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A Feminist Reading of Shakespearean Tragedies: Frailty, Thy Name is Woman

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Abstract:

Literary texts are loaded with ideologies, sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly. Shakespeare's plays, both tragedies and comedies are perfect specimens of art and literature. Theories and principles of pure art and form can be deduced from them. On the surface, they seem to be structured by issues like love, jealousy, hatred, wars, intrigues, human failures and failings. But deep down these texts are the carriers of ideologies. They, at one level, project the binary opposition between male and female, in which male pair is privileged. Shakespeare's plays are not lacking in women with positive human qualities, and some of them are presented with qualities and attributes at par with men, but on the whole these texts disseminate and project the historical and conventional perception of woman, as lesser and negative stereotype, and portray them from the patriarchal perspective. The present study intended to investigate the portrayal of women in Shakespeare's major tragedies. The study is based upon the exhaustive analysis of the major tragedies of Shakespeare (*Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet*) in the light of deconstructive Feminism. The main hypothesis of the study is that women in Shakespearean tragedies are portrayed and presented as lesser and negative stereotypes and these texts have reinforced and strengthened the patriarchy and patriarchal values.

Keywords: patriarchy, boggler, morsel, dish, frailty, headstrong, sovereign, emperor, god.

1. Introduction:

The Shakespearean tragedies have been commented upon by a host of critics from several angles. The present study meant to focus on the treatment and place of women in these plays in the light of deconstructive Feminism. The emphasis has been on the analysis of the texts in the light of the selected critical approach. A brief literature review has been presented to establish the context and the background to the study. It further has highlighted the relevance and justification of this Feminist reading of Shakespearean tragedies. Research questions were formulated to make the study a systematic exercise. The analysis of the texts provided answers to these questions. Five tragedies were discussed one by one with cross references, wherever possible, from other works to lend support to the current analysis. The findings on every play are presented in every section and at the end the overall findings are presented in the conclusion chapter.

2. Literature Review:

Harold Jenkins (1982) in his commentary on *Hamlet* focuses on the dramatic problems and the ambiguities of the play. Major among these are the issues of delay, revenge and the debates about the construction of plot. For Jenkins, the essential subject of *Hamlet* is the binary opposition between evil and good, coexisting in the individual and found in the cosmos where Hyperion is brother to satyr, sprung from the same stock. Johnson (1969) expresses his delight and satisfaction on finally finding a moral purpose, both simple and profound, in a Shakespearean play. Johnson wants all of us to speak in unison with Hamlet, "The readiness is all". Eleanor Prosser (1967) has written a full book on the nature of ghost and the evil it stands for. Wilson Knight (1949) has also dwelt upon the nature of ghost, revenge, delay and other related issues. T. S. Eliot's (1932) judgment of *Hamlet* as an "artistic failure" due to the excess of emotion than justified by the facts of the play, throws light on the grounding principle of the play in the opinion of the learned critic. Bradley (1904) also is more interested in deriving a sense of "some vaster power" than focusing on other aspects which might distract our attention from this issue of prime importance. C. S. Lewis (1964) believes that *Hamlet* the poem is more important than Hamlet the prince. Stoll (1933) has focused his critical attention upon the issue of delay. The brief review constructed here on *Hamlet* amply justifies the present study and its theoretical framework.

John Wilders (1995) in his detailed introduction to *Antony and Cleopatra* has examined it from almost every angle. He begins with a reference to the dramatization of a tragic and celebrated love affair. He touches upon the legendary and extravagant status and stature of the lovers. He has focused upon Cleopatra as "wonderful piece of work". He dwells upon Cleopatra's rapid shifting from tenderness to fury and grief. Wilders views it as projection of international politics of the time, in which different contenders compete for mastery of Rome. He is also conscious of the irresistible power of Cleopatra over Antony and his dependency upon her. He does not fail to pay attention to its dialogue, language and style. He has also commented upon the violation of the unities of time, action and place by Shakespeare in this play. Wilders comes close to viewing the play from the feminist/patriarchal perspective, but he does not view the play from this angle. Dryden (1984) and Dowden (1967) have examined the play from the moral point of view. Both these critics attribute the tragic ending to the immoral life style of the protagonists. Swinburne (1909) and Wilson Knight (1965) have critiqued it as a love tragedy. Swinburne finds the play as "the greatest love poem of all the time"(318). Knight declares Cleopatra as the love "absolute and incarnate" (318). Bradley (1904) excluded the play from his study of Shakespearean tragedy for lack of consistent high seriousness but dwelt upon it in his lectures and found it inferior to the major tragedies of Shakespeare. Maurice Charney (1961) has examined the play from the perspective of imagery, especially the image of the sword. This is a good study in which the use of this image is investigated, tracing the carrier of Antony as a wielder of sword.

