

## **“GENDER ROLES IN THE RENAISSANCE: ROLE PLAYING IN SHAKESPEARE’S AS YOU LIKE IT”**

**Nasib Kumari**

Student

J.k. Memorial College of Education

Barsana Mor, Birhi Kalan

Charkhi Dadri

**Abstract:-** Shakespeare has remained popular over a number of centuries, his plays managing to retain a universal appeal and each generation taking a different understanding to apply to their own lives. Due to social and cultural changes, various interpretations have been made since the plays were first written. One of them that has been analyzed and re-interpreted is that of gender. The beginning of an understanding of gender during Shakespeare’s life is the patriarchal household which referred to the power of the father over all members of his household-not only his wife and children, but servants or apprentices in the sixteenth century. ‘*As You Like It*’ is one of Shakespeare's most highly regarded comedies and most frequently performed works which is based on Thomas Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde* (1590), the play recounts the love story of Rosalind and Orlando. ‘*As You Like It*’ is a gentle, pastoral comedy and a complicated, dark debate on the relationship between love, power and gender construction. Rosalind, who disguises herself as the boy Ganymede, raises many interesting debates on homosexuality, gender blending, androgyny, and sexual identity. With the rising influence of feminist studies and the application of new historicism, scholars have applied a previously unexplored set of questions to the play. Chief among them is the nature of gender relations, the role of eroticism, and the degree to which patriarchal ideals are maintained in the play. In addition, emerging historical data about Elizabethan popular culture has given scholars new insight into the significance of sport and the influence of philosophical ideals in the play. At the centre of the play we can call Rosalind, as

one of Shakespeare's most engaging, witty, intelligent, and lovable female characters. She is the epitome of Elizabethan femininity: beautiful, chaste, and charitable; and yet she is able to transcend traditional gender boundaries to become a powerful masculine figure, allowing Shakespeare to call into question the serious nature of gender and identity, while also adding to the comic relief of the play through the use of dramatic irony. The serious potential of transgressing gender roles is explored through Rosalind's ability to subvert the limitations that society imposes on her as a woman and gain power through masculine identity (Thomas Lodge 1590: 50).

### **Introduction:**

During analysis of Shakespeare's play "As You Like It", we find that one of the most intriguing aspects of the treatment of love in 'As You Like It' concerns the 'issue of gender'. And this issue, for obvious reasons, has generated a special interest in recent times. The principal reason for this in the play is the cross dressing and role playing. The central love interest between Rosalind and Orlando calls into question the conventional wisdom about men's and women's gender roles and challenges our preconceptions about these roles in courtship, erotic love, and beyond. At the heart of this courtship is a very complex ambiguity which is completely difficult to appreciate without a production to refer to. But here we have a man (the actor) playing a woman (Rosalind), who has dressed herself up as a man (Ganymede), and who is pretending to be a woman (Rosalind) in the courtship game with Orlando. The most obvious issue rose by the cross dressing is the relationship between gender roles and clothes (or outer appearance). For Rosalind passes herself off easily enough as a man and, in the process, acquires a certain freedom to move around, give advice, and associate as an equal among other men. Her disguise is, in that sense, much more significant than Celia's, for Celia remains female in her role as Aliena and is thus largely passive (her pseudonym meaning "Stranger" or "outsider" is an interesting one). The fact that Celia is largely passive in the Forest of Ardenne (especially in contrast to Rosalind) and has to wait for life to deliver a man to her rather than seeking one out, as Rosalind does, is an interesting and important difference between the two friends.

Here without any argument, it can be noticed clearly that these points raise some interesting issues. If becoming accepted as a man and getting the freedom to act that comes with that acceptance is simply a matter of presenting oneself as a man, then what do we say about all the enshrined natural differences we claim as the basis for our different treatment of men and women? Given that Rosalind is clearly the most intelligent, active, and interesting character in the play and that these qualities would not be likely to manifest themselves so fully if she were not passing herself off as a man, the play raises some interesting questions about just what we mean by any insistence on gender differences as more than mere conventions (Shakespeare William1623:29).

