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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Monetarily Heroic Perspective of Feminism in the Merchant of Venice****Muhammad Asad Qureshi**

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ayeshakhadim077@gmail.com**Abstract**

More or less all the literally, social, theatrically, moral and human values saw a positive revival in the Renaissance due to the pen of Shakespeare. The spectrum of writings of Shakespeare is wide stretched to the centuries. The principal prepositions in his writings seem to have a universal appeal as these have a deep relevance with characters of every era. Among Shakespeare's four comedies, The Merchant of Venice is one with diversified roles of both the genders. The Merchant of Venice a play by Shakespeare which surfaced up during the Elizabethan reign which witnessed huge economic growth. This era also saw a radical changes in form of Renaissance Humanism. It is the power and charisma of kind human heart which keeps the burner lit up in adverse conditions. The story of Merchant of Venice revolves around timely enacted acts of kindness based on positive intentions. This research article deals with wisdom of women in lines with the power of neat feministic intentions. It shows what a woman can do by applying her wisdom in a humanistic manner. It also discusses how a woman can be a source of radical liberation from intense and Intricate social scenarios. This article also brings to light the value of letting the women to show their real potential in making a real difference. This research paper also looks into the measures taken by the women for measures (the feministic power of taking the initiative).

Introduction

The purpose of creating the world was to have a culture in which human holds a principal position as far order of preferences and rights is concerned. Shakespeare in period of Renaissance rehighlighted this fact and therefore Humanism became the pivotal part of Renaissance rather it's essence. Renaissance which means the revival of learning taught the world that human beings can't be discriminated on basis of their social and financial status. It signified the presence of subalterns and emphasized upon the fact that bourgeoisie do have existence and be therefore valued, honored and be equally treated. Philanthropists during revival of learning in Europe with specific reference to thrive in England reiterated

the truth that human is central to this universe . Humans have the fundamental right irrespective of their location , color , caste , creed and gender to relish their lives and by industrious means endeavour to ameliorate their lives with a positivism in their mind . *Shakespeare* as a true humanists had presented the theme of humanity through his writings . One of his such writings was *The Merchant of Venice* . The play has been divided into two principal plots i.e one in which Bassanio longs to court Portia , second part describes the real humanism and inhumanism as the matter of debt between Antonio and Shylock became complex .

Religion , doesn't matter who is who by it remains deep in the sentiments . Shylock who was Jew by religion , it added to his feel of indignation against Antonio which made the matter anti humanistic . It is interesting to know that no religion in the world incorporated hatred against a person belonging to the other religion . Unless religions on religious basis become antagonist to each other , the religion remains a friend to the human . This is evident from the character of Antonio who after successfully negotiating the trial handled the affairs with wit which can rightly be called as Human Wit . Shylock whose hatred was based on misperceived and self concocted religious anger on the other hand was adamant for a pound of flesh of Antonio . Shylock therefore is mean , selfish , inordinate character . Portia and Narissa in this play *The Merchant of Venice* have been represented by *Shakespeare* as wise and superior ladies for of their tactful and unbiased handling of the situation.

Male Authoritative Society of Europe.

Europe in the 16th century was a male dominated society. It had a culture which used to put men in a position of superiority. Women were treated as unwise and inferior creature in the town . Men had all the powers pertaining to the social , moral , political , non official and official matters . Women were not only thought to be the commodities in the hands of men , but they were also kept in a state of oppression by men . In the 16th century , Europe used to present a picture of present Pakistani culture in which lives were completely governed by the male . Women in Europe in 16th century before marriage had to act and live as per words spoken to them by their father and brothers which bears resemblance to s current Pakistani culture . In post marriage scenario in Europe in the 16th century women were bound to follow the directives of their husbands much like present Pakistani women . There was no permission for women in Europe in the 16th century to have their say in domestic or social matters . The women then acted rather sat like dolls whose pastures of sitting , standing and lying were determined by male . How ironical is it that a living being (woman) despite in her own home didn't have the freedom to sit alone at one specific place of her home . 16th century oppression in Europe against the women seems to be the picture of Pakistan's current situation of the women . It was Renaissance which educated the women in Europe to feel like a living being , to have a opinion , to voice for their rights , and struggle to establish their identification by industrious means . Renaissance infused a new sense of optimism in the women which raised them to life when they were almost paralysed by the society in which only male had the voice . Women consciousness did wake up from a slumber .