G. Wilson Knight (1949) declares *Macbeth* to be Shakespeare's, "most profound vision of evil, a statement of evil". For him it is a play about damnation. Similar sentiments are expressed about the play by Samuel Johnson (1969). For Kenneth Muir (1984) it is the conflict between order and disorder that structures *Macbeth*. He is also appreciative of its richness and intensity. However, Muir acknowledges the potential of Shakespearean drama to be interpreted in an infinite number of ways, reflecting its vastness and complexity. Robert Bridges (1927) views the play from the perspective of inevitability

and coherence. He contends that Shakespeare sacrificed psychological consistency to theatrical effect. A similar argument regarding Shakespeare's partiality for theatrical or poetical effect is presented by Stoll (1943) as well. Critics like A. A. Smirnov (1937) have focused upon the supernatural element of the play.

Brian Gibbons (1980) in his introduction to *Romeo and Juliet* focuses mainly upon lyricism and the sonnet like quality of this tragedy. He has also suggested the larger role of literature in effecting reconciliation, greater good, through the celebration of the power of faith and love and finally the restoration of order in the cosmos. Donald A. Stauffer (1949) has identified love and its healing power as the major theme of the play.

King Lear has been commented upon by a host of critics from the angle of its structural and dramatic weaknesses. It has also been commented from the perspective of its imagery and poetry.

The brief review of literature presented here establishes the context and the ample justification for the present study.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is based upon the exhaustive analysis of the selected plays in the light of Feminist theories and deconstructive approaches. The major proposition of the study is that Shakespearean tragedies have presented and projected women in these plays as lesser beings and negative stereotypes. The following research questions are designed to streamline the study:

- i) Are women presented as lesser and inferior to men?
- ii) Do women occupy socially and economically an equal position with men?
- iii) Are women presented as irrational and creatures of passion?
- iv) Are women presented as immoral, devoid of human values (evil) and as negative stereotypes?
- v) Do Shakespearean tragedies reinforce or undermine patriarchy?
- vi) Are women presented as fully developed human beings who can decide about their own lives?

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Women in Hamlet

There are only two female characters in Hamlet. Both of these characters are presented from the male and patriarchal perspective. Ophelia, the beloved of Hamlet is a good daughter of her father and a good sister of her brother. She stands for what Marilyn French (1982) calls the 'in-law' aspect of the feminine, thereby a woman is associated with divine. Ophelia absolutely obeys her father and brother, even at the cost of her own feelings. Laertes manifests the double standard prevalent in the sixteenth century for men and women. A man's honor is not at stake for indulging in affairs outside the institution of marriage. But Ophelia is to ruin her honor from any such alliance. She gives Laertes her word that she will keep his dictates in her memory and he himself will keep the key to it. This leaves in no doubt about the superior position of the brother as compared to the sister. Ophelia's father compares her to a woodcock which cannot fend for itself. Polonius makes it clear that Hamlet, being a man can walk with a longer tether than can be given to Ophelia. She loves Hamlet but, avoids and abstains herself from Hamlet when forbidden by brother and father. Subsequently, Prince Hamlet accuses Ophelia, and

through her the whole woman kind of faithlessness and treachery, of hypocrisy and falsehood.

Gertrude, the wife of Hamlet the King, is portrayed as a negative stereotype of a woman. French (1982) calls such women as the outlaw aspect of the feminine. Such women are associated with darkness and sexuality. They are whores and bitches. She re-marries Claudius, the bother of King Hamlet, within days of the death of her husband. It is her conduct that has pushed the Prince Hamlet to the thought of committing suicide. She wept like Niobe at the funeral of her husband, but within days enters into a new wedlock. She is portrayed as a faithless and disloyal woman. She turns her back upon the memory of her loving husband and with indecent haste and speed marries Claudius, in violation of social and religious laws and sanctions. Shocked at her conduct, her son Prince Hamlet utters his judgment against her mother, "frailty thy name is woman". Even the prince Hamlet regards her mother as the property of his father. He behaves like a typical male, reinforcing the dictates of patriarchy. He comes up with a sweeping and general judgment against women. Gertrude's right to re-marry is not accepted. Prince Hamlet calls her mother the most pernicious woman, a damned smiling villain. Nowhere else such titles and labels are given to a man for re-marriage after the death of his wife. This is nothing but the double standards patriarchy upholds and reinforces.