But the issue is much more complicated than that. For Rosalind's assumed name, Ganymede is a very deliberate reference to the young male lover Zeus carried up to Olympus, and it points us to what might be a very strong element in the courtship game between Orlando and Rosalind and in the feelings Phoebe has for Rosalind, namely homoerotic desire. And that challenges all sorts of conventional expectations about erotic love, in order to "probe the surprisingly complex issue of what is natural in matters of love and sexual desire". That's why in the play wedding ceremony from which Rosalind and Orlando go through with Celia playing role of officiating minister is, for all the acting going on, quite powerfully charged. Celia, who loves Rosalind, supervises the wedding of the two people presenting themselves as men, and under the obvious fun of the make believes there's a powerful sense of the sexual attraction the two have for each other. There seems little doubt that underneath his play acting he is experiencing a strong bond with Rosalind/Ganymede, something which emerges as even more. If a set of men's clothes is the only thing distinguishing conventional sexual arrangements from alternatives, we are invited (at least) to wonder somewhat about the extent to which conventional arrangements do not exhaust the erotic possibilities (Chicago,Shakespeare1980:204).

In "*The Early Modern and the Homoerotic Turn*" in '*Political Criticism*', 'Jean E. Howard' says that: the reason why studies in sexuality are conducted and why studies of gender and sexuality are separated is to break the notion that "each sex has a necessary gender" and "each gender has a corresponding 'natural' sexuality." To be biologically a male does not necessarily mean that one's gender will not be masculine, nor that one's sexuality will be a desire

for a female. (Howard 1948:110). She knows that she is allowed to do things such as express emotions and cry when she's dressed as a female, but not when she's dressed as a male. In other words, her actions and words were dictated by what clothing she wore, what name she was called, and all of that was based on the identity she took. Also, while Rosalind was under the identity of a male, she was allowed to give instructions to Orlando on how to court a woman and be more attentive, but if she were under the identity of a woman, it wouldn't have been suitable for her to do that. While she does so, she voices what a male at that time would have viewed as an ideal woman, not necessarily what a woman would've thought an ideal woman to be.

In the words of 'Hugh Grady', "A number of critics have suggested that the subversiveness of Rosalind's gender-play lies not in an attempt to usurp male power or identity, but in the denaturalizing of gender identity itself. Her mockery of Orlando's by-the-book pseudo-Petrarchan verses and sentiments, of Silvius' literary-pastoral rhetoric of praise and prostration and Phoebe's corresponding coldness, and of her own invocation of misogynist stereotypes of women as fickle, jealous and unfaithful are read as revealing the artificiality of conventional gender roles.(Grady 2000:109).

As we all know, in that time that in a male-dominated society, the societal structure heavily depends on each sex keeping their assigned roles. Because I feel that Shakespeare was toying with this idea. After analyzing the character of Rosalynde, the reason Shakespeare did make Rosalind return to her female identity was to finally appease with the audiences' wants and needs. Instead, in the latter half of the twentieth century, we are invited to contemplate a changing image of 'woman', for whom a refusal of the codes of femininity offers exciting possibilities for the liberation of physical, psychic and erotic energy. Like *'Twelfth Night'* and *'The Merchant of Venice'* Shakespeare's *'As You Like It'* features a cross-dressing heroine whose disguise allows Shakespeare to explore the fluidity of gender. When Rosalind flees into the woods for safety, she disguises herself as an attractive young boy, "Ganymede," challenging traditional ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman. Rosalind's gender-bending game of make believe is complicated even further by the fact that the actor playing the role of "Rosalind" would have been a boy since women weren't allowed to perform on Shakespeare's

public stage. In *'As You Like It'*, Shakespeare makes it clear that gender roles can be imitated and performed in theater as well as in real life also.

The character of 'Rosalind', which is a fictional character and the romantic female lead in the play *'As You Like It'*, She is the daughter of the exiled Duke Senior and niece to his usurping brother Duke Frederick. Her father is banished from the kingdom which breaks her heart. She then meets Orlando and falls in love with him. After frustrating her uncle, she leaves his court for exile in the Forest of Arden. There, she lives disguised as a shepherd named Ganymede with her sweet and devoted cousin, Celia, disguised as his sister, Aliena and her uncle's fool Touchstone. Eventually, Rosalind is reunited with her father and married to her faithful lover, Orlando.