All rights were for men and all oppressions were for women . In 1792 , a British woman named as Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a book titled as " A Vindication of the Rights of the Woman " . She in that book advocated for the equal rights for women to men . She believed that class and private properties are the causes of women discrimination . One thought is that first concept of Feminism came from France , and then it became familiar in Europe and America . In reality the very first concept of giving rights to women

and the very first concept of their existence and a living being was given by The Holy Prophet PBUH . All other theories relevant to Feminism are derived from His PBUH the very first concept of empowering the women .

There are roughly 100 schools of Feminism around the world with different opinions regarding Feminism . Some of them believe in radical feminism , some of them side with the liberal feminism , some argue in favour of social feminism and some speak about postmodern feminism . Although all of these schools have their own interpretation of feminism , yet their goal is one to ensure that women opinion is valued , their bodies are respected , their work is given worth , their families are supported and their governments represent them . All of them collectively wish to end the sense of superiority of male . Their endeavour has been to have equal rights and space on the land of God . All of them say that a woman should also have the right to go and whiff a flower in the summer in the garden whenever she desires as men do . According to them the purpose of feminism is to have a society where a woman is not treated as a type but a living being with feelings of a human instead of a person .

Portia

A girl with humanistic approach to life . She was dashing , sympathetic , wise and always remained conscious of the situation with humble mind . Portia had received a bright legacy from her father , but she was bound to follow and adhere to the will of her late father . Her father left a will that marry a man who chooses the casket of his wish as there were three boxes gold , silver and lead .

There is now a conflict inside Portia as she is bound to stick to the words of her father , but she being a human has a wish of her own . This is extremely interesting to note that how humans of same blood have different wishes . Yes , a wish of a human be respected , but concomitantly a wish of a benefactor be more respected than wish of own . Portia finds herself in perplex situation as she is not able to choose whom she likes and can't refuse whom she doesn't like . An element of time here holds importance . It is the nature of decision with compact composure which changes the circumstances amicably . Portia a girl with an intelligent mind doesn't fall a victim to the nature of circumstances , rather contemplates and finds means to come out of it . Here is the role feministic wisdom as Portia stands with courage before the men controlled society and in meek but in graceful manner voices for her rights . She says that woman conscience be not dictated by wish of patriarchal society .

Individuals including the dukes came to test their fortune for Portia. But , Portia being very intelligent remained very much unmoved by their interactions as everyone as she thought had a very average mind . Therefore, the conversation of each one of them couldn't impress Portia . According to Portia , all of them had inhuman tendencies as Portia once did speak to her maid telling her that she (Portia) strongly detests the snobbish discourses of men which smell like arrogant and pontifical . She further added that she was the only one at her home who hold the powers of all sorts , and therefore my (Portia) words be listened as words of the Master and not of a subordinate.

In Act 3, Scene 2, Her tactful dealing with the suitors proves the metal of her wisdom . She in order to achieve her desire of the heart indulged them in a kind of discourse which baffles the minds of the suitors and they started to make promises which humanly impossible to be met . She therefore declared them as liars as they had malicious looks in their eyes and their words had malicious tones as well . As a result of unrealistic conversation they were deliberately misguided by Portia and they failed in choosing the right casket . But , on the other hand Portia remained conscious of her feministic urge to have a partner

of her own wish . When Bassanio came to court Portia , she was very lenient towards her and by her orders he was provided every possible help to select a required casket . He during his process of selection was assisted with the music which had all the indications how to choose a right casket . Bassanio with support of Portia opened a casket which had in it a portrait of Portia.

It was a feminist assertion on part of Portia when she proved the worth of feminine wisdom while choosing for herself a man . It seems strange to note here that a woman impliedly used her feminist wisdom to choose a man , and not a woman . On one hand it is feminism , and on the other feminism seems incomplete if it doesn't involve men . If feminism only relates to women then why does it have men in it ? As of now Portia went with her own wish against the will of her dead father as far her marriage was concerned . Though many wealthy suitors came to court her but she preferred Bassanio who was almost had not even a single penny . This attitude of Portia also reflects her delicate and neat feminist sentiments which rejects the capitalistic inclinations in upholding the true essence of love . This action of Portia makes feminism rare with in and outside the domain of feminism . Marriage in words and thoughts of Portia is a union of Heart Sentiments , a union of profound understanding to go through the journey of life with a resolve to stand with hand in hand both in adverse and happy times . Portia thought that marriage is a relation in which there should appear not a single line of arrogance on the forehead . It therefore demands love and patience instead power and money .

