

ESSAY

Tempest is not all fury

SYED MAQSD JAMIL

TEMPEST is not among the widely popular of Shakespeare's plays. It does not have famed characters, nor does it have drama. Caliban with his deformed body adds some degree of fancy. Prospero's daughter Miranda heightens it with the contrast of her beauty. Tempest is all about storm, shipwreck, survivors, a desolate island peopled by his master, the exiled Duke of Milan, Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and the slave Caliban. The magical character Ariel is a frequent, but not a principal player in the play, although he is the instrument of magic, which Prospero puts to work. It is a wonderful fairy tale play. The story of the wrongful deportation of Prospero, the Duke of Milan, along with his daughter Miranda. The wrongdoing is righted by raising a tempest in the sea, which brings the offenders, Antonio, the traitorous brother of Prospero, Antonio's benefactor, the King of Naples, Alonso, his brother Sebastian, son Ferdinand and Gonzales, a nobleman of Naples to the desolate island. They are laid at the mercy of Prospero; the dukedom is duly restored. The justice effected has a fairy tale ending, when Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love. Fury eases into felicity.

Shakespeare is dear to the readers for the characters he created. Hamlet, Romeo-Juliet, Macbeth, Othello and many others. Many of his plays have historical context. He adds drama to the historical facts. Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Richard the second, Henry the fifth, Henry the eighth, such plays are born. On the other side, he created plays with historical background. Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, giving us dear literary characters like Hamlet the Prince of Denmark, Othello the Moor, Macbeth the general, Shylock,

the moneylender and the tragic lovers in Romeo and Juliet. Tragic settings find favour through the ages and across the divides, because our hearts go out to fallen heroes and wronged lovers.

Shakespeare is more than his tragic plays. The popular comedies are the other parts of his genius. They do not however sum up his worth. He also wrote many plays, mixing his story with fairy tale. The characters may not breathe fury; perishing in tragic endings, or enacting comical roles, yet their substance make a useful reading. They present the fatuity of the wrongs we commit for our personal ends. A trusted counsel in wisdom, and above all the fairy tale ways of justice.

I choose Shakespeare's 'Tempest', for this reason. It tells of the genesis of a tempest when right is wronged by bad masters in ingratitude, and blind greed. The fury in the tempest of foul play grows in maturity, as the wronged waits with wisdom for it to right the wrong. I find the content in it rational; at least there is a lesson to learn from. That wisdom lends soundness to our thinking, discretion to our attitude. Prospero, the Duke of Milan was given to his books and preferred wisdom to authority. He let his brother to look after the statecraft. It was a trust granted out of inner strength. He was not a slave to his dukedom. We learn it from Caliban when he expresses in drunken candor, "First to possess his books; for without them! He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not! One spirit to command;".

Antonio, his brother with his unfettered use of office would take counsel only from his authority. Wisdom was not a book from which he would read, for authority suited his traitorous ends better. It was more useful to him in granting favours, in winning over men who suited him by advancing them, discarding those who would hold him back. His eyes beheld the prize of the dukedom of Milan.



William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's Tempest tells us that it is better served by sensible thinking, sound action, by wise and forgiving attitude of the ones who command it and triumphs. Such tempests will see wholesome and happy ending, leaving no trace of hostility.

Prospero gives a vivid description when he speaks to Miranda how he trustingly handed over the statecraft to his brother Antony, "My brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio- / I pray thee, mark me that a brother should/Be so perfidious. He, whom next thyself/Of all the world I lov'd, and to him put/The manage of my state; as at that time/Through all the signories it was the first, /And Prospero the prime duke, being so/ reputed/In dignity, and for the liberal arts/Without a parallel, those being all my/study-/The government I cast upon my brother...."

He goes on to describe how Antonio wickedly perfected his hold on the dukedom. The narration of Antonio's falsehood, driven by an ill-taught mind brings on a touching tale how his well-meaning trust was violated in full measure. He goes on to tell, "Being once perfected how to grant/ suits, /How to deny them, who t' advance, and who/ To trash for over-topping, new created/The creatures that were mine, I say, or/chang'd'em, /Or else new form'd'em; having both the /key/Of officer and office...."