Later on, Prince Hamlet further condemns her mother for her re-marriage. Earlier, a father and a brother controlled the life of a daughter and a sister, now a son imposes his edicts upon her mother. Prince Hamlet the re-marriage of his mother is the violation of modesty and grace. He finds it as the disgrace of virtue and love itself. He questions the right of a mature woman to decide about her life. He does not respect the choice of her mother and wants her mother to view things from his perspective. He declares it as shameful and a gross trespassing. He forces his mother to withhold herself from her husband. This is the presentation of patriarchy in its undiluted form.

4.2 Women in King Lear

King Lear is a major tragedy by Shakespeare. There are three women in *King Lear*, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. They all are daughters of the *King Lear*. Cordelia, is portrayed as a loving daughter and a virtuous woman. In spite of her virtue and piety, she is presented as a woman who subscribes to patriarchy and patriarchal values in letter and spirit. She is not free to decide about her marriage. Her lack of tact mars her fortunes. She leaves the palace of her father without the least protest. She comes back to England to the rescue of her father. Goneril and Regan are portrayed as monsters. They are liars, hypocrites, greedy and selfish. They are morally corrupt and are loyal to no one. Even Cordelia, who apparently is almost perfect daughter and with all the good qualities, is the one that in a way is cause of the destruction of everything,. The play opens with the old king surrendering his kingdom and authority to his daughters. He asks his daughters to express their love for their father before he hands over their respective territories to them. Goneril, being the eldest, is the first to oblige. The hypocrite, cunning and false Goneril declares that she loves her father more than anything in this wide world, including life, liberty and eye-sight. She does not show any sympathy for or say any kind words to Cordelia when she is banished by their father for saying nothing, and thus offending the old fond father. Instead, she hurts her further by declaring that she deserves her present dowerless status and future possible unkind treatment from her husband, because in her opinion Cordelia asked for it. Gonrel is portrayed as cruel and ungenerous, instead of

being grateful and obliged towards her father, as claimed in her earlier speech, she points out his rashness, unstable nature, poor judgment and bad temperament (I—i---290). Now she discovers not only the imperfections of long- engrafted condition in the person of her father, but she believes that these have been compounded by his age and choleric years. She is the one who suggests to her sister that they should forge a collective front against their father. After she gets her one third of kingdom, is extremely rude, discourteous and ungenerous towards her father- king. She is critical of the king for the lack of discipline amongst his knights, who are said to be carping and quarreling every single moment. She dubs her knights as disordered and debosh'd. She accuses the knights of her father of violating the decorum and the precedence established by the class system. She offends her father to the extent that he leaves her palace and goes to live with her other daughter Regan. Regan also reveals her true self by declaring her father as infirm and ignorant of his own good self, capable of many unpredictable acts(I—ii—300). Goneril is so selfish that she finds fault with every act of her father, whom she earlier loved more than eyesight, life and liberty. She finds her nights as riotous, and the behavior of King Lear as unacceptable. She encourages her servants to be rude towards the King. In the eyes of Goneril, King is not more than an idle, old fool (I—iii—20). Goneril is also portrayed as disobedient to her husband Albany, whom she criticizes for his gentleness. She has an affair with Edmund, the illegitimate son of Gloucester, and calls her own husband, Albany, as fool. She wants Edmund to kill her husband and then become his wife (IV—VI—265). Albany calls Goneril as vile, filth, a beast (tiger), most barbarous, most degenerate, worse than head-lugged bear, a devil and finally declares Hamlet fashion:

Proper deformity shows not in the fiend

So horrid as in woman (IV—ii—60).

He further declares, "However thou art a fiend, a woman's shape doth shield thee". Edgar, after he has discovered the conspiracy of Goneril against the life of Albany, also echoes Hamlet when he utters, "O in distinguished space of woman's will!" (O limitless range of woman's lust!). At the end, out of jealousy, Goneril poisons her own sister Regan and she herself commits suicide.

