‘AS YOU LIKE IT’- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

“The Forest of Arden, according to the play reflects the different -state -of -mind of the various characters of the play itself”-Discuss.

“There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

Every story narrated or dramatized has an artistic structure which may be called its architectural design. The different elements of the story, technically known as the plot, are characters, incidents and the atmosphere born out of the union of these two. Characters unfolding themselves through incidents which often mould them,or incidents revealing characters through narration and dialogue, are so skillfully adapted to each other and vitally connected as ultimately to conceal the parts in the symmetrical beauty or realized harmony of the whole. Every interesting story arises out of a conflict, absence of which will make it dull and unexciting. There are, generally speaking, two main movements required to achieve this artistic result- a movement of Complication and a movement of Resolution. Between these two movements the plot will develop through many ups and downs which follow a well-regulated course. Structurally the natural divisions of a drama are fivefold, roughly corresponding to its five acts in the Elizabethan play.

“Truths that wake,

To perish never;

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,

Nor Man nor Boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,

Can utterly abolish or destroy.”

While Romance admits the comic spirit within a corner of the field, the area is strictly limited. Romance and the comic spirit cannot well live together on terms of equality. In Shakespearean comedy, the comic spirit has to minister to the purposes of Romance and not the other way about. The truth of this observation can be seen in how the characters of Benedick and Beatrice, though seen in a comic setting in the beginning, emerge finally as Romantic characters, with both of them acting as the Champions of hero who is subjected to such ill merited suffering. On a lower plane it is true of Dogberry and Verges also. As Peter Quennell says: “Dogberry like Bottom was intended to raise a cultured laughter.”

Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden is an imaginary setting in As you Like it and it is futile and unnecessary to try and find its actual counterpart in the world- whether in France or in England. What matters is that the Forest of Arden has a significant role in As You like It.

“Pythagoras said, that this world, was like a stage

Where many play their parts: the lookers on, the stage

Philosophers are, saith he, whose part is to learn

The manneres of all nations.”

In such a place, in such an atmosphere, Love is the central light, the infallible intelligence, the chief source of life and happiness. And this love is identified primarily with a young woman. She is the Shakti of this universe; she is beauty, truth and rarity and inspires similar virtues (or values) in her lover.

“For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,

Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,

More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn

Than women’s are.’’

In Shakespeare’s mature comedy-it is worth remembering that in comedy Ben Jonson put him above the classics- he presents ‘a harmonious society in which each person’s individuality is fully developed and yet is in perfect tune with all others’. While keeping to the old principle that comedy portrays characters, he profoundly modified it by deepening and strengthening each separate character, developing the relations between different characters, until the characters became the plot.

As You Like It has a systematically worked–out plot. Its principal plot is to illustrate the ultimate happy fate or the denouement of pair of lovers after passing through some struggles and difficulties. This is the story of the love between Orlando and Rosalind. Round about it there are three sub-plots, having the same theme of love between pairs. These sub-plots merge into the main plot in such a way as to leave no impression of their independent existence. The sub-plots are- the love between Oliver and Celia, the love between Silvius and Phebe, the love between Touchstone and Audrey. All these have happy endings in marriage. The aim of the dramatist in constructing these subplots is to produce the impression that the atmosphere of the play is one of genuine, undiluted love, serenity, joy and peace. The governing idea of the dramatist in constructing the plots of Gloucester and Edmund as a parallel to the main plot of Lear and his daughters.

“I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,

A stage where every man must play a part,

And mine a sad one,”

Arden is not untouched by the world of reality and its sorrows, but it is a place where those who come to it discover certain abiding truths about life. The characters get a conviction that gay and the gentle can endure the rubs of fortune to find happiness in them and in others on this earth. The characters also realize certain truths. The masque of Hymen marks the end of this interlude in the greenwood, and announces the return to a court purged of envy and baseness. As in all comedy the characters realize the truth about themselves through trial and error, and the change is for the better. Thus Rosalind as Ganymede discovers she can play no more but must accept Orlando’s love. By loving a shadow, the mere image of a charming youth, Phebe discovers that it is better love than to be loved and scorn one’s lover.

If we consult the evidence of the play it will be abundantly clear that Love-at-first-sight is the main theme of the comedy, As You Like It. All the lovers in this play, courtiers as well as rustics, follow this kind of love. Rosalind and Orlando fall in love with each other the moment they see each other; and the rest of the lovers following the same course. Such a conception of love is romantic, and Shakespeare has employed unhesitatingly for no less than four pairs of lovers, two from the higher and two from the lower class of society, follow such a mode of romantic love. Whether one agrees or not with such a mode of love one cannot but observe that in this play this motive of love eventuates in the happiness of all the lovers.