We behold how the dukedom is usurped from Prospero by Antonio with the support of the King of Naples, Alonso. The violation of Prospero's trust by Antonio was most cruel. It can drive even the forgiving heart to ruthless vengeance. That is the natural order of the world. The wise however leash their vengeance and follow a course suited to a wholesome purpose and propitious time. Vengeance, an unleashed fury can doom the cause and the wrong is never righted. Shakespeare gave Prospero's cause a metaphorical format with the fairy tale acts of a spirit called Ariel. Thus we often see how the divine order of things unfold like a miracle. The spirit Ariel acts to the bidding of Prospero. He raises a tempest in the sea, putting the ships of Alonso and Antonio carrying

Sebastian, Ferdinand and Gonzales to great buffeting by the waves and the winds. The irony of the situation is aptly described by a boatswain when he cuttingly responds to Gonzales, "None that I more love than my-/self. You are a counsellor; if you can com-/mand these elements to silence, and work/ the peace of the present, we will not hand a/ rope more. Use your authority; if you/cannot, give thanks you have liv'd so long, / and make yourself ready in your cabin for/the mischance of the hour...."

Miranda's tender heart aches to see the plight of the ships in turmoil. She beseeches her father, "If by your art, my dearest father, /you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. /The sky, it seems, would pour down stink-/ing pitch,". The just Prospero assures her daughter, "The direful spectacle of the wreck, which/touch'd/The very virtue of compassion in thee, /I have with such provision in mine art/So safely ordered that there is no soul-/No, not so much perdition as an hair/Betid to any creature in the vessel". There is an ideal in it that malevolence need not follow in the wake of vindication. Prospero tells his daughter with virtuous confidence how he was wronged in the foulest manner. The ships have not been harmed at the least and the offending noblemen from Naples and Milan are safe on the island. He treats Ferdinand with gentleness when he learns that Miranda is deeply in love with him. Not a malice betraying his wronged heart, he speaks to Ferdinand with benign philosophy "We are such stuff/As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd; /Bear with my weakness; my old brain is/troubled; /Be not disturb'd with my infirmity, / If you be pleas'd, retire into my cell/And there is repose"

The goodness of wisdom has a crowning

moment when Prospero welcomes Alonso to his cell, speaking courteously, "First noble friend, /Let me embrace thine age, whose honour/cannot/Be measur'd or confin'd." He professes not to take any action against his enemies that lie before his mercy. We get a glimpse of the kindness of his heart. He forgives all. Outwardly he was stern and relentless in the pursuit of his just cause, like the tempest he raised, threatening in its fury; yet he was humane to his core. Ferdinand gives words to it, saying, "Though the seas threaten, they are /merciful; /I have curs'd them without cause." It may appear like the other worldly course, where only the angels tread, forgiving in triumph has the noblest of colours in human beings. Shakespeare constructed Caliban to focus the ugliness of an untaught mind without the grace of wisdom. It is Caliban who paid the final tribute, saying, "Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise/hereafter, / And seek for grace"

Tempest is the story of all ages. Although, they may not have fairy tale element in them, for that is the exclusive creation of the genius of Shakespeare. Human societies have seen and will see more of the foulest wrongdoing. The right will be dispossessed, trust will be violated, and wisdom and the sensible will be scorned. Every wrong will have a seed of natural order striving to right it. A tempest may languish or may rise to overpower. Shakespeare's Tempest tells us that it is better served by sensible thinking, sound action, by wise and forgiving attitude of the ones who command it and triumphs. Such tempests will see wholesome and happy ending, leaving no trace of hostility. The world will have its tempests; it can do well with its Prosperos.

BOOK REVIEW

Re-writing history

Rahman Chowdhury's play *Mohabidroh O Shamrat Bahadur Shah* focuses on the greatest tragedy of Indian history

ALAMGIR KHAN

BENGALI books written elaborately on the 1857's Great Rebellion in India are not many. Among a few of these worth mentioning there are Promothnath Bishi's novel *Lalkella* (The Red Fort), Utpal Dutt's play *Tota* (The Cartridge) and, in recent time, Rahman Chowdhury's *Mohabidroh O Shamrat Bahadur Shah* (The Great Rebellion and the Emperor Bahadur Shah), published by the Bangla Academy in 1995. For its diction, analysis of history and depiction of characters, this play stands out from the recent Bangla plays in our country.

The Great Rebellion in 1857, which is only a Sepoy Rebellion to the English historians, was the first national revolt against British colonial rule. It shook the base of the British reign over India.

Two unsuccessful rebellions against British rule occurred at Baharpure and Barackpur where the mutineers lost their jobs. Then on 10th May, 1857, the first successful mutiny broke out at Meerut cantonment. The Indian sepoys refused to bite open the cartridge of the new enfold rifle. Because the cartridge was rumored to be greased with cow and pig fat. The former is sacred to Hindus and the latter is unclean to Muslims. The prophecy spread by Fakirs, a Muslim rebel group, that India will be ruled by a foreign power for a hundred years, gave spiritual support to the mutineers at the centenary of the Battle of Plassey. Having killed some British officers there one and a half thousand sepoys on horseback travelled the whole night to Delhi. On 11th May morning they reached the Red Fort, Emperor Bahadur Shah's palace.