Regan is not behind her sister in cruelty, selfishness and treachery. She is portrayed as a monster. She supports her husband Cornwall in humiliating Kent, the messenger of the King. She is rude and discourteous towards her father. She takes the side of her sister Goneril against their father. She has the guts to mock her father when he, on his knees, begs of her for food and lodging (II—iv—151). She calls his requests as unsightly tricks. She shuts up the door on her old father during a stormy night, without a trace of remorse. Both Regan and Goneril compete with each other in a bid to come out with the most horrible punishment for Gloucester, their host. Regan desires his immediate execution, while Goneril wants him to be blinded. Regan pulls hair from off his beard before he is blinded. She is not satisfied with Gloucester blinded in one eye. She urges her husband to pluck the second eye of Gloucester as well. Then she gets Gloucester thrown out of palace. Regan is in competition with her dear sister for Edmund as well. Now that her husband is killed, she plans to marry Edmund. But as said earlier, she is poisoned by her sister. On the death of these two sisters, Albany says, "This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble, touches us not with pity"(V—iii—230).

4.3 Place of Women in *Romeo and Juliet*

A traditional reading of *Romeo and Juliet* blames the stars (their fate) and the enmity between the Capulet's and the Montague's for the tragedy. This is what the prologue (chorus) says in the start of the play. But a Feminist reading holds deeply entrenched patriarchy and patriarchal values responsible for the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*. There are four female characters in this play. The role of Lady Montague is not very significant. Lady Capulet is a patriarchal woman. She knows and has accepted her lesser place in the household and the society as defined by patriarchy. She breaks the news of the imminent marriage of Juliet with Lord Paris, though Juliet is hardly fourteen. Patriarchy does not see the role of women outside the institution of marriage; therefore Juliet is good enough to become the wife at fourteen. The decision of marriage is taken by the father of Juliet, lord Capulet. Capulet, in the beginning, does accept and apparently give the freedom of choice to her daughter, Juliet, but when the time comes he proves himself the most tyrant father and a very relentless patriarch. Juliet herself defines her status under the strict control of her father as bondage (II—ii—160). Marriage for women is regarded as their ultimate destiny and an act of utmost honor. Lady Capulet, like other women of rank, was herself a mother at this age. Nurse's remark that women grow by men is reflective of the patriarchy and the inherent dependence of women upon men for everything (I—iv—95). Juliet is expected to approve the choice of her father and seek happiness with Lord Paris. But at the ball, she falls in love with Romeo, the son of the family enemy. She promises to become the wife of Romeo and follow him as her lord through the world. She also declares him to be her god of idolatry. This throws light on the place of women, portrayed by Shakespeare in this play, as lesser creatures. Since, she is required to accept the decree of her father on the question of marriage; she dare not raise this issue with anyone, including her mother. Here resides the only cause of this tragedy. Had she been a free human being, capable of independent decisions, she would have told her parents of her love for Romeo and her wish to marry him. The question of her secret and over-hasty marriage with Romeo, and the subsequent disaster would not have arisen. This shows the lesser position of women as portrayed by Shakespeare in this play.

After the murders of Tybalt and Mercutio, Capulet, the father of Juliet, decides the date of the marriage of Juliet with Paris, without taking Juliet in confidence. Juliet, being already married to Romeo, naturally is not in the position to oblige. She tries to seek the help of her mother. Lady Capulet, because of her own lesser position vis-à-vis her husband, dare not intervene in the territory of her husband. In the male-dominant world of this play, it is the prerogative of the husband/father to impose decisions. The reluctance to obey, earns Juliet the titles of headstrong, fool, mistress minion, baggage, a curse, disobedient wretch, a wretched puling fool, a whining Mamet. She is further threatened to be thrown out of the house on to streets to beg, starve and die in misery. Juliet kneels to her father for delay in marriage, but all she gets is the final decree that she must go to the church on coming Thursday, whether alive or dead (III—v—190). Marrying Paris, while her husband Romeo is still alive, is impossibility. She, naturally, is prepared to put an end to her life or any such desperate act to avoid marriage with Paris. But she cannot tell her father that she is already married, she knows the consequences too well.

It is in these circumstances, that she approaches the priest for that very desperate remedy, which leads to the tragedy. Apparently, confident and fortified by the stratagem of the

priest, she informs her father that she is ready for marriage with Paris. Now the same wayward and head strong daughter is reclaimed in the eyes of her father. The thorough analysis has amply shown the place of women as portrayed in *Romeo and Juliet*. Even the nurse is portrayed as greedy, fickle and foolish person.

