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Rereading of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: A psychological approach

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Abstract--- Psychology and literature are interconnected in more ways than one. In plays and novels, the characters are expected to be “psychologically true”. Readers may model their lives up on the patterns of play or on the lives of fictional heroes and heroines. Young readers are often more strongly influenced this way. William Shakespeare’s works lead to such psychological influences in one way or the other. One of William Shakespeare’s best psychological works *Romeo and Juliet*, written in the 1500s is the tragic story of two ‘star-crossed lovers’ who were led towards death because of their psychological trauma and their immaturity. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the psychology of teenagers in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*- their emotions, moods, sensations, immature thoughts - which lead to their mental stress and tragic end and also to examine the psychological aspects of other minor characters in the play.

Keywords---suicide, depression, psychological conflict, teenage love, immaturity, impulsive reaction, Mood sensation, highly sensitive.

Introduction

“The mind of man is capable of anything”. Psychology assigns a prodigious role for the human mind- to think, feel, react, and behave. These are also part of the scientific and environmental roles of the human mind. Psychology is defined as an art and a science. It is the process of the mind and mental state of a human being. Psychology deals with prediction, disturbances, and improvement in human behavior, vehemence, conscious and unconscious actions of the mind. Both psychology and literature deal with desires, conflict, and human emotions and so on. Though conceptualization of this factor differs from one person to another, writers manipulate psychological factors in their works in every stream

of literature. Elizabethan drama revolves around human experience. Portrayal of the inner conflicts of main characters is one of the important features of Elizabethan drama and the audience could experience bloodshed, murder, downfall as they are enacted on the stage. Revenge, hero-villain protagonist, tragi comedy, melodramatic scene, presence of ghost found a prominent place during the Elizabethan period. In drama, the audience or the readers accept the play only when they identify themselves with the emotions of the characters. These emotions are handled by the playwright. The characters, their action and their way of articulation of dialogues are very crucial in the success of the play. The Elizabethan plays are packed with emotion and conflicts.

William Shakespeare is a dramatist who employs psychological aspects in his works in assorted ways because he has a deep assimilation of human nature. It is comfortable for the audience to expect and understand what will happen next in the play. He is the one who has written various types of drama like tragedies, comedies, historical plays. In his tragedies, he delineates conflict, downfall, death, sadness and tragic flaw. At the same time, he presents humour and romance in his comedies. Many psychological theorists, writers, and researchers tried to explain psychological elements in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the implication of psychology is evident in the behaviour of the witches and Lady Macbeth and the same is true in the case of his other works like *King Lear*. He is able to reflect accurate psychological insight of the characters.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, psychological facets are concatenate to the predominant character Romeo and Juliet and the alternate characters like Friar Laurence and the Nurse. The human mind is reflected in the characters of Romeo and Juliet, who are teenagers. Teenagers are highly emotional and are sceptical and they are frequently immersed in a world of fantasy. Their sensation, incertitude, imaginations are mostly not manageable. This psychological state of the teenagers leads to impulsive reactions. Teenagers take decision under the strong influence of their emotion. Mostly in twelve and sixteen years, they are ready to engage in risky deportment, and they do not have much ability to differentiate positive and negative things. Their actions give much importance to their happiness and satisfaction. Death is also not a concern to them, even falling in love is an immediate reaction for them and this feeling mostly comes out of infatuation. Sigmund Freud explicates that human mind is segregated into the conscious and unconscious mind. In *Romeo and Juliet*, many incidents take place because of the befuddled mind and Sigmund Freud's theory also suggests the fragile mind of an individual pondering over death and anger. In *Romeo and Juliet*, their unexpected gestures bring transformation to the play and the audience develop great emotions and acquire insight. Teenagers are more traumatised in such situations. At that time, they do not have proper sleep; they try to spend more time alone, and they avoid friends and family.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare accords more consequence of the characters' adoration, inner life and contemplation. Shakespeare's heroes and heroines in the tragedies are frequently facing inner struggle, hesitation, dismay and pandemonium. Even though there is some resemblance in the aspects of psychology in Tolstoy's work like *War and Peace*, he adopts different techniques of depicting the hero's inner struggle and action. The readers can nudge the

vehemence in his works. William Shakespeare's characters are kindred to real life their conceptualisation.