The play starts here in Bahadur Shah's chamber with the Emperor, himself a poet, discussing poetry with the great poet Mirza Ghalib of his court. Bahadur Shah was a titular emperor and pensioner of the East India Company. As all the power rested with the company, the eighty-four-year-old Mughal emperor took consolation from poetry and music. The company even did not bother to guard his palace with enough soldiers.

After reaching the Red Fort the mutineers wanted to meet the emperor and demanded talks with him. But Bahadur Shah refused them. They killed the guards, entered his court by force and prostrated themselves before the trembling emperor. They declared him emperor of independent India and wanted his approval of the mutiny. It took some time for the emperor to overcome his hesitation and regain self-control. Thus, in that stormy moment of history, Bahadur Shah stood at the helm of the first national revolt of India.

The rebels had all the moral support from the people at large. But there always remain some to pull the wheel of history behind. In the next scene we see some conspirators such as Nawab Zaiuddin, Moulvi Rajjab Ali, Hakim Ahsan Ullah, Banian Shiu Prashad and Banian Devi Singh discussing things against the mutineers. There is

no usual villain artificially imposed in this drama. Every conspirator's role is set against the backdrop of historical course of events. Each of them presents the reason of his own role. For instance, Banian Shiu Prashad says that in the company's rule there is law and individual's right is protected which was absent under the Mughal. Hakim Ahsan Ullah, a selfishly clever man, says, in one sense rightly, that everyone serves his own purpose.

In the fourth scene the playwright has exposed the conflict in the heart of Zinat Mahal, the youngest wife of the emperor. On the one hand she deeply hopes for the independence of India and on the other she is worried about the future of her son Zoan Bakht as the next emperor. So once she



shows outright loyalty towards her husband and thus towards the rebels. But later, as a concerned mother, she tries to reach a secret deal with the company. In the next scene we see Prince Mirza Mughal, commander of the army, represent the decaying Mughal dynasty with all its false pride and moral downfall. Inexperience, loose morality and wasteful life-styles of the princes lead to the mutineers' continued defeats. The number of the rebel soldiers increased day by day but they failed to win against a small numbers of company's soldiers. The difference of power between the Mughal and the company is clear when Major Srigram says, "Dear Prince, the days of swords are gone. Now war is done with guns and can-

nons. Learn how to shoot, Sir. Since now the sword will only decorate your wall." Here comes the brave, experienced and skillful military officer Bakht Khan, head of the Berily force. He along with his large strong force reached the palace of Delhi on the 2nd July and was appointed as head of the army by the emperor replacing Mirza Mughal. This rekindled the glimmer of hope among the mutineers, but made the prince unhappy and envious. So a conspiracy by them ensues against him. They plan to set Ghaus Mohammad, head of the Nimokh force, against Bakht Khan.

This split within the rebel force is exploited in full by the traitors like Hakim Ahsan Ullah. The traitors even try to spoil this struggle for independence by provoking communal riot between Muslims and Hindus. In addition to the acute financial problems among the rebels, relationship between Ghaus Mohammad and Bakht Khan turns bitter and bitter. To prevent the approaching victory of the company's force, all the opposing rebel groups tried to reunite themselves for an all-out attack for the last time. But by then it was too late.

Company's force crushed the rebels' last futile attempts and marched victorious into the Red Fort. One hundred fifty million Indians lost at the hands of a paltry forty thousand British soldiers. Despite having all the sincerity and the deepest kind of patriotism, the rebels embraced defeat instead of victory for their internal conflicts, narrow self-interest and jealousy against each other. The mutineers headed for Lucknow to reorganize and keep fighting against British rule. But the fate of India's next ninety years under the British was sealed there that day at Red Fort.

In last scene the sorrows of Zinat Mahal, Bakht Khan and Bahadur Shah sadden our hearts deeply. Yet above all we see Bahadur Shah shines not only as a great emperor, but as a great man too. In spite of all his faults Bakht Khan is the epitome of patriotism. And in Zinat Mahal cries the heart of Mother India.

Though for writing a historical drama the dramatist need not be true to history in all aspects, Rahman Chowdhury has followed the historical events almost in detail except in some dialogues. But it is not a mere drawing of those past days. The objective of the playwright has been to show the reasons of failure of the Great Rebellion. That he has done by focussing on the clashes of ago between characters, their sorrows and joys and individual passions.