4.4 Portrayal of Women in *Macbeth*

The play opens with three witches, who are in the middle of their spell. The witches are exaggerated and distorted form of women, turned into monsters, with special supernatural powers. Macbeth contends that they should be women, but for their beards (I—ii—45). Later, the witches call themselves as Weird Sisters (the goddesses of destiny). Even Banquo calls them as Weird Women (III---i—2). The witches are portrayed true to their name as evil doers, greedy, vicious, vindictive and inhuman. The fact that they have a definite plan to meet Macbeth, suggests that their spell is against Macbeth, and they have their further designs on Macbeth. With their spell and charms, they establish their control over Macbeth. Banquo suggests the possibility of the victim surrendering his reason as prisoner to such creatures. Macbeth repeats the words earlier spoken by the witches, while commenting on the foul weather, betraying his vulnerability to the influence of the witches. Witches deliver their predictions. The predictions are proved partially true by the messengers of the King, who bring news of Macbeth's elevation to an additional honor of Thane of Cawdor. This is the time for the birth of evil in Macbeth and he contemplates on the possibilities and implications of the predictions and their partial realization. His own ambitious nature aside, the role of witches (women) as manipulators and temptresses cannot be ignored. This brings us to the main thesis of this study that women characters are portrayed as negative stereotypes (as evil beings). Macbeth breaks the news of these developments to his beloved wife lady Macbeth, who is portrayed as the fourth witch and a monster. Macbeth is ambitious, but her ambition brooks no barriers, moral or temporal. Her speech (I—iv—45), leaves no one in doubt that she is the fourth sister to witches. She craves the spirits to fill her with direst cruelty, from head to toe. She asks the murdering ministers and the invisible spirits of hell to fill her womanly breasts with gall and to strip her of any humanly feelings, remorse and sympathy. She prays to the spirits of hell to give her strength to complete her fell purpose. She declares that King Duncan shall never go back alive from palace. Not only she herself is an hypocrite par excellence, it is lady Macbeth who teaches Macbeth to be serpent but look like a flower. She wants the business of that night (murder of Duncan) to be trusted to her. She chides Macbeth for his reluctance and hesitation. Macbeth on further thought and consideration, reins in his "vaulting ambition" and informs his wife that they will not proceed further in this business (murder of Duncan) (I—vii—31). He makes it clear that this act is neither good nor wise. But Lady Macbeth abuses him, reprimands him and challenges his manhood. Then like her weird sisters she declares that she can kill her own infant with her own hands by dashing it on to the ground, while it is still sucking upon her breasts. This is how she compels Macbeth to the murder of Duncan. It becomes very clear that women, both natural and supernatural, are portrayed in *Macbeth* as monsters, irrational creatures and the embodiments of evil. It is obvious that women are presented as negative stereotypes.

4.5 Women in *Antony and Cleopatra*

A surface reading of the play *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests that the love and tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra structures it. But the text deconstructs itself under deep analysis and reveals the patriarchal ideology it carries. The play reinforces patriarchy because it privileges the status and place of men to that of women. The textual evidence shows that whenever women are made captain, disaster is the outcome. It starts with a reference to Cleopatra as an enchantress and a promiscuous woman. She is the queen of Egypt but she is portrayed as a third rate woman. Her association and company have made Antony a woman. His career as a general and as one of the three rulers of Roman Empire is ruined. A one-time great warrior and general, is stripped of his manly qualities and leadership because he has espoused the female world of Egypt represented by Cleopatra. He has reneged his soldier's temper (resiliency) and has become a slave to a gipsy (a whore). The triple pillar of the world is transformed into a strumpet's (Cleopatra's) fool. His status of a god of war has given way to that of a paramour of a gipsy. In the manly world of Rome he earned medals for his breast, now he is surrounded by eunuchs. He has stopped taking interest in the battle formations of his army or the duties of state and is least concerned about the present or the future of the Roman Empire (I-i—35). This is the direct result of the ascendancy of the female principle and Antony adopting the female world of Egypt, which is signified by upholding and privileging personal feelings to national obligations. North (1964) also blames squarely Cleopatra for the decline of Antony. She is presented as an irrational creature and an embodiment of passion. The outcome of the final battle between Caesar Octavius and Antony is already too obvious.

Antony himself calls Cleopatra a cunning woman beyond human thought (I-ii-152). This comes from a man who is already married to Fulvia and is having a great time with Cleopatra. The text says nothing about his morals (except after Octavia returns to her brother Caesar, when Maecenas calls him adulterous) but women are condemned for their frailty in the strongest terms. Caesar calls her a whore. Maecenas calls her a trull. Enobarbus uses the crude animal imagery to describe women and their presence on the war front as the worst liability. He compares women to mares who will attract soldiers towards them. Clown contends that a woman is a dish for the gods. He adds that fifty percent of women are marred by the devils in the very beginning (V-ii-275).