In *King Lear* the relationship of father and daughter can be connected to real life and in the play *Romeo and Juliet*, the unanticipated action of teenagers, like hiding problems from parents are something similar to real life. William Shakespeare's tragedies are mainly concerned with the social break down of characters and their death. In Elizabethan drama, supernatural is a common element. In *Macbeth*, Macbeth believes the prophecy of the three witches, and he kills the king as per the advice of his wife to fulfil his ambition to become the king and he murders the people who are against him, but the bloody end happens while in *Hamlet*, prince Hamlet takes revenge on his uncle for his father's murder but Hamlet also faces death at the end of the play. *Othello*, *King Lear* etc also portray the death of the main characters. *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* are based on revenge while *Romeo and Juliet* deals with the hasty actions of Romeo and Juliet without thinking about the denouement.

Romeo and Juliet includes tragic scenes and scenes of murder. The same in the case of Hamlet and both have every different endings. In William Shakespeare's tragedies, practically every hero or heroine has a tragic flaw. Many surprising elements are hidden in his plays, Hamartia is also one of the important features in his tragedy and he wonderfully portrays in many of his plays. Prince Hamlet gets many opportunities to kill his uncle Claudius but he fails because of his dither and delay of taking action. There is no poetic justice in his tragedies, but the element such as comic relief gives some sort of pleasure to audience.

The play focuses more on the psychological components of trepidation, daze, and agony. Romeo is dependent on love and when Romeo encounters Juliet, he is in a wholly bewildered state. "Did my heart love till now?"[48, Act 1 scene 5 *Romeo and Juliet*]. In this precipitous impression of love in his mind, he absolutely ignores the love for Rosaline. William Shakespeare presents teenage mind in action. Romeo does not know anything about Juliet or her family at the first glance. When he comes to know that she is the daughter of an enemy family both the lovers are afraid. The minds of teenagers do not think about the after effects of their action. They give more importance to their gaiety only. The lover's fear and sexual desires lead them to their marriage, they do not get any time to think properly. Everything results in failure. Actually this blind love is the reason for their abrupt actions. William Shakespeare renders a paradigm of the mind of teenagers through this play. At first when Rosaline does not reciprocate her love towards Romeo, he is in a melancholic state and he did not talk to anybody and at that juncture his parents are very much apprehensive about him because if this situation continues, it will lead to more horrendous after effects. Psychologically, a person who has hatred in his mind is not responsive to the situation. In the opening scene, involving Benvolio and Tybalt both from enemy families, Tybalt does not get any idea about what is happening between servants and Benvolio but Tybalt suddenly challenges Benvolio to a fight and Benvolio tries his maximum to clarify the situation. The foe of Tybalt does not understand the peaceful intention of Benvolio and they start to fight and the reasonable mind of the character is subject to forfeiture.

When Benvolio and Romeo plan to enter Capulet family to attend the Banquet, Romeo is very much sure that his love for Rosaline is very pure and sincere. But he does not think about the after effect of entering the enemy family the imaginative mind and the sudden action of a person puts them in to more perilous situation. William Shakespeare portrays the character of Benvolio as not having any kind of sensible mind because he encourages Romeo to attend the banquet. The human mind is not at all secure in its notion, and takes delight in everything. Teenagers are prone to fall in love.

Here Romeo sincerely loves Rosaline, but after attending that banquet he has fully forgotten the love of Rosaline. They do not have any kind of proper feelings and desire. After leaving Capulet family, while attending the banquet, Romeo hides himself from his friends because he is lost in Juliet's beauty. In his conscious mind, he knows it is dangerous to enter Capulet's garden but his unconscious mind does not consider any kind of problem. When Juliet is standing in the balcony, she expresses her love towards Romeo and at that stage the readers can intuit her juvenile musing. Juliet knows that Romeo is from the enemy family but she is fully devoted to him. Beauty is the only one factor that would attract each other. Their concept, the way of handling matters are very different. During the first meeting both Romeo and Juliet do not know much about each other but they are ready to live together.

At the time of arranging the marriage, Friar Laurence and the Nurse are the two characters who assist them. In this drama, William Shakespeare does not give the capability of prompt decision making to any of the characters. Shakespeare permits the same kind of thought processes in the mind of the teenagers and old people. Here the two characters do not admonish the desperate happening in the life. The Nurse has a motherly affection to Juliet. So she thinks only about her happiness. Before the marriage of Romeo and Juliet, Nurse knows that it is going to be a hazard because Capulet and Lady Capulet do not know about this marriage ceremony and also Romeo has planned to climb the balcony of Juliet's room in the night after the marriage and this plan is informed to Juliet by the Nurse. Here the Nurse's reaction is all of a sudden, and she does everything without any kind of wisdom. If she has any kind of pragmatic thinking, she will try to convince Juliet about the danger of this marriage without the permission of her parents.

