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Situating Race in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: A Colonial Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Race identifies a large group of people distinguished from others on the basis of common physical characteristics. *The Tempest* is one of the celebrated masterpieces of English drama written by William Shakespeare. The play is kind of representation of colonialism along with its other aspects like race, class and colour. In the play, the colonizers oppress and subjugate the natives, the colonized people are hegemonized due to the racial differences. The play presents the character Caliban, who is the original inhabitant of the island, as a savage and uncivilized. The main male protagonist of the play, Prospero is the outsider but he is the colonial master who dominates the other characters of the play. Shakespeare also showcases the dehumanization of colonial rule throughout the play. *The Tempest* depicts the power relation between master-slave, colonizer-colonized, white-black, civilized -uncivilized. The present paper aims to show the colonial practices of the play *The Tempest*. It will also represent the master-slave relationship with the help of the characters of Prospero and Caliban. The paper will also be a representation of the conflicts between 'black' and 'white', 'self' and 'other', 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' within the play. The paper is also going to focus on the plight of the subaltern character, Caliban due to the hegemonic structure.

1. Objectives of the Study

- i) Buildings To show the relationship between master and slave throughout the play.
- ii) To represent how power corrupts the inferiors.

- iii) To analyse how the attitude of the 'civilized' bound the 'uncivilized' to be oppressed.
- iv) To show the conflict between 'centre' and 'margin' on the subaltern perspective.
- v) To expose the relation between power and post colonialism.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The review of the available texts and write ups show that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been interpreted through various themes like master-slave relationship, gender issues, post colonial and colonial perspective, identity crisis, hybridity and many more. Some of the critics have also created works on the race also. The present study makes the effort to center on the racial issue throughout the play. As regard, works by some other scholar have been taken into consideration to exemplify this.

Duke Pesta in his *Acknowledging Things of Darkness: Postcolonial Criticism of The Tempest* observes the post-colonial effect throughout the play. Here he compares and contrasts that Shakespeare's island to Bermuda island where no one can be inhabited. According to his point of view, the island cannot be civilized on the basis of intellectual and cultural values.

In *Colonialism and Cultural Hybridity: A Post Colonial Reading of The Tempest*, Raihan Rahman tries to examine the cross cultural phenomenon of the play *The Tempest*, which gives birth to a hybrid culture. Here, it is shown how the native culture of Caliban is oppressed by the outsider Prospero and Caliban is so bound that he has confronted with culture of 'others' and has become hybridized and starts speaking the language of his oppressor.

Rajasha H.K. has talks about racial differences in her article *The Issue of Racial Discrimination in William Shakespeare's The Tempest*. Here she exposes how the blacks are dominated under hegemony and how 'the west' considers themselves as superior and 'the east' to be inferior. She is showing the hypocrisy of 'the west' and the discrimination on the basis of colour.

One of the selected papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference that is *Extremes of Gender and Power: Sycorax's Absence in Shakespeare's The Tempest*, Brittney Blystone talks about the female characters and their power within the play. The only character that is present in the play is Miranda but her chastity and virginity are questioned by the male patriarch. The play doesn't provide so much about Caliban's mother Sycorax. Blystone mentions her as powerful character in absentia, she represents anti-patriarchal ideas. According to this writer, gender is only one conflicting power between Prospero and Sycorax.

In *The New York Times*, *The Tempest presents as Lovefest*, With a Queenly Prospero by Jose Solis. Here the play is considered to be a problem play, where Prospero creates the shipwreck to take revenge on the people who did wrong to him before twelve. All the plans are cultivated by Prospero on the every character.

Thus many scholars have discussed about the play with different perspective. This present study will bring some new ideas regarding the racial discrimination of the text.

3. ANALYSIS:

Colonialism marks the historical process whereby the 'west' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-west'. Colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation. One of the foundational book *Orientalism* by Edward Said states that the cultural domination bound the non-western people to be the 'others'. Like Said, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, in her book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argued that the post-colonial subjects have no voice under the oppressive colonial rule. Because they are not able to raise their voice against the dominant power so they are called as 'colonial subject'. The critics of Colonialism and Postcolonialism point out the dichotomy between Orient and Occident, the self and other, colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed, centre and margin, white and black etc. Colonialism also studies the binary opposition of the structure. Colonialism was not an identical process in various parts of world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the new comers into the most complex and traumatic relation in the mankind. Colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods and it is not only the expansion of colonial hegemony but also the wide spread feature of humanity. It is a process forming a community in the new land with the imposition of practices, trade, enslavement on the natives. According to Pramod K. Nayar in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* the 'race' is defined as "A marker of difference that leads to slavery, exploitation and death. While biological evidence for the superiority of one race or another has not emerged- or has been faulted- the social and political fields remain enfolded within discourses that consistently, if subtly race as difference". (Nayar 222) William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a finest illustration of the colonial encounter, in which all the aspects of colonialism are intertwined.

The Tempest is a play, where Shakespeare represents the 'white man's burden', the colonization and the hegemonic power by the colonizer over the natives. The character of Prospero is the symbol of colonial power in the Sycorax's island because of his dominant behaviour. Caliban is the character, who is the native of the particular island. He resists against the colonial power. Because of the protest and resistance against the colonizer, we can consider it as a post-colonial play.