In a Romantic Comedy, the main stress is on the story of these loves-a story, says Mark Hunter, “treated seriously, moving through a number of checks and trying complications to a prosperous ending.” It is, besides, “ a story not only of high life, but of the highest in each particular case possibly”, but allied to the main story, there are invariably other stories also, but-like silk threads, of diverse colours-all are cunningly woven into a single texture: “Through complexity of plot if secured a compensating variety, both variety of character-interest, and variety of delight afforded by the alternation of two or more Romantic themes, together with a greater or lesser admixture of pure Comedy, not Romantic.”

That Shakespeare is an artist hardly needs asserting in the present day. It is true that his art was probably far less self conscious that that of Milton or of Tennyson, that it was probably more intuitive than aforethought. The distinction, however, is probably not so important as its seems. A great artist does not need rules or conscious analysis to tell him what is good and what is evil. Any analysis that may be necessary may be done sub-consciously.

“Shallow. “Here comes fair Mistress Anne. Would I be young for your sake, Mistress Anne.

Anne. The dinner is on the table.”’

The presentation of love on the stage is fraught with grave dangers even when attempted by a great artist; for it has a natural tendency towards degenerating into the ridiculous. Lyric poetry remained the appropriate domain for love’s expression in creative. It was only post-Renaissance dramatists who made a bold experiment in introducing love as an absorbing theme in drama. In the Elizabethan age romantic love often became the main ingredient of novels and dramas. To Elizabethan people “to live be to love, and to love was to love romantically. That was for them a fact of experience.” It was left to Shakespeare and his great contemporaries to achieve a mystical alliance between comedy and romance and to elevate comedy from the region of the farcical and the ludicrous to the realm of the poetic and the romantic. A note of high seriousness often characterized a comedy of love, As You Like it.

It is replete with different portrayals of love.

“I have seen the day, with good biting falchion,

I would have made them skip: I am old now.

And these same crosses spoil me.”

Like Thomas Hardy’s Edgon Heath, Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden is not simply a background of the plot; nay it is itself a character, perhaps the most important character of the play. “It has its own soul, a vital breath- that possesses the greatest reformative and constructive power. It reforms the wicked, selfish and cruel Oliver; it softens the aching hearts of the weary pilgrims, who come to it; it brings about a reconciliation between the Dukes, and finally, it is the Forest Of Arden which unties the separate lovers-Orlando and Rosalind- infusing a spirit of love into other characters.”

“If we shadows have offended,

Think but this, and all is mended,

That you have but slumber’d here

While these visions did appear.”

“The play treats of the gifts of Nature and the ways of Fortune. Orlando, given little is brought too much. Rosalind and Celia, born too much, are brought to little. The Duke, born to all things, is brought to nothing. The usurping Duke, born to nothing climbs too much, desires all, and at last, renounces all. Oliver born too much, aims all little more, loses all, and at last, renounces all. Touchstone, the wordly-wise, marries a fool Audrey, born a clown, marries a courtier. Phebe, scorning a man falls in love with a woman. The play is a little picture of this world, as Hallam observes, but it is a picture in mellow and soothing colours of gaiety.”

“I am much sorry, sir,

You put me to forget a lady’s manners,

By being so verbal.”

The practical value of the songs in the play was to entertain the audience with music. The Elizabethans were great lovers of music and they always welcomed songs. While he conceded to the popular demand for songs he introduced into them some significance on the context in which they were sung. In As you Like It we have half a dozen songs primarily intended to heighten the psychological effect of the scene in which they are sung. For instance the song in the Forest scene beginning with “Blow, blow thou winter wind,” has the effect of intensifying the pathos of the situation. The sense of ingratitude under which the banished Duke is acutely suffering is made more poetical and so endurable, by the beauty of the song and aptness of its sentiments. In the songs of country life which this play contains we find a different significane.These songs (“Under the greenwood tree”) heighten the sense of rural bliss and innocence by expressing through musical words and serenity and peace that pervades the countryside. Thus we may say that the songs in Shakespeare’s generally serve the purpose of intensifying the effect of the scenes and situations in which they are introduced.