On June 30, 1857 after fifty days of the mutiny's eruption at Meerut, Karl Marx, while in London, wrote, "The rebels at Delhi are very likely to succumb without any prolonged resistance. Yet, even then, it is only the prologue of a most terrible tragedy that will have to be enacted." And this prologue is also a most terrible tragedy in itself, Rahman Chowdhury's *Mohabidroh O Shamrat Bahadur Shah* is quite heartfelt and remarkable in its depiction of that unforgettable event in India's history.

ANDALIB RASHIDE

ONLY years ago the issue of adolescent reproductive health came to the forefront. The big thrust came after the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development that shifted the focus of health and family planning to a unified reproductive health approach. South-South Centre, Bangladesh brings out a publication on Adolescent Reproductive Health based on a dialogue it had organized to identify the challenges of adolescent reproductive health in a resource poor country like Bangladesh. The publication develops around a keynote paper delivered at the dialogue and draws from the subsequent discussions and debates on it.

Adolescents are defined differently by different organizations. According to World Health Organization, adolescents are the population between ages 10 and 19 years with the 'characteristics of biological development from the beginning of puberty to sexual and reproductive maturity, psychological development from cognitive and emotional traits of childhood to that of adulthood, and emergence from childhood state of dependence to socioeconomic independence'.

There is no shortcut route to reach adulthood escaping adolescence. Adolescent population in Bangladesh constitutes around 23 per cent of total population numbering nearly 30 million. Currently 48 per cent of the adolescent population are female and 52 per cent male. With 20 per cent of total population below 10 years age group plus 23 per cent adolescents totaling 43 per cent of total population will now determine the health and population structure of the country in the years to come.

Adolescent population growth rate is much higher at 4.3 per cent compared to 1.7 per cent for total population. Marriage rate is almost double for the people of this age group while contraceptive prevalence rate for the adolescent is 20 per cent lesser than the national average. This huge size of population will certainly exert high population momentum effect on the increment of total population. The challenge lies not only in containing population growth but also in ensuring health of this mammoth size of population in a world that faces the worst pandemic of AIDS.

75 per cent of the rural girls in Bangladesh are married before reaching observing their sixteenth birthday. Mothers in 15-19 age group have a share of 20 per cent of the total births. The mortality risks for children born to teenage mothers are substantially higher than that of adult mothers. Having survived infancy and early childhood diseases, they have the lowest mortality rates of any age group. An adolescent faces the highest health risks during the pregnancy. The apparent security and immunity of adolescent boys and girls often leave them in a state of no-need-to-take-care as they can well do it for themselves. AIDS has overwhelmed the conti-

ment of Africa and Asia is quickly getting nearer to the African situation. The AIDS pandemic has disproved the myth of immunity of young people. Half of the adolescent population in Africa is HIV positive and the rate is higher for Botswana. Unless there is miracle savior the adolescent population will continue to pay for the complacency of their parents. The risk of death may be two to four times higher depending on the expecting adolescent's health and socioeconomic status.

In Bangladesh 20 per cent births to adolescent women are mistimed and a considerable number of conceptions are unwanted. Mortality rate for adolescent mothers is higher than the national average. Children born to young mothers are



Adolescent Reproductive Health in Bangladesh: A Challenge

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more likely to die early as both mothers and children are highly risk prone. Because of early-age childbearing 19 per cent of births are exposed to higher risk of death. Antenatal, neonatal and postnatal cares for adolescent mothers are very low. Adolescents have appallingly inadequate sexual education. One study suggests that the vast majority of them (83 per cent) have never heard of Sexually Transmitted

Diseases (STDs) and AIDS. Another report suggests that about 95 per cent of the young people do not know how to play sex safe.

The publication contains a touchy statement of an adolescent girl named Shamima: 'I can remember the horrifying experience and the trauma that I faced on seeing the first menstrual blood. I screamed, I cried, and I groaned. I had no idea of what it was. I had access to no one who could give me a brief on the sudden flow of this reddened discharge. Am I going to die then? Only an illiterate maidservant came to my rescue. She assured that the same thing had happened to her when she was of my age. That was not a one-shot problem, but a regular monthly feature. I was lucky that I got at least one maid to tell me a few secrets in her own way and according to her own perception. She gave me an incomplete and misleading picture of the process of menstruation. But I know after passing a few years as an adolescent girl, most of the girls of my age faced the same trauma, many of them become worse off with the beginning of menstruation and the same fear continues for years'.

She embarrassed the policy makers and development practitioners by asking whether they had ever given their daughters in puberty any prior idea on menstruation and whether they had ever created a friendly environment that allowed the daughters to ask questions on sex and sexual behavior. The problem remains, as the silence is not broken and talks on sex and reproduction remain a taboo.