Many a times, the play has been analyzed as a play about colonial rule, precisely because Prospero, an outsider comes to Sycorax's island, controls and rule the island as well as starts to impose his own culture on the inhabitants of the island. In the play, he is the father of the girl, Miranda but he is a ruler more than a father in the island of Caliban. Prospero is the representative of the European colonial power and the white hegemonists, who dominates the land of the native Americans and enslaved

them. Like Prospero, Caliban and the natives of the particular island are the representatives of the black race of America. And due to the racial discrimination, the colonizer becomes more powerful than the natives. The white hegemony always puts the 'blacks' into the position of the margin. The blacks are the slave under the white hegemony and they are locating in the centre. In the play, Prospero put Caliban into the position of a slave and consider him as a half-man. Because Prospero is having the superior power, he pushes the natives like Caliban and Ariel to the extreme position. He displaces the mother of Caliban as a 'witch' and treats her like a beast. The master has full control over the island along with its innards. Caliban is bound to be his slave and calls him a thing of darkness, which proves the racial prejudice of the play. Though Caliban is the occupier of the island but he is being dehumanized and ill-treated by Prospero.

"Dull thing, I say so; he, that Caliban whom now I keep in service."
(Shakespeare 14)

In the book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said states that the Westerners consider the Non-western people as the 'other', they are the 'orient' and in this play also this particular concept is widely relevant because the outsider is Prospero and he is presented before us like a westerner and Caliban is accepted by him as the 'other' or as 'white man's burden'. In *The Tempest* the character of Caliban is described as deformed, uncivilized, violent, savage etc. According to Prospero, he is a born devil not a human being,

"A devil, a born devil, on whose nature Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains Humanely taken-all, all lost, quite lost!" (Shakespeare 50)

In the mouthpiece of Miranda also, discrimination is reflected when she says about Caliban,

"Tis a villain, sir, I do not love to look on." (Shakespeare 14)

She asserts that even though he could learn the language from Prospero, it is because of his race he can never be good. The white people always looked down upon the black people i.e the colonizer has the mind-set that they should dominate the 'powerless', Caliban is powerless in the 3 hands of the 'powerful' Prospero. It is the attitude of the 'powerful' that they are born to dominate and the 'powerless' are born to be dominated within a construct. The binary opposition is largely used in the play through the characters of Prospero, Caliban, Miranda etc. Shakespeare is successful to show the dichotomy between white and black, west and non-west, superior and inferior, master and slave, self and other. Prospero is the Colonizer and he has the attitude of a civilized and so that he treats Caliban as uncivilized and savage. The European colonizers governed the various colonies in the world with the help of education and they considered the uncivilized natives as their 'burden'. Like the European, Prospero also tries to educate and civilize Caliban but he is not much successful.

"And my profit on't Is. I know how to curse. The red plague rid you For learning me your language." (Shakespeare 16)

Many critics have said that the process of civilization always goes with domination over the inferior. In this way, Caliban is suppressed due to his inferiority and the superiority of the outsider.

The character of Caliban is a unique creation by Shakespeare, without Caliban *The Tempest* is impossible. Caliban is the spokesperson of those savage and lower underdeveloped races which were controlled and governed by the European colonizers in the Elizabethan age. Caliban unwillingly approves the state of slavery to his master. He opposes to learn the language which is taught by Prospero. Till the end of the play, he remains at the same position. No changes come over him due to the colonial power. Like the white Europeans, Prospero tries to change the inborn nature of the natives, but he fails because Caliban does not learn the things taught by the master. In this way, Caliban tries to protest against the hegemonic colonial power.

If we discuss the play from the postcolonial perspective, then we will see that Caliban defends against the authority from the very beginning of domination. Prospero manipulates and subjugates the natives of the island with the help of his power and action. And Caliban has a great and strong hatredness towards him and his dominion. The indigenous people are the puppet for the colonizer in the play. Prospero is a colonial master of the island, Caliban wants to fight back and tries to raise his voice against the ruler. He becomes disobedient and as a form of revenge, therefore he attempts to seduce Miranda. Prospero enters to the island through the ship-wreck and so that he is an outsider after that he forcefully starts to rule over the island taken away from the mother of Caliban by displacing her. As a result, Caliban tries to remonstrate for the injustice done to them. Likewise, postcolonialism starts in the play, along with the protestation. Time and again, Caliban claims that the land is to be inherited on him and originally the island belongs to him only, "I must eat my dinner. This island is mine, by Sycorax, my mother." (Shakespeare 15)

The Tempest is an image of the relation between the white man and the uncivilized natives within the boundary of civilization. The play also bears the connection between outsider and insider. The play is a kind of discussion about 'colonial problem'. It shows the resistance of the oppressive class. In the play, whatever Caliban learns from Prospero, he uses it to harm Prospero. The marginality of Caliban and the hegemony and oppression of Prospero prove the colonial influence within the play. As a pure colonist, Prospero compels the natives of the island to be confined and they are seen as 'other'. The play is an allegory of the colonial encounter. Through the characters of Prospero and Caliban, the notion of racial difference is largely conceptualized. Shakespeare is successful to showcase the various phases of colonialism during his time through the play. He projects the colonial conquest over the colonies by representing the island in the play. The conqueror are the pre-capitalist, they always try to manufacture the lower class and enslaved them. Though the play is written during the Elizabethan period but it can be re-read as a play of Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Marxism of the modern period.

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