The world of Arden has not the rarefied atmosphere of an unearthly region; this forest is emphatically real and feelingly earthy. It is subject to the change of seasons; eternal spring does not reign here. The struggle for existence is as acute here as in the city. The shepherd and the shepherdess are not ideal and innocent persons of the golden age breathing the idyllic atmosphere of Arcadia. A heartless coquette like Phebe and an ‘ill-favoured’ Audrey easily capable of deserting her true love for becoming the snobbish wife of a courtier, are found to dwell within its extensive air. Boas says: “The sentimentality of the orthodox pastoral is entirely absent, and in its place we have the ruddy vigour, the leaping pulse and play of the open-air life that ‘loves to live in the sun’. Never has the charm of outdoor existence found more matchless expression.”

As You Like It owes its charm and beauty to the flavor love that pervades the plot. The drama maintains a number of love episodes, which as a matter of fact spring from the main fountain- love between Orlando and Rosalind, but there is another touch of love in the play, which distinguishes it from most of the Shakespearean comedies. It is the innocent yet sincere and penetrating love between the two cousins Rosalind and Celia.

“What would you have,

Your gentleness shall force,

More than your force move us to gentleness.”

It is to be noted that the first impression of Arden is not very attractive to any of those who escape to it. “Well, this is the forest of Arden,” says Rosalind in apparently unenthusiastic tones. Touchstone calls himself foolish for having come there. The Forest of Arden is no conventional Arcadia. It is not a place where the laws of Nature are abrogated and roses are without thorns. Life’s roughness is very much in evidence in Arden. The herd abandons the wounded deer. Winter and rough weather, the season’s differences, the icy fangs and churlish chiding of the winter’s wind invade Arden as often as they invade this hemisphere of ours. Nor does Manna fall to it from heaven. One may come by a sufficient sustenance of flesh ,if one has the weapons and the impulse to make a breach in the conventionality of idyllic Nature by killing its own creatures, the deer, to whom the Forest is assigned a native dwelling place. Rosalind and Orlando will return to live their adult life in the society of men and in civilization, which will impose upon them their duties of extended social responsibilities.

“Come, woo me, for now I am in a

Holiday humour and like enough to consent.”

It is easy to see how As You Like It conforms to the conventions of the pastoral tradition. We find, for example, a plentiful crop of rustic scenes and situations of shepherdess, and all the other associations of a pastoral life. Even the principal figure of the comedy the heroine herself, takes to the life and manners of the shepherds in the major portion of the play. Rosalind buys the estate of a shepherd in the Forest of Arden and lives the life of simplicity and unsophisticated innocence. Besides, it is as a disguised shepherd youth that Rosalind appears in her best wit and intelligence. Her mock wooing of Orlando, her complications as a girl in the dress of a boy and, finally, her splendid resources of wit in reducing all these complications to an easy and happy ending- all these prove that Shakespeare exploited the pastoral convention in the service of comedy.

The songs are a notable feature of As You Like It. The forest would be dead without them. They are all old and plain; no luscious madrigals or quaint eclogues but songs of the greenwood and the holly, of the chase and country love. The themes are all the better for being old-fashioned: they awake the echoes of Robin Hood, and their music and association help not a little to convey that open air feeling that pervades the play, and which mere convey that open air feeling that pervades the play and which mere description cannot always impart. Here the sylvan predominates over pastoral; we are in Sherwood not in Arcadia, as J.C. Smith says.

“He that brings this love to thee

Little knows this love in me:

And by him seal up thy mind;

Whether that thy youth and kind

Will the faithful offer take

Of me and all that I can make;

Or else by him my love deny,

And then I’ll study how to die.”

By a pastoral comedy we mean a play in which the characters belong to the rustic class, specially shepherds and shepherdesses. The situations of such plays are romantically simple and pure and innocent, and the story usually delineates the peaceful and enviable life of these figures that love and enjoy life in an ideal fashion. They have no cares and burdens. They always get what they wish, and they end in a happy atmosphere of joy and felicity. Such, in the main, are the elements of a pastoral story whether in fiction or in drama.

“Thus men may grow wiser every day; it is

the first time that ever I heard breaking of

ribs was sport for ladies.”

