

STUDY MATERIAL FOR DEGREE II, ENGLISH (HONOURS), PAPER –III

AS YOU LIKE IT AS A SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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The drama '*As You Like It*' is a romantic comedy written by William Shakespeare. This play has been written in the second phase of his literary career in which Shakespeare wrote some outstanding comedies like, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* and others. This phase almost extends from the year 1595 to 1600. This phase depicts an elevation in the artistic ability of Shakespeare. A better handling of plots and a deeper insight into human nature made these plays stand unique.

The play '*As You Like It*' is marked with amusement and laughter accompanied with some occasional moments of sombreness and seriousness. '*As You Like It*' is a fine blend of romantic and realistic notions. If on one hand the theme of love is dominating the entire play then on the other hand the conflict between brothers makes the play real. There are moments of conflict and betrayal but they are short lived as they are replaced with fun, mirth and enjoyment of the characters. In short, '*As You Like It*' as a romantic play has the love story of Rosalind and Orlando as the main plot. The love affairs of Celia and Oliver, Phebe and Silvius and Audery and Touchstone form the sub-plots of the play.

The play begins on a note of conflict where Orlando, the hero of the drama, shows his resentment on being deprived of proper treatment by his elder brother, Oliver. He has not been given the share of his inheritance according to his father's will.

Oliver, Jaques and Orlando are the three sons of deceased Sir Roland de Boys. The play opens with a conversation where Orlando is seen complaining to Adam, the old and loyal servant of their family, about the injustice done to him. He complains that his elder brother, Oliver has left him untrained and neglected. He has been denied even of the minimum facilities that a gentleman should get. This callousness of attitude shown by Oliver aggrieves Orlando. As a result, he decides to revolt against the injustice. The opening scene is marked with a fight between the two brothers. Adam stops them. Oliver gets angry and secretly plans to punish Orlando, his younger brother. Meanwhile, Oliver is informed about Orlando's decision to challenge the court wrestler, Charles. Charles in his good will requests Oliver to discourage Orlando from participating in the challenge or else it may turn fatal for him. Charles always played to crush his opponent. Oliver, in turn, very efficiently incites Charles by calling Orlando 'the stubbornest young fellow of France; full of ambition and envious emulator of every man's good parts, a secret and villainous contriver against me his natural brother'. Charles gets convinced and promises Oliver to give Orlando his due.

The match was to be held in the court of Duke Fredrick. Duke Fredrick is the younger brother of Senior Duke. He has usurped the elder brother of his dukedom and has also banished him. The senior Duke, Ferdinand, has moved to the Forest of Arden with his loyal courtiers. Here, Duke lives far away from the pretentious court life, amidst natural surroundings and experiences the sweet uses of adversity.

Meanwhile, Orlando defeats the court wrestler, Charles and wins the appreciation of two young ladies, Rosalind and Celia. They are cousins. Duke Fredrick is also impressed and praises the young man for his excellent performance but soon after knowing that Orlando was the son of Roland de Boys, his enemy, he starts detesting him. On the other hand, Rosalind is spell bound by the charm of Orlando and loses her heart at the very first sight. She even presents Orlando with a necklace as a reward of gallantry.

Celia is the daughter of Duke Fredrick. There is a strong bonding between the two sisters, Celia and Rosalind. Rosalind, the daughter of the banished Duke, was not sent to exile with her father due to Celia who was not ready to accept separation from her loving cousin. The love between the two sisters is true and sincere and is in sharp contrast to that of the two set of brothers who lack any sincere feelings. As Rosalind was sharing her feelings of love for Orlando with Celia she was interrupted by Duke Fredrick's furious entrance. The Duke very harshly commanded Rosalind to leave the palace within ten days or else she will die. The act of banishing Rosalind reveals the treacherous attitude of the duke. His hatred and villainy are all revealed. 'Thou art thy father's daughter; there's enough' was the reason given by the Duke to Rosalind for her banishment. The Duke was irked by the fact that Rosalind's presence reminded the people of her banished father. Celia tries to convince her father but fails in her efforts. She also decides to accompany her cousin in exile. With these words, 'To liberty and not to banishment' Celia moves with Rosalind to the Forest of Arden. The expedition was, however, very dangerous and challenging for the two young girls. Rosalind describes the difficult situation in the following words,

'Maids as we are to travel forth so far!

Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold'.

Rosalind and Celia decide to disguise themselves and move safely to the Forest of Arden.

Rosalind disguises herself as a young man and calls herself Ganymede. Celia also dresses herself as a country girl and calls herself Aliena. They are accompanied by Touchstone, the court jester.

Orlando also moves to the Forest of Arden with Adam who tells about Oliver's wicked plan to kill Orlando.

So, Orlando and Adam escape the place to save their lives. Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone proceed towards a new life. Touchstone is a court jester whose witty remarks not only produce laughter but also ridicule the folly of men.

Duke Fredrick is enraged to find Celia and Touchstone missing from the palace. He blames Orlando and threatens Oliver to find Orlando or else he will lose his estate. Celia and Rosalind (Ganymede) move to the forest and settle amidst the pastoral surrounding. They were to lead a simple and rustic life of shepherds. The setting of Forest of Arden is natural and idyllic as compared to the court life that is full of complexity. In words of Duke senior the life of forest is free from pomp and show of court life. No doubt, there are difficulties in the forest as 'penalty of Adam, the seasons' difference; the icy fang And churlish chiding of winter's wind,it bites and blows' but has no flattery of the cunning courtiers. Thus, life in the forest is difficult but has truth and simplicity, whereas the court life is artificial.

Later, Orlando also reaches the Forest of Arden with Adam. Here he meets Jaques, the great melancholic character of the play. He is one of the courtiers who had accompanied the Senior Duke to the Forest of Arden in his banishment. According to Jaques, everything is melancholic and sad.

The presence of Orlando is soon felt due to his love poems hanged all over in the forest. The trees in the forest were carved with passionate love verses for Rosalind. Rosalind takes pleasure in reading the verses but keeps her identity unrevealed to Orlando. She continues with her disguise as Ganymede. She like a ‘saucy lackey’ takes immense pleasure in teasing Orlando and wooing him. Unaware of the disguise, Orlando pours out his feelings honestly to Rosalind. This act of Rosalind creates an environment of laughter and amusement. The thrill of the act fills the audience with sweet and gentle humour.

In the forest there are other lovers present. Silvius is madly in love with Phebe but Phebe refuses to accept his love and harshly rejects him. She, in turn is fascinated by the charming young shepherd, Ganymede. She is unaware of the truth. This also leads to mirth and humour. Touchstone is seen wooing the simple maid Audrey.

The Forest of Arden is an ideal and peaceful place. Gradually, all the characters of the play gather here. This is a place where all misunderstandings are resolved. It is also a place of realization and reconciliation. The good accomplish in their pursuit and the bad get transformed.

Oliver comes to forest where he was saved by Orlando. Orlando kills the lioness that was ready to attack Oliver. Orlando gets wounded in the encounter. Inspite of the tyranny done to Orlando, he decides to save his brother. Oliver realises the goodness of his brother and finally promises to mend the damages done to him.

Oliver and Celia meet each other and fall in love at first sight. In a sudden development they decide to marry each other. Thus, apart from the love story of Rosalind and Orlando, stories of other couples also run parallel to the main theme.

After Oliver, Duke Fredrick also moved to the Forest of Arden. He is enraged to find everyone moving towards the forest. He decides to punish his elder brother and his followers. As he reaches the outskirts of the forest he meets a hermit whose words bring a miraculous transformation in the character of Duke Fredrick. He realises