***III-B.A. ENGLISH – CORE COURSE – IX - SHAKESPEARE***

**Unit-V**

**5. Shakespearean Soliloquies**

**Soliloquy:**

A **Soliloquy** means **speaking with oneself** or **a dialogue with one’s own self**. Soliloquy is very useful in drama. Sometimes when an actor is not supposed to speak on the stage, but the dramatist wants to convey his feelings or thoughts to the spectators, that actor is made to step aside and speak softly as if to himself, and thus let the audience know what he is thinking or talking about.

**Soliloquies in Shakespeare’s Plays:**

The real function of a soliloquy is **self-analysis** and **self-revelation** specifically to bring out the inner springs of any of the leading characters, particularly, the hero of a play. It is mostly the heroes and the villains who generally indulge in soliloquies in the plays of Shakespeare and mostly in the tragedies because tragedies are **deep with the deeper emotions** and **the more secret springs of human head and the human heart**. Shakespeare’s soliloquies are intended chiefly ***to explain, to idealize, to inform***, and also ***to reveal things which otherwise cannot be revealed either through incident or through dialogue.***

Shakespeare frequently uses soliloquies in his plays. Some of his plays, like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard* *II*, contain a number of soliloquies, and so do some of his comedies. Among the tragedies, the largest number of soliloquies is found in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. There are about nine Soliloquies each in *Othello* and *Hamlet*, several in *Macbeth*, and only one in *Richard* *II*. These soliloquies convey to the reader or the spectator the innermost thoughts of the character that speaks to them, or communicates some information which cannot be conveyed through action or dialogues.

Soliloquies in Shakespeare’s plays serve three purposes (i) **to illuminate and explain the character of the more important figures in the play**; (ii) **to supply details to show the connection between various links of the plot**; and (iii) **to help in maintaining necessary unity by tracing the true sequence of cause and effect.**

For illustration of Shakespearean soliloquies we shall take up and analyze the dramatic significance of some of well-known soliloquies in *Macbeth*.

**Soliloquies in *Macbeth*:**

*Macbeth* contains several soliloquies by Macbeth, a few by Lady Macbeth, and one or two by Banquo and Lady Macduff. Macbeth’s soliloquies are in the form of ‘asides’, that is speeches made so as not to be heard by anybody on the stage. Banquo also uses an aside to enquire about Ross’s information about Macbeth having been made the thane of Cawdor (‘what, can the devil speak true?’). Macbeth speaks his first aside after having been informed about his elevation in rank so as to become the thane of Cawdor. He thinks that if the witches’ prophecy about his being the thane of Cawdor has proved to be true, then that regarding his becoming the king may prove to be so too. He says: “Glamis, and thane of Cawdor. The greatest is behind”. This shows the height of his ambition. Another aside by him occurs when he learns that Malcolm, the son of the king, has been made the Prince of Cumberland in preparation for becoming the heir to the throne Macbeth soliloquizes: “The Prince of Cumberland that is a step / on which I must fall down, or else O’erleap,/ For in my way it lies”. This soliloquy reveals his determination to get rid of all obstacles coming in the way to his becoming the king. The growth of evil in Macbeth’s mind is evident here.

In the beginning of Act I, Scene 7, in the soliloquy beginning with the words, “If it were done when it’s done, then ‘t were well / It were done quickly”, we get a glimpse into Macbeth’s mind considering the pros and cons of the proposed act of the murder of Duncan. His hesitation, his want of moral stability, his fear of the opinion of others, and his sense of inadequacy of his motive, are seen here. Macbeth’s soliloquy in the dagger-scene (Act II, scene) “Is this a dagger which I see before me / The handle toward my hand” – points out to his fearful imaginings before committing the murder. In the soliloquy appearing just before the banquet scene, Macbeth seems to repent his act of murder and give vent to his fears about the possibility of his being dethroned or killed like the king.

In Act II, scene 2, there is a soliloquy of Lady Macbeth, i.e. “He is about it; the doors are open – I have drugged their posses / I laid their daggers ready, he could not miss them”, which throws light on the progress of the action of the play and helps the audience to imagine the events that are occurring off the stage. In the opening scene of Act III, we have Banquo’s Soliloquy which affords a glimpse into some of his characteristics. He is seen to be aware of Macbeth’s crime and guilt, but is not morally strong enough to expose it.

Thus, it is found that soliloquies play an important part in *Macbeth*. They reveal the character of various persons, point at the inner workings of their mind, and help the spectators in understanding the meaning of various actions, and witnessing the progress of the plot.

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**6. Shakespeare as a Sonneteer and a Narrative Poet**

***i. As a Sonneteer***

**Sonnet**

The word ‘sonnet’ is an Italian word. It means a ‘little sound’. Now it is used for a poem of 14 lines with a fixed rhyme scheme. The Italian poet Petrarch divided it into two parts. The first part of eight lines is called ‘Octave’ and the second part of six lines is called ‘Sestet’. He used the iambic Pentameter and the rhyme scheme abba, abba, cde, cde. He wrote on the subject of love. The thought or emotion was stated in the octave and then further developed after a pause called ‘Cesura’ in the sestet. The sonnet was brought into England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and perfected by Earl of Surrey.