Friar Laurence is very fond of Romeo, and he agrees to conduct their marriage ceremony. He says, "But come young waverer, come, go with me, in one respect I'll thy assistant be. For this alliance many so happy prove. To turn your house hold's rancour to pure love." [78, Act 2 scene 4 Romeo and Juliet]. The human beings have their own emotion, memories, that can be arduous to dispense with. Sigmund Freud theory of id, ego and super ego can be discerned here. The id can be seen in the behavior of Romeo and Juliet they only want to fulfill their needs and both Romeo and Juliet do not think about the circumstances of their marriage, they only want to satisfy their desires. After the death of Mercutio, Romeo is fully in an impulsive and unconscious state. His fervour and lack of control lead him to kill Tybalt. If Romeo had not attempted that crime, he could have avoided the banishment from that place. When human beings lose control upon themselves, they are unable to think properly. Their mind and thoughts do

not come under their control. They behave differently during that time, especially teenagers, since they are highly sensitive.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, none of the characters does not have any kind of pragmatic perception. After the banishment of Romeo from Verona, Romeo knows that if his presence is identified by anyone from Verona, it could be very dangerous for him. But Romeo climbs Juliet's crib at darkness, his only intention is to spend time with his bride and he forgets everything about the unsafe situation.

William Shakespeare does not portray Friar Laurence as a normal or ordinary priest. He focuses only on the fact that the enmity between the two families will come to an end after their marriage. After the banishment of Romeo, both Romeo and Juliet are in a distressed state. Juliet's father arranges her marriage with Paris and that causes trouble for her. She seeks the help of Friar Laurence. She says, "O shut the door, and when thou hast done so, come weep with me, past hope, past care, past help!" [158, Act 4 scene 1 *Romeo and Juliet*]. "Tell me not, Friar, that thou he arrest of this, Unless thou tell me how I may prevent it. If in thy wisdom thou canst give no help, Do thou but call my resolution wise, And with this knife I'll help it presently." [160, Act 4 scene 1 *Romeo and Juliet*] Teenagers mostly hesitate in sharing their actual problems with their parents. William Shakespeare portrays this nature of teenagers in his play.

The discombobulated mind is not capable of taking good decisions. In such a condition, good thoughts do not occur to person. That is the psychological condition of a human mind. Friar Laurence pushes the lovers in to a more thorny situation. Before using the potion that Friar Laurence gives her, Juliet experiences trepidation, doubt, torment and much more. She is doubtful whether she will wake up after drinking the potion and if she does not wake up, she will not be able to live with her husband. However, if she refrains from using the potion, she might have to live with Paris. Finally, she drinks the potion and she becomes anxious of her life. According to Freud's theory, this anxiety comes under ego and it is an unpleasant state of a person's mind. While lying in the grave, Juliet must have experienced immense suffocation, although she managed it. But despite all the desolation, what happens to her is not what she desired. The intense emotions that she experiences during such situation in her life depict the stressful mind of a teenager. Shakespeare uses *Romeo and Juliet* to delineate the flickering mind of teenagers. Juliet experiences confusion when she is given the potion she is doubtful whether to consume it or not but her impulsive mind decides to consume it without sufficient thought. This shows the impulsiveness of teenagers which affects most of their decisions in their life. Here the role of the nurse also causes more difficulties to Juliet. She is the one who provides all the help to Juliet to accomplish her love but after the banishment of Romeo, she changes her mind and she advises Juliet to marry Paris and at that moment Juliet does not trust the nurse and she does not discuss her plans. The mind of the Nurse is changing due to circumstances. She knows that Juliet's marriage has already taken place and her advice is more irritable to Juliet. If the Nurse had given that support throughout, she would have explained her plans and it would have saved Juliet from her tragic death. In the adolescent period, people only look for their comfort zone they discuss their problems with only those who are friendly to them.

When Romeo comes to hear that Juliet is dead, his impetuous and disturbed mind immediately evokes a tendency to commit suicide. "I'll be with thee straight. Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight. Let's see for means. O mischief thou art swift to enter in the thought of desperate men. I do remember an apothecary –And hereabouts he dwells – which late I noted In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows culling of simples" [184, Act 5 scene 1 Romeo and Juliet] He simply cannot think of a life without Juliet. According to 'Sigmund Freud's' psychological theory, as a result of unbearable mental stress a person may not be able to accept reality as such . William Shakespeare employs this psychological effect here. Romeo, knowing the real story, is confronted with the heart breaking news of Juliet's death as reported by a servant.