Rosalind is one of Shakespeare's most recognized heroines who is Admired for her intelligence, quick wit, and beauty, Rosalind is a vital character in "As You Like It". Most commonly seen next to her beloved cousin Celia, Rosalind is also a faithful friend, leader, and schemer. She stays true to her family and friends throughout the entire story, no matter how dangerous the consequences. Rosalind dominates the stage. Her true decision-making skills can be seen in the 'last scene of Act 5' where she has to present herself as Rosalind to her father and to Orlando, but at the same time change Phebe's opinion to marry Silvius. She is the main character of the play who extracts the clarity of important traits in other characters. If we try to get the source of her name Rosalynde, which is the heroine of Lodge's *Euphues' Golden Legacy* we find that: 'Faire Rosalind' had, however, at this time, acquired a fresh poetic fame as the object of Spenser's attachment, celebrated in his *'Shepheard's Calendar'*, 1579, and Colin Clouts *Come Home Againe*, 1595. (Thomas Lodge 1592: 97). 'Of all the sweet feminine names compounded from Rosa, that of Rosa-linda seems to be the most elegant, and therefore most befitting that particular character of ideal beauty which the dramatist here assigns to his imaginary princess. Ganymede, the name she assumes in her disguise as a forest youth, is that of 'Jove's own page', the most beautiful of all mortals, son of Tros and Callirrhoe, chosen by Jupiter to be his cup-bearer, and to dwell among the gods as his chosen servant.

Rosalind dominates *As You Like It*. So fully realized her in the complexity of her emotions, the subtlety of her thought, and the fullness of her character that no one else in the play matches up to her. Orlando is handsome, strong, and an affectionate, if unskilled, poet, yet still we feel that Rosalind settles for someone slightly less magnificent when she chooses him as her mate. Similarly, the observations of Touchstone and Jaques, who might shine more brightly in another play, seem rather dull whenever Rosalind takes the stage.

The endless appeal of watching Rosalind has much to do with her success as a knowledgeable and charming critic of herself and others. But unlike Jaques, who refuses to participate wholly in life but has much to say about the foolishness of those who surround him, Rosalind gives herself over fully to circumstance. She chastises Silvius for his irrational devotion to Phoebe, and she challenges Orlando's thoughtless equation of Rosalind with a Platonic ideal, but still she comes undone by her lover's inconsequential tardiness and faints at the sight of his blood. That Rosalind can play both sides of any field makes her identifiable to nearly everyone, and so, irresistible. We can call Rosalind as a particular favorite among feminist critics, who admire her ability to subvert the limitations that society imposes on her as a woman. With boldness and imagination, she disguises herself as a young man for the majority of the play in order to woo the man she loves and instruct him in how to be a more accomplished, attentive lover—a tutorship that would not be welcome from a woman. (Dolan, Frances 2000: 104). There is endless comic appeal in Rosalind's lampooning of the conventions of both male and female behavior, but an Elizabethan audience might have felt a certain amount of anxiety regarding her behavior. After all, the structure of a male-dominated society depends upon both men and women acting in their assigned roles. Her emergence as an actor in the Epilogue assures that theatergoers, like the Ardenne foresters, are about to exit a somewhat enchanted realm and return to the familiar world they left behind. But because they leave having learned the same lessons from Rosalind, they do so with the same potential to make that world a less punishing place. (Bate, Jonathan 2008: 60).

Celia is in some ways proves a mirror before the audience for that Shakespeare holds up to the audience to show the depths of Rosalind's passions. For that reason, the fact that Celia

in many ways resembles Rosalind is not surprising. The two girls have almost identical backgrounds. They are princesses, cousins, and inseparable companions, brought up together from their earliest childhoods. Like Rosalind, Celia is physically attractive, intelligent, and witty; also, like Rosalind, she has a bright sense of humor. Both girls embody the essences of the ideal heroine. Celia also shares with Rosalind a reflective turn of mind, which is seen in their discussion of Fortune and Nature. But, the fact is that Celia is not, however, a carbon copy of Rosalind. Rather, she serves as a foil, a mirror, a young woman who brings out, by contrast, the distinctive qualities of the play's heroine. That she shares the same virtues with Rosalind raises her attractiveness, of course, in the mind of the audience. Although Celia is quite able to hold her own in witty conversations with Rosalind and Touchstone, she is usually reserved in public situations; in the important scenes in which both girls are present, the scenes are dominated by Rosalind. In 'Act 3, Scene 2', for example, Celia says nothing for almost two hundred lines, which is to be explained, in part, by the fact that Rosalind is Shakespeare's principal creation, and by the fact that throughout most of the play, Celia is not in love. In terms of stage decorum, it is necessary that Celia, or someone else, be on stage during the courtship scenes to lend certain respectability and to keep the scenes from degenerating into burlesque. Thus, Celia acts more or less as a "chaperone" in the play. Humorously, Orlando is incredulous at Celia's capitulation to his brother's avowals of love. "Is't possible," he asks Oliver, "that on so little acquaintance you should like her . . . and, wooing, she should grant?" (Shaw George Bernard, 1897: 107).

