carol Pearson defines hero as one who “departs from convention and thereby either implicitly or explicitly challenges the myths that define the status quo” (Pearson 16)

Katherine is the short-tempered and sharp-tongued protagonist of the play *The Taming of the Shrew*, who from the beginning constantly criticized the institution of love and marriage. Her unrestrained actions and the manner in which she displays her feelings without hesitation, makes her the shrew according to the social norms of the sixteenth century. In spite of abuse and violation, Kate was unbreakable and her strong will- power never let her bend down. She reflects her intelligence, by pretending to agree with her husband who has taken the mission of taming her and under the disguise of submission takes control over all. Her actions, at the end of the play, reveal her as a more developed and dynamic spirit. Kate and Petruchio are very unique

among Shakespearean couples. Though Petruchio is hardly a hero, he is the man who “tames the shrew.” However, Petruchio is a perfect match for Kate in harshness, manner and in his social shortcomings. But, Kate is more polished and presentable than her husband. The power balance between them shifts dramatically. Kate outshines Petruchio in diplomacy and intelligence.

In the play *As You Like It*, Rosalind is one of Shakespeare's most recognized heroines who are admired for her intelligence and quick wit. She is assertive and demonstrates leadership quality, plotting and decision-making skills. Also she is found to extract important traits of other characters. The most feminist aspect of Rosalind is her ability to exceed gender norms. In cross-dressing, with confidence she disguises herself as a man for the majority of the play in order to woo and teach the man she loves how to be a skillful lover. Rosalind's sexual empowerment does idolize her to a certain degree. She has the power to evoke feelings in men that would not exist earlier. She is admired for her ability to sabotage the limitations that society enforces on her as a woman. Rosalind and Orlando is another pair, where Shakespeare makes the heroine beat the hero and become the hero herself. Rosalind dominates the play through her self-gained power and guarded emotions. With confidence she defies the tradition of sixteenth century, discovers her individuality as well takes lead and control over everything around her. There is no doubt that she is a hero and possesses the superior qualities to train other characters.

Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* is the strongest among the three protagonists. Her empowerment is a triumph for Elizabethan feminism. She possesses stronger voice, sense of identity and freedom. Portia pulls off a male role finely and does not stop at scrutinizing and questioning masculinity of other male characters of the play. Her navigation skills and manipulation ability highlights her intelligence and wit. Portia has smartly exploited as well challenged masculine authority and the traditional gender hierarchy. Among Portia and Bassanio,

without any doubt Portia wins the crown of a hero. Portia leaves Bassanio, Antonio and Shylock behind in every aspect. She rectifies Bassanio's mistake. Saves Antonio's life and pull Shylock down brutally. She manipulates Bassanio and exploits to take control over him. Portia outsmarts Shylock in court, disguised as a lawyer, forcing him to abandon his claim to Antonio's flesh and to give up wealth and religion in the process. Portia saves everyone single-handedly like a literal hero.

William Shakespeare is an author, who elegantly alerts the society to the issues in women's studies and gender philosophy. Shakespeare's comedies show that there was a clear borderline between men and women. Responsibilities of men and women were strictly divided at that time. Shakespeare dealt with every issue which was burning question of the time, also he recognized the issues which were not even considered to be existed. Gender is socially learned behaviors that are attached to the sexes, which ultimately leads to Gender Roles. Gender roles in *As You Like It* and *The merchant of Venice* prove to be quite enigmatic in Shakespearean comedy.

Shakespeare highlights the difference between reality and delusion. Rosalind exemplifies the vulnerability of love that leads to a happy, harmonious living. She as a conspirator brings the four contrasting romances end in marriage. On the other hand, Portia demonstrates importance of manipulation skills. Portia navigates expertly to save lives and property. Shakespeare beautifully created almost ideal heroines who bring the play to its ending, which is unique and becomes an inspiration for other women in the society.

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