**Shakespearean Sonnet**

Shakespeare was a poet before he became a dramatist. His earlier known creations are ‘The Rape of Lucreece’ and ‘Venus and Adonis’. In all his life about 154 sonnets flowed from his pen on love and friendship. Shakespeare divided his sonnets into four parts of three quartrains of four lines each and a concluding couplet rhyming together. His typical rhyme scheme is ab, ab, cd, cd, ef, ef, gg. The couplet is in the form of a commentary on the thought or emotion of the whole poet. His sonnets can be arranged in a number of groups. The first group consists of 128 sonnets addressed to a beautiful but wanton youth referred to as W.H. The second group consists of 28 sonnets addressed to a dark lady, the beloved of the poet. According to Mr. Lee, W.H. stands for Mr. William Hail who privately secured the copies of sonnets for Thorpe’s edition. Other scholars opine that W.H. stands for William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.

**The Theme of the Sonnets**

 The theme of the sonnets is eternal. They tell us of the triumph of time over human ambitions, desires, loves and friendships. Old Time is a tyrant. It destroys everything. Rich monuments of stone, the page on which the poet writes, human civilizations and works of art are all subjects to the ravages of Time. All things decay. True love is eternal and it alone escapes Time’s scythe. This is the only comfort for the poet. On this note of consolation, the first series of sonnets ends. The second series is shorter and coarse. Shakespeare speaks of his mind with frankness. That is almost brutal. Its theme is the short-lived delight of lust, its violence, its treachery and the torments are its reward.

**The Auto-Biographical Nature**

Some doubt the sincerity of the emotions expressed in he sonnets. They say that they are entirely conventional. Shakespeare wrote them because it was the fashion of the day to write them and not because he really experienced the emotions expressed in them. But general opinion is that they were private documents meant for some particular individuals. There is overwhelming evidence in favor of their being auto-biographical. They are passionate records of the poet’s own feelings. It is not by the artistic merit but by the intensity of their passion that these sonnets rank with the greatest poetry of the world. They tell a story of passionate friendship, of broken faith, of love that does not alter when it finds an alteration, of lust hat is short madness and turns to bitterness and remorse. In the sonnets the voice of the poet is heard in many tones, now pleading with his friend, now railing against the woman that has ensnared him.

**Their Artistic Excellence**

The sonnets contain some of the finest lyrical poetry for all times. Poetry is not biography. To the modern reader their value lies in their poetic excellence. All true poetry is a record of the overflow of powerful emotions. The passionate intensity of Shakespeare’s sonnets has not failed to move even the oldest hearts. The splendor and grandeur of their style, their music, and their sensuous phraseology, have received recognition from all critics of Shakespeare.

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***ii. As a Narrative Poet***

Shakespearean literature has provided a rich variety of narrative and lyrical poems, sonnets and plays of all genres. His poetry is a superb means of dramatic expression Even as he was writing plays he found occasions for composing poems, mostly narrative. Following the outbreak of plague during 1592 and 1593, plays were suspended. Shakespeare sought the patronage of noble men. In 1593, **‘Venus and Adonis’** was published. It was dedicated to the young Lord Henry Wriothesley. It was followed by ‘**The Rape Of Lucreece’**. It was also dedicated to the same patron. **‘A Lover’s Complaint’** has a narrative style. Shakespeare’s last poem was **‘ The Phoenix and** **the Turtle’**. Besides the sonnets the nondramatic poems still remain the greatest.

**‘Venus and Adonis’** was the first their of Shakespeare’s literary prominent feature of the narrative poem is the poet’s getting into grips with the complexity of human life and with the study of evil that can frustrate nature and man. Tarquin’s ravishing strides are associated with flashing images of vultures, hawks and wolves. His crime is presented as a fierce challenge to Nature’s order.

**‘The Phoenix and the Turtle’** is said to be an outstanding metaphysical poem. It was included in a collection of poems, Chester’s **‘Love’s Martyr’**. This poem celebrates mystic love-union beyond sex. The supremacy and sublimity of love transcend nature and reason. Purity of diction and lyrical form distinguish this poem from the narrative poetry of Shakespeare. Love is very intimately associated with chastity. Much of the substance recalls the sonnets. The Turtle-Dove in the poem represents the female-element while the Phoenix, the male element. There are varied interpretations about the sexes of these two birds. The poem lends itself, to several meanings of symbolic import and topical and personal interests tend to baffle the reader. Yet the main myth about Phoenix forms the basis of all shades of meanings. The baffling debates about the sexes of the birds become irrelevant when the distinctions between lovers are annihilated.

 Studying the sonnets as a whole we find that as the sequence proceeds the texture of the poems show a slowly increasing complexity. They become more introspective. The interest is often far more on the state of the mind than the object of his lover or even the love itself. In the sixty sixth sonnets Shakespeare writes “tired with all these, for restful death I cry”. Self disgust and self reproach are the usual tones of his introspection. The poet is bitter at the thought of age. He feels even more deeply the conviction of failure as a poet.

 In the final analysis we can say with Wilson Knight, “The Mutual Flame in consuming the grossness of love attains a spiritual, consummation dreamt of by Dante in his ‘Divine Comedy’. Such a sacred flame doubtless is burning, behind the sonnets of Shakespeare”.

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