Canidius is apprehensive of the fact that Antony and his officers are led by a woman. He doubts the leadership qualities of Cleopatra for being a woman (III-vii-69). He is proved right by the outcome of the war. Cleopatra is presented as the curse of Antony and the cause of the defeat in the war. Caesar Octavius, like Hamlet, comes up with a very sweeping statement against women. He declares that women are not strong even when they are lucky, and under pressure of needs the never touched virgin can compromise her chastity (III-xii-30).

Antony himself walks very casually from the bed of Cleopatra to the chamber of his new wife Octavia. Later in the play, the same Antony calls Cleopatra a foul Egyptian, triple-turned whore, false soul of Egypt. He calls her a boggler, a morsel, a fragment, who is sure to produce horns on the head of her husband because of her habit of changing partners. The marriage of Octavia is settled among the three men as a matter of state policy. She is only a small chip in the grand design of men on empires. Octavia is not consulted, only informed about the decision. She is bequeathed to Antony by Octavius. Antony is not alone with this attitude. Pompey calls Cleopatra a salt woman and

Enobarbus describes her as Antony's Egyptian dish. He at a place suggests that only women are given to weeping (IV-ii-35). Enobarbus presents Antony with new prospects because of the death of Fulvia. Antony is critical of his dead wife and calls her a shrew. Even the Fortune is said to be a woman for its inconstancy (IV-xv-45).

The waiting ladies of Cleopatra are not different from her. It is very significant that a soothsayer has predicted that the husband of Chairman will be the champion cuckold of all Egypt. No wonder she wishes to be married to three kings in a span of one morning. She also hints at giving birth to bastard children.

Towards the end of the play, Cleopatra emerges as a noble and queen-like lady who prefers death to female frailty; because she embraces the masculine values (Roman). This also privileges the male from the binary opposition of male and female, emphasizing the lower and lesser status of women. Cleopatra becomes marble-constant only when she has nothing of woman in her (V-ii-237). She also disassociates herself from the influence of inconstant moon, generally the fate of women. She has earned a place in the story told by Plutarch and Shakespeare only by giving up the world and the principle of women.

The analysis of the play *Antony and Cleopatra* in the light of deconstructive Feminism has shown that the text upholds the patriarchal values and patriarchy by presenting women and the world of women as lesser and corrupt. Antony, once the greatest prince of the world, the most sovereign emperor and a god-like figure finally comes to point where he cannot put an end to his life properly, for embracing the female world and principle. This is a last moment effort to retrieve his fame and reputation by becoming a Roman (committing suicide in the honorable Roman way). It is the tragedy of a man who gives up the world of men for the world of women and eunuchs. Even in the final victory of Rome (masculine world and order) over Egypt (female world and order) is very symbolic. It establishes the superiority of patriarchy and its values.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the texts of five tragedies of Shakespeare has proved the major proposition of the study that these texts are loaded with the ideology of patriarchy and these texts reinforce and perpetuate it. The study has also found answers to the research questions raised in beginning. The study has found that these texts do present women as lesser and inferior to men. Women don't occupy equal positions with men in society, socially, politically and economically. If they happen to occupy such positions, it implies disaster. The women are portrayed as creatures of passion and irrationality. The women are not capable to handle serious issues and challenges and because of this lack cannot be true leaders. The ample textual evidence has shown that women are presented as immoral and negative stereotypes. The women in these tragedies do not have the genuine freedom and liberty and all major decisions about their lives are taken by men without them being ever consulted.

The study has shown that the real cause of tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet* is the patriarchy's denial of freedom and the right to choose her husband to Juliet. Similarly, Hamlet's reaction to the marriage of his mother is only reflective of the operation of patriarchy. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony meets his tragic end for giving up the world of men and embracing the feminine principle. Macbeth would never have done what he did, had he not been associated with monsters and fiends in the form of women, both natural and

supernatural. Gonrel and Regan are presented as monsters, for their revolt against patriarchy. Cordelia has our sympathy and admiration because she accepts the dictates of her father without protest. To sum it up, Shakespearean tragedies perpetuate and reinforce the patriarchy and patriarchal values and women are presented as lesser beings.

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