

POSTCOLONIAL READING OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

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Colonization is an imperial power structure which privileges the Western values, tradition and culture. Postcolonial criticism relates the study of the colonizer and the colonized in various perspectives. It studies how European nations subjugated and controlled the native culture of the colonized and how these natives have responded to it and withstood those encroachments. The postcolonial theorists are interested in what happens to people during and after colonialism. They use postcolonial theory or postcolonial criticism as a specific critical lens to read a text and this specific way of reading a text explains the effects of colonization and imperialism. In 1611 when William Shakespeare wrote the play *The Tempest*, colonization was a recent concept in Britain.

Ben Jonson, a playwright, poet and a literary critic in the introductory poem to the First Folio of Shakespeare's play states he was not of an age, but for all ages and was also the soul of the age. Even though colonization was a budding concept during the time of Shakespeare, critical interpretation of his play reveals a more complex discourse of colonialism which seems to be prophetic of the post-colonial era. This states the unique writing style of Shakespeare.

By its very nature, drama mirrors its time. This is more true in the case of Shakespeare. His Plays reflect the times in which he existed. *The Tempest* is considered to be the last play of William Shakespeare which is written in 1610-11. It is in this play that Shakespeare has followed the unity of time, place and action. The play is also an allegory of artistic creation of Shakespeare which is said to be his farewell to the stage. The play can also be interpreted in postcolonial perspectives. The plot is based in an island and the description of it seems more significant of colonies, which were being colonized during the time the play was written. Thus, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* can also be reread as a play about the beginning of colonization during the Elizabethan era.

Shakespeare has taken this concept into consideration and has given an account of the empirical nature of colonialism in his play. The play allegorically reveals how the colonizers captured the land of the natives, how they controlled the native people, their tradition and culture.

The protagonist of the play Prospero is the Duke of Milan. He was exiled to an unknown island along with his daughter Miranda twelve years before the play begins. Being isolated in the middle of the sea he reaches an unknown island which happens to be the property of the native called Caliban. On reaching the island Prospero befriends Caliban. Prospero uses all types of crafty process to know about the details of the island. After knowing all the information of the island Prospero uses his knowledge and power to capture the island and then enslaves Caliban. This act of Prospero is similar to the situation of colonial history. Thus *The Tempest*, can be classified as the most notable earlier works illustrating the fundamental aspects of colonialism.

Prospero is one of the most powerful protagonists in Shakespeare's plays. Prospero's character, actions, reasoning, and the way he deals with the inhabitants reflect the attitude of the colonizer. According to critics, Prospero reflects the character of a colonizer. He has captured the island of the native called Caliban and soon enslaves him in his own land. He takes the power of the inhabitant, establishes new order in the island and makes himself the ruler of it. On the other hand Caliban is the inhabitant of the island before the arrival of Prospero. When seen through the lens of postcolonialism, Caliban represents the colonized native who is betrayed by the colonial ruler. Thus he is identified as being the representative of the colonized "other," who is subjected to the imposed rule of his subjugators.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, reflects the concept of colonialism and sheds its light significantly through the relationship between the colonizer and the native. The re-contextualization of the play within postcolonial contexts has drawn attention to the character of Caliban in spite of his minor role in the play.

Caliban is the son of Sycorax, and the inhabitant of the island before Prospero's arrival. Caliban, seen through the lens of colonialism depicts the natives and Prospero the colonizer who has enforced colonial domination over Caliban. The following speech of Caliban explains the way in which Prospero has captured the island.

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
 Which thou took'st from me. When thou cam'st first
 Thou stole'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me
 Water with berries in't; and teach me how
 To name the bigger light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee
 And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile:
 Curs'd be I that that did so! All the charms
 Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
 For I am all the subjects that you have,
 Which first was mine own King: and here you stay me
 In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
 The rest o' th' island (I.II.)

The above speech by Caliban states how Prospero has settled in his island by befriending him first and enslaving him last. Prospero after entering the unknown island finds Caliban as the inhabitant of the land. Prospero befriends Caliban, teaches him his language and provides him with food and shelter. Seeing the kind nature of Prospero, Caliban starts to like and trust him and reveals all the qualities of the island. He shows the barren places and the fertile places of the island. After knowing the secrets of the island Prospero enslaves Caliban and never lets him free. The attitude of Prospero is similar to the attitude of the colonizer. Thus Caliban accuses Prospero by using the language he has taught him. This scene in the play gains the interest of the critics as it interprets the exact way in which colonizers treated the native people. Prospero gives freedom to Ariel for the service it had rendered to him, but not to Caliban because of his rebelling nature.

Then to the elements
 Be free, and fare thou well (V.i. 60)

He treats Caliban as a slave and forces him to do whatever he commands. Whenever Caliban fails to obey his words he is punished physically by the spirits. Thus Caliban is forced to obey Prospero for the fear of punishment.

Hag-seed, hence!
Fetch us in fuel; and be quick, thou art best,
To answer other business. Shrugst thou, malice?
Of thou neglectest or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar
That beasts shall tremble at thy din. (I.ii. 16)

The following passage states Prospero's address to Caliban which resembles the colonizers attitude of civilizing the natives.

I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. (I.ii.17)

The typical attitude of the colonizers is to civilize the natives. Similarly Prospero displays how his presence on the island is valuable for Caliban which indicates the attitude and supremacy of the colonist over the natives. The colonizer considers the native as uncivilized savages and slaves. Prospero views Caliban as lesser being than himself. He firmly believes that Caliban's existence is bound to serve his order and not to retaliate. He expects Caliban to be grateful to him for educating him and making him learn the superior language.

Along with his daughter Miranda, Prospero tries to educate and civilize Caliban but both of them find Caliban's inability to be civilized and learn what they teach because of his tough nature. Instead of showing gratitude to Prospero Caliban goes to the extent of violating the honor of Prospero's daughter.

Prospero: Thou most lying slave,
Whose stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee
The mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honor of my child.

Miranda: Abhorred slave,
which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in it which good natures

Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison. (I.ii. 15-16)

The above lines also state how the natives are considered as savages and their reluctance to be civilized by the colonizers. Caliban's behavior towards Miranda leads Prospero to imprison and punish him physically. This makes Caliban feel oppressed and exploited in his own land. Thus he tries to get some kind of opportunity to regain his island but unfortunately he couldn't be able to be successful to escape the supreme control of Prospero's knowledge and magical power. Thus Caliban remains scolding himself for trusting Prospero and letting him know all the secrets of the land. He grumbles all time for being the slave in his own land.

The play ends with Prospero deciding to return to his country along with his daughter. He leaves the island, frees his slaves and enables Caliban to be the inhabitant of the island. At last, Caliban gets the freedom and the right to claim his island. He gets the freedom to be himself in his native place. This incident reflects the period when the colonizers returned to their country after Britain gave freedom to its colonies. Yet the impact of the colonizers and colonialism remains in the lives of natives.

The Tempest is the play which dramatizes the process of colonization and deals with the relationship of the settler and the native. Thus the characters of Prospero and Caliban are constantly reread in the colonial contexts which emphasize the greatness of Shakespeare's capacity of understanding the aspects and the nature of human being as a whole. *The tempest* denotes the idea of colonialism as it was as the turning point during the period of British Empire. Throughout the text, Shakespeare states the colonial perspective and the perspective of the colonized as represented by Prospero and Caliban.

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