Shakespeare builds up his ideal world and lets his idealists scorn the real one, but into their midst he introduces people who mock their ideals and others who mock them. One must not say that Shakespeare never judges but one judgment is always being modified by another. Opposite views may contradict one another but of course, they do not cancel out. Instead they add up to an all embracing view far larger and more satisfying than any one of them by itself. As You Like It belongs to the group of plays consisting of Much Ado About Nothing and Twelfth Night which are splendid specimens of Shakespearean’s mastery of the comic and dramatic art. These plays are characteristic Elizabethan romantic comedies- plays which satisfied the curiously Elizabethan demand for drama catering to the romantic as well as the comic instinct of the audiences. Neither the extreme of idealism nor those of materialism, as they are variously represented, emerge as “the good life” in As You Like It. through the device of contrast an effective balanced view emerges.

“West of this place, down in the neighbor bottom;

The rank osiers by the murmuring stream

Left on your right hand brings you to the place.

But at this hour the house doth keep itself;

There’s none within.”

We may, however, note one thing while discussing As You Like It as a pastoral comedy. The pastoral creation of the ancient writers usually verge on the improbable and almost fantastic side. This results in the impression of artificiality in an endeavour to escape from it, but in the consummate art of Shakespeare even the idealization which is inevitable in the application of the pastoral convention is touched with probability and realism with the result that his characters remain endearingly human. Their motives may be romantic but their passions and sentiments are human and worldly-wise. In other words, it may be said that in Shakespeare’s hands the pastoral convention is humanized. The union of Rosalind and Orlando in happy wedlock has been the objective aimed at from the beginning and this is now finally attained, but the crowning achievement of the heroine lies not only in her own happiness but also in winning happiness for others. All the different pairs of lovers have their heart’s desire fulfilled-it is As You Like It.

“We that are true lovers run into strange capers;

But as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature

In love mortal in folly.”

The purpose of the Exposition is ‘to put the audience in possession of all information that is essential for the property understanding of the play.’ It prepares us for the aviation, but it is really independent of the plot proper. In As You Like It the preliminary information consists chiefly of : (a) the banishment of the elder Duke, the unexpected presence of his only daughter Rosalind at the usurper’s court, and (b) the will of Sir Rowland de Boys and the ill-treatment of Orlando at the hands of his elder brother Oliver. Thus the two main threads out of which the love story will be woven are suggested e even at the outset; the hero and the heroine have been introduced in the midst of circumstances which are strikingly similar in many respects. The Wrestling Match is the initial incident which starts the action: and the seed of this great love is shown here. Here is also the genesis of the main conflict between our hero and the heroine on one side and Oliver and the usurper ranged against them on the other.

“O my life, his malice’s against the lady

Will suddenly break forth.”

“Other and inferior writers would have worked out their descriptions with all pettiness and impertinence of detail” says Coleridge, regarding the pastoral atmosphere created by Shakespeare. In fact Shakespeare has not cared to describe at large these pictured of pastoral scenery: he has as the master artist adopted the unique method of subtle suggestion. By a few strokes of the painter’s brush he has succeeded in creating not only the appropriate pastoral back ground but also a vast and vivid woodland scene studded with some landmarks,e.g., he Duke’s cave, Rosalind’s cottage, the antique oak, and the crawling brook. So superb has been the success of this delineation that we seem to breathe ‘the very breath of the woods and the mountains’. Public theatres of the Elizabethan age had no painted scenes. The dramatist had thus to depend entirely on his own poetic art and his power of stimulating their imaginative capacity of his audience.

There are two levels of awareness at work in the scene. The audience’s awareness is at one with Rosalind’s; Orlando’s awareness falls short. To this extent, the climactic scene is structurally simple. But in, very simplicity it is magnificient.The compensation for the lack of complexity comes the wooing scene in As You Like It is different from similar scenes in Shakespearean comedies. There is in this play different level of awareness and ignorance which make the wing scene all the more interesting dramatically and thematically. The wooing scene, in fact, is the climax as far as the theme of ignorance and awareness is concerned. As Rosalind disguised as Ganymede questions and argues with Orlando who does not know Ganymede’s identity, there is much fun as well as serious comment implicit for audience.

“For thou thyself hast been a libertine

As sensual as the brutish sting itself;

And all the embossed sores, and headed evils,

That thou with license of free foot hast caught,

Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.”