After Bassanio had chosen the right casket and Portia had a husband of her choice , there came the letter to Bassanio from Antonio . The letter read that Shylock was adamant to have a pound of my flesh as a result of not meeting the accord of loan on time . It baffled the Bassanio , but Portia a lady with a wise mind instead losing the patience or showing any sign of otherness to the friend of Bassanio, decided to have the wedding ceremony in the simplest possible manner to rush in the possible sincerest manner to help friend of her husband . It seems that it is Portia who has been calling the shots . It is Portia who decides that marriage ceremony ought to be a simple . It is Portia who decides that Antonio be helped as soon as possible . If on one hand it is a feminist power or assertion of feminist power , but on the other hand it is quite evident that it is the capitalistic person irrespective of the nature of gender who pulls the strings . It can also be suggested that Portia was doing all this for she believed that after tying a knot , both husband and wife have the equal right to know each other equally . Therefore , Portia attempts unhesitatingly to do whatever she can to help Antonio , a friend of her husband . A glance on a difference between Portia and a woman who seems to be the captive of circumstances reveals that Portia is a powerful lady not because she is untraditional , not because she is different from other ladies or is more superior or wiser than other traditional (compelled by circumstances) ladies , but she is different from other women for she had the legacy , she had the resources , she had the power which other women don't have . What makes her little unique from the other women is her courage and wisdom along with the resources that she had . She could have behaved like a lustful lady add to her wealth by marrying a rich suitor , but she didn't do that which makes her a real woman and a strong representative of feminism that this is how the feminism ought to be .

Prior parting Portia gave a ring to Bassanio with words that any carelessness shown by you with this ring i.e don't give it to any body nor lose it . An extremely authoritative tone used by Portia . It can be suggested that instead calling her tone authoritative , it may be perceived that she was possessive for

Bassanio or in other words for her love . Portia believes that to live and love is a right of a woman . She is leading from the front which is feministic and humanistic simultaneously .

As far an element of men superiority to lead in giving gifts is concerned , Bassanio couldn't prove this for he was a destitute . Portia gave him a ring as a wedding gift and proved herself ahead of men or patriarchal society or power . Though here a feministic superiority is prominent in it's worth , yet , it seems here that gender has got nothing to do with this first gift giving distinction . In fact it is the financial position or standing which made Portia unique and a leading figure . As far the noble feministic (humanistic) aspect is concerned that is upheld by Portia for she didn't behave like a rude or arrogant queen in her relationship towards her husband . She rather behaved like a equal partner in the relationship without a sense of any undue excellence or distinction .

The striking part of the play is witnessed in the court where Antonio's fate was to be decided . A true feministic color here was shown by Portia as she decided to act as a leading legal counselor of Antonio by disguising herself as her cousin's assistant lawyer . Portia having a true human heart was eager to save the life of Antonio due to whom she also had the wish of her wedding with Bassanio. Had there no Antonio , there would have been no union of Portia and Bassanio . The proceedings started and every one in the court was clueless how to rescue Antonio until Portia delivered sagacious arguments . She argued that Shylock had the right to take a pound of Antonio's flesh as the accord says . Therefore there is no restriction by law on him not to take his right . She further argued that treaty signed between Antonio and Shylock doesn't permit Shylock to shed a single drop of blood while cutting a pound of flesh from his body as there is no such mention of word of blood in the treaty . The treaty only says and speaks about the pound of flesh . She went on saying that by law of Venice if a drop of blood of a Christian is shed , the lands and belongings of Shylock must then be transferred to Antonio as per law of the state . [12:45 PM, 4/9/2024] Babar Raza: Shylock had no answer to the wisdom of Portia who had disguised herself as a lawyer . Shylock , therefore fell into a trap set by Portia . She had the case verdict in her favour and saved Antonio's life . Had Portia thought like traditional women , she would have never been able to save Antonio . Portia not only proved her feministic power but she also made a point that thinking out of the box always rewards a person both individually and collectively. It was her courage in adverse circumstances which proved that a human be not discriminated on basis of gender , rather his or her potential be regarded indiscriminatively .