Celia provides yet another function that is often overlooked by many modern-day audiences. She serves to remind the audience that Rosalind is an actor — that is, she is a *boy* who is playing the role of a girl who, in disguise, is playing the role of a young man. There is much humor in Rosalind's masquerade as "Ganymede." The epilogue, in particular, which is part of the burlesque of the play, loses much of its humor unless the audience remembers that the actor playing Rosalind was a boy in the Elizabethan productions.

Celia's role, then, is ultimately subordinate to that of her friend, Rosalind; she has the dramatically somewhat thankless part of serving as a companion rather than as emerging as a strong personality in her own right. Yet without Celia's acting as a kind of mirror to Rosalind,

Rosalind's character would lose a great deal of its brilliance. Celia's friendship for Rosalind is perhaps the most striking feature of her personality. We first see her comforting Rosalind and later, when the tyrannical Duke Frederick vilifies Rosalind, Celia springs to her cousin's defense, absolutely unaffected by her father's unjust remarks, which are calculated to arouse her envy and resentment. Denied great romantic scenes in the play, Celia nevertheless shines passionately as the devoted friend of Rosalind, loyal, precise, and ever practical.

In most modern printed copies of *'As You Like It'*, Rosalind's Epilogue bears a footnote in the spot where she says, "If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not." *'As You Like It'* in particular communicates some noteworthy insights into the nature of, and the relationship between, the sexes. It also features what many consider the best role for women in all of Shakespeare. In the beginning of *As You Like It*, characters act pretty much according to the expectations of their respective genders. Orlando's trip to the court, in which he hopes to demonstrate his virtue by means of a wrestling match, is a very "male" thing to do. He will enter a competition, show himself the stronger of the two contestants, and prove his manhood. It can be argued that:

"Literally and figuratively the disguise releases her: you have to imagine her going into doublet and hose from Elizabethan petticoat and farthingale and a rib-cracking corset. To get out of that corset must be such a relief. Rosalind can stretch her limbs, she can breathe properly, and so she's able to embark on increasingly long sweeps of thought and expression that take her ever deeper into new terrain". (Stevenson Juliet 1980: 129).

### **Conclusion:**

From the above description we can conclude that: William Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* is really a subversive play that exposes the instability of gender roles and traditional values where the play questions matters of gender, rank and social order. I agree with the literary critic: Anne Barton who says that, "Rosalind is extraordinarily important in *'As You Like It'*, as central

and dominating a figure in her fashion as Hamlet in his own different play. William Shakespeare presented her in a unique way to present the role of gender in his play. If we compare, the world of William Shakespeare was not so different from the world in which we live where Women's rights, homosexuality and the struggle for equality are still in the news, and the only difference in family infighting is the use of the courts and lawyers to settle disputes instead of banishment to the forest. The Robin Hoods of our culture are the politicians who try to redistribute wealth, and huge agricultural conglomerates have bought out the family farms of our own midlands to control the price of crops. Perhaps, after all, the new millennium is so enthralled by Shakespeare because he is just like us. William Shakespeare proves to be a rich and suggestive author in terms of alert the society towards the issues in women's studies and gender ideology. Shakespeare's comedy indicates that there was a clear borderline between men and women and their obligations were strictly subdivided at that time. Really Shakespeare dealt with a great issue which is adorable for every reader. Gender is amongst us all in every society. Although it is not as simple as it seems. It plays a significant part when speaking of the different social problems encountered by men and women. Gender is the socially learned behaviors that are attached to the sexes, which create "Gender Roles". Gender roles in *As You Like It* prove to be quite mysterious in this comedy. Shakespeare highlights the distinction between actuality and delusion. Rosalind embodies the susceptibility, the humor and the type of love that leads to a contented, harmonious living. She brings the conspirator to a decree when four contrasting romances end in marriage. Shakespeare beautifully created an almost ideal heroine who brings the play to its ending which is unique and becomes an inspiration for other women in the society.

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