In the width of the discrepancy in the awareness of the lovers. The wooing scene deliberately exploits this gap in the awareness of the lovers. The wooing scene deliberately exploits this gap in the awareness. The exploitation is not thin. Neither the relation of the participants nor the situation changes at all during the action. At the beginning, Rosalind knows everything and Orlando nothing; it is the same at the end. However, at the end of the scene. Rosalind’s conviction about Orlando’s love has received a final confirmation. There is a blending of the magic and the comic even in the sunny, joyous and bright comedy of As You Like it. Thus the play opens with a quarrel between the brothers-Oliver and Orlando. The former makes attempts to take the life of the latter. We also get distinctly tragic elements in the sorrow of the banished Duke, which he philosophies away; in the melancholy of Rosalind due to the banishment of her father, which is dispelled by the cheery optimism of Celia; in the pathetic fate of the three unfortunate sons of the old man, who are injured by the wrestler. There is also something like the tragic element in the disappointment of Silvius regarding Phebe. These tragic elements are harmoniously, delicately, and artistically blended with and merged into the comic elements. The court milieu at the beginning of AS You Like It then, is one in which disorder flourishes. Life in the Forest of Arden is contrasted with “that of painted pomp” with the perilous life in “the envious court”. This is the “court versus country” theme which recurs in Shakespeare in other plays. The fidelity and conscience piousness of the old servant Adam are contrasted by Orlando with the general rule that obtains in this environment. And it is Adam himself who gives what is perhaps the most striking evidence of the disorder that is rampant.

It may be well to point out that Shakespeare does not believe that court life must necessarily be corrupt and disordered. In fact he is concerned in As You Like It to point out by implication that escapism is no solution: at the end of the play, we have most of the exiles returning from the Forest of Arden, and we are clearly meant to understand that the court environment has been rid of its evil. Disorder has been set right.

“Nay, I care not for their names; they owe me

nothing. Will you sing?”

In the true order of things a man’s graces and virtues should assist him in his life, but here a man’s virtues are a danger to him, exciting the envy of others. The true order of things is inverted. Speaking to Orlando he says:

“O, what a world is this, when what is comely

Envenoms him that bears it!”

The Forest has a great deal of influence on the people who stray into it. We see the shady dark green landscape in the background and breathe in imagination the fresh air of the forest. The hours are here measured by no clocks, no regulated recurrence of duty or toil; they flow on unnumbered in voluntary occupation or fanciful idleness, to which every one addicts himself according to his humour or disposition; and this unlimited freedom compensated all of them for the lost conveniences of life. One throws himself down solitary under a tree, and indulges in melancholy reflections on the changes of fortune; others make the woods resound with social and festive songs to the accompaniment of their horns. Selfishness, envy, and ambition have been left in the city behind them. The wit of touchstone is a dainty kind of absurdity worth comparison with the melancholy of Jaques. And Orlando in the beauty and strength of early manhood, and Rosalind-“a gallant curtle axe upon her thigh, a broad spear in her hand, and the bright tender, loyal womanhood, within”-are figures which quicken and restore our spirits. But upon, no one does the air of Arden work as powerfully as upon the banished Duke. He extracts some useful lessons from his life of banishment in the forest. He draws a contrast between “painted pomp” of court life and the life of careless ease in the Forest of Arden. The life at court is full of envy, malice and ambition. But of, the forest life is sweeter and more “free from peril.” But even, when he shrinks from the cold winter wind, he feels it is better than the flattering courtiers. While the courtiers at court are only enemies in disguise, the cold wind is an open enemy and does not flatter him. The Duke also realizes the sweet uses of adversity. The forest life has many things to teach. Every object in Nature has a lesson of its own. He finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything.

“Thou art not for the fashion of these times.

Where none will sweat but for promotion.

And having that, do choke their service up

Even with the having; it is not so with thee.”

“The dramatist presents us with a pastoral comedy of the characters of which , instead of belonging to the ideal pastoral age, are true copies of what nature will produce under similar conditions” (Halliwell). The pastoral poet of convention clothed courtiers in the shepherds’ dress and put into mouths sentiments of an advances civilization. Shakespeare, on the other hand, has given us real shepherds-Corin and William and Audrey, “whose language is the language of the fields, whose hands saviour of the wood and sheep, and whose persons exhale the odour of the goat-pen or the dairy” as Stanley Wood says, but the characters of Rosalind, Orlando and Duke are certainly ideal ones-although like every ideal, they are based on the actual; they represent experiences idealized.

“Well, I’ll end the song. Sirs, cover the while;

the duke will drink under this tree. He hath

been all this day to look you.”

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“My fortunes were more able to relieve her;

But I am shepherd to another man,

And do not shear the fleeces that I graze:”

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EXCEPT SETTING, REFERENCE, IDEAS; WORDS AND SENTENCES FROM DR.S.SEN.

***-RITUPARNA RAY CHAUDHURI***.