In post court scenario Portia asked Bassanio about the ring . Bassanio had given the ring to a lawyer (Portia) who saved Antonio . Bassanio was in promise with Portia not to part with the ring come what may . But , Bassanio had no choice other than to give a ring as an expression of gratitude to the lawyer. Portia once again projected her feministic attitude and said that hence you , my husband Bassanio violated the promise with me , I therefore had the right to break the promise of wedding with you . Portia consciously doubted by saying to Bassanio that he had given the ring to another woman . She therefore asserted that henceforward she would not abide by the bounds of wedding towards her husband and would not allow him to share bed . She also denied him any other privilege of a husband as she had the opinion that both husband and wife had same and equal privileges .

[12:45 PM, 4/9/2024] Babar Raza: Portia in expression of her feministic anger said that she would also give the right to a young lawyer to do with her whatever he desires to . She wanted to take revenge from Bassanio for violating the promise of wedding . She said :

" I will become as liberal as you ;
 I ' will not deny him any thing I have ,
 No, not my body nor my husband's bed "

Portia was doing the same as she thought he did to her .

Portia when she intends to return the favours to her husband , it proves her unorthodox from other orthodox ladies who act as directed by their husbands . Here a point seems relevant to be taken into consideration that she had the capital inherited to her by her father . Therefore , she had no other thoughts such as to think before talking to a husband as a fearless lady who is monetarily well established . Portia was inherited a legacy of queen by her father which made her blunt . Even a woman who is financially independent in mediocre sense has words of self defence in her mouth . Therefore , in comparison to a lady who is moderately independent in her financial matters is more brave than Portia for the heroics of feminism shown by Portia by being extremely well off are very little than heroics of feminism shown by a woman with an average financial status . As of now it seems that it is the financial standing which gives a power to a person to decide who will sit , who will stand, who will keep silence and who will speak and how , where and when . A traditional woman is traditional for she is deficient in resources . Otherwise a woman with resources if is traditional , she is unjust then to her gender or to her existence for that matter .

Portia wanted her husband to realise that he had violated the norms of fidelity though because he had no other choice , yet it was violation . It perhaps shows the degree of possessiveness of Portia for Bassanio that she made him to realise for his crime . But , later Portia revealed to Bassanio that it was she who saved his friend Antonio . A wife in need is a wife indeed . Bassanio was filled with admiration and praise for Portia which made the bonding between them a binding forever more for Bassanio it seems .

As far Portia's act of showing disobedience to her father's will , it can be suggested that no human is perfect . Might be she wanted to show the male dominated society that the presence and existed of women can neither be overlooked nor be denied . She therefore act as a wise person which not only saved a life of a good soul but it also laid a strong foundation for other ladies to be as strong and wise as Portia was . It seems more a love affair than a story of feminist heroics when she expressed her willingness to name all of her properties including her body to her husband . This action by her represents her as a traditional lady because when she in other matters demands equality in the wedding bond , then why she acts like a submissive woman here ? It can probably be termed as a feminist weakness or an error of judgement .

Conclusion

Portia seemingly did her best to awake the female conscience . Despite all of her efforts she remained confined in her thoughts and actions and couldn't project the real face of women as they deserve . In a society which is dominated by males a female while walking , sitting , speaking and doing something seems an object in non existence . But , Portia struggled hard to somehow make the male dominant society realise that that women too have the right to breath , to speak , to walk and to make their presence felt by voicing for their rights in parallel to men by means of upholding values of Humanism. In this play , it looks evident that Portia displayed often the spirit of Humanism by standing shoulder to shoulder with her husband in his time of adversity . Portia's another heroic of Humanism was when she

didn't act as a status conscious lady and preferred Bassanio instead the capitalists . It shows her strong will and a courage to revolt against the orthodoxy of traditions which deny the humans with their legitimate rights . Portia no doubt laid the foundation for women to voice and struggle for their rights . Portia seems a light for women who consciously keep silence in the face of exploitation . Portia also made it clear to her gender that time is the most important factor in life and it is imperative for a woman to act and decide on time rather map and design her course of action before time as men do . Had Portia showed delayed or slacking attitude , she would have not only lost her identity but also her legacy , and she would have been lost into an unending multitude of the world where every thing is bound to face the destruction and ultimate disappearance in hands rubbing context . Portia proved that women survival and identification lies only in the domain of Feminism with all the lights of Humanism in it . Portia also showed that if money is given in the hands of women , they make it's better use than men as Portia demonstrated the very fact taking the course of Humanism instead supporting the capitalism.

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