Professor Abul Barkat, who wrote the keynote paper, maintains that adolescent reproductive health is one of the least explored, widely talked about and most sensitive global issues. But its knowledge base is at the embryonic stage in Bangladesh. It reveals from his essay that the challenges are multifaceted and inter-woven. The first challenge demands identification of the best ways and means to ensure adolescent friendly services in the socio-cultural setting of Bangladesh. The second one is that of identifying what needs to be done to increase the coverage efficiently. The third one poses a question as to what is needed to be done to overcome the barriers and thereby ensure creation of a conducive environment which will accelerate the process of maximizing RH services utilization by the adolescents. It is encouraging to see that government policy document recognizes the need for treating adolescent as distinct and priority group requiring immediate intervention, both clinical and non-clinical.

The publication emphasizes on the introduction of priority reproductive health services for adolescents. This is an important documentation in the area of reproductive health. The publication is supported by UNICEF. No price is tagged with it probably with the intention that professionals in adolescent reproductive health areas will receive it free of cost from the publisher.

PROFILE

Percey Bysshe Shelley: An Ineffectual Angel

A K ROY

ONE month before his 30th birthday in 1822, Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned in a sailing accident on the Mediterranean. Back in London, the Gentlemen's Magazine harrumphed: "We ought as justly to regret the decease of the Devil." A far different post-mortem came from Lord Byron, who called Shelley "the best and the least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison".

Byron's view prevailed. By tearing out passages from diaries and journals and keeping the lid on their less savory memories, Shelley's intimates created a marzipan myth to be consumed in Victorian parlors. The poet, so the story went, was

only nominally a seducer, defacto bigamist and flaming revolutionary. In reality he was, as Matthew Arnold wrote, "an ineffectual angel."

This first large life of Shelley since 1940 offers a "darker and more earthly, crueller and more capable figure." Richard Holmes, a British journalist, believes that if the writer was "essentially unstable," he was also the most premonitory radical theorist of his age. During a short life, Shelley either advocated or babbled in vegetarianism, communal living, free love and the redistribution of wealth. Bisexuality as well as home sexuality intrigued him, and he championed women's rights. When war was still glamorized, he raged; "Man has no right to kill his brother. It is no excuse that he does so in uniform; he only adds the infamy of

servitude to the crime of murder."

Writing to older correspondents, Shelley blanched demurely at the thought of class uprisings. Yet when deeper thoughts were goaded out of him, they bore bloodstains. In 1819, after demonstrating workers in Manchester were annihilated in the Peterloo massacre, Shelley roared: Rise like lions after slumber In unvanquishable number- Shake your chains to earth like dew Which in sleep had fallen on you- Ye are many-they are few.

What possessed Shelley? Holmes has tried to find the answer by retracing a path trampled flat by idolaters. After a pampered, precocious childhood

filled with adoring sisters, gothic novels and the promise of an inherited baronetcy. Shelley was thrust into a Dickensian boarding school. At Eton, his refusal to kowtow to senior students earned him the nickname "Mad Shelley." There followed University College, Oxford, which gratefully expelled young Percy Bysshe, after a scant six months, for writing a broadside on atheism.

The pamphleteer promptly ran off with 16-year-old Harriet West brook, daughter of a London tavernkeeper. With Harriet came an older sister, eager to protect this new family tie with the aristocracy, plus Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Shelley's best friend at Oxford. The odd menage was shattered several years later when Shelley met Mary Godwin, daughter of the genteel radical, William

Godwin. He eloped with her and her stepsister, Claire Clairmont-generously inviting Harriet to join them as a "spiritual" sister. She refused. Shelley and his new entourage set out on years of restless travel, ending with the drowning that Holmes suggests, Shelley half courted.

The time expertly snared the incendiary decades into which the poet was born, when the French Revolution and the writings of Rousseau encouraged an apocalyptic break with the past. Holmes revives and justifiably praises Shelley's neglected political pamphlets and stoutly defends the poetry against its critics (F R Leavis claimed that Shelley's "one accepts the immediate feeling and doesn't slow down to think").

Shelley preached the abolition of class distinc-

tions but treated debts to mere tradesmen with aristocratic disdain he wallowed in sensuality but complained prudishly that a woman's body is a "lump of or ganized matter" impeding access to her soul. Mary Shelley recognized her husband's divided nature best and captured it in her novel Frankenstein.

Part of Shelley can be seen in the Faustian, idealistic doctor and part in his monster, an innocent but violent outcast from the society of men. Holmes cannot quite put these contradictory pieces together-but then neither could Shelley.

The writer is a District and Sessions Judge currently working on deputation as Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.