He does not enquire about the truth, but jumps to a quick and irrational decision of committing suicide. Blinded with his love for Juliet, Romeo is seen making a decision subconsciously. He is not even fully in the present when he makes the decision, which is quite evident in the play. According to Sigmund Freud's theory, it is suggested that unconscious thought and feeling of human being can be transferred to the conscious mind in the form of mental error.

In Shakespeare's poem "The Seven Ages of a Man", he describes the various stages of a man's life .The third stage, in his words, is that of a lover, where a man devotes his entire life sighing for his lover. Here, Shakespeare portrays Romeo as a lover who is ready to kill himself for his beloved. He immediately thinks of suicide when he is confronted with the news of Juliet's death, without much thinking he decides to kill himself. Similarly, when Juliet is awake from her sleep, she is also put under tremendous conflict that she is left unable to make a proper decision or come to a proper conclusion. "Go, get thee hence, for I will not away .What's here? A cup clos'd in my true loves hand?"[200, Act 5 scene3 Romeo and Juliet] In both cases, the flickering teenage mind and its unpredictable thoughts are hinted at by Shakespeare. The situation could have been different and far better if both Romeo and Juliet had some body to support and advise them. The lack of supporting system, be it in the form of friends or family, takes them to an emotional crisis which ends up tragically.

A fragile mind contemplates on death and suicide and considers death as an ultimate escape from the harsh realities of life, instead of facing the reality very boldly. This is exactly what Romeo and Juliet do. The death of Paris is also an unanticipated psychological action on his part. When he watches Romeo opening Juliet's grave, he thinks that it is because of his enmity towards the Capulet family . Even when Romeo tries to explain the real situation, Paris does not believe him.

"I will apprehend him . Stop thy unhallow'd toil, vile Montague.

Can vengeance be pursud' further the death? Condemned Villain , I do

apprehended thee.Obey, and go with me , for thou must die.
" I do defy

thy conjuration . And apprehend thee for a felon here".[194, Act5 scene 3 Romeo and Juliet]

He is banished from the land. So, Paris spontaneously enters into a fight with Romeo. His mental state is unstable and does not allow him to make a rational and matured decision at that time. Instead of attending Juliet on time, in a fit of temper and uncontrollable emotions, Romeo enters into a duel with Paris. "Wilt thou provoke me? Then have at thee, boy". [194, Act 4 scene 3 Romeo and Juliet] According to Sigmund Freud's theory, when the psychosexual developments occur in the teenagers, there is an urge to fulfil sexual desires. In many parts of the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare depicts the sexual hunger of characters.

Romeo and Juliet throws light on the psyche of the characters. Every character in the play is continuously put into psychological trauma and wrangle. The capricious thoughts and feelings of a teenager are explained in detail through the impulsive and irrational decisions and actions of Romeo and Juliet. The character of Friar Laurence also receives much psychological attention as he is put into different uncertain situations in the play. The fact that a human mind, however, experienced or mature, when put in to difficult circumstances can make a silly conclusion, is constantly portrayed through almost all major characters in the play. Yet another important aspect that surfaces as a result of psychological dilemma is the tendency to believe that death is the ultimate solution to all troubles in life. This is especially true in the case of young minds. The most tragic point of the play is the decision of Romeo and Juliet to end their lives, and through this play Shakespeare tries to give the message to the readers that parents should be conscious of the upbringing of children. Here Juliet is afraid of her father as he forced her to marry Paris and he does not try to understand his daughter's emotion or feelings. This leads her in to different actions which ultimately cause her death.

Without realizing that they have plenty of years ahead to live in happiness, they decide to die, thinking that their death is the only solution to all problems. In fact, if this thought was taken away from their minds, the entire play would have a different ending. William Shakespeare tries to understand human nature and through his observation he finds that teenage love is not a silly matter and he uses his potential to develop this play with two characters and the audience takes them in to their heart. Everyone feels that the love of teenagers is short lived but their psychology is something different they might fall in love with only an attraction but that leads them to do an unconscious action like what Romeo and Juliet did in the play.

All these psychological elements together bring life to the play. William Shakespeare's brilliance is evident in his decision to put these psychological elements in the play because it is to these that the audience relates the most. Shakespeare knows that very well. He takes his audience through various critical life situations and gives subtle morals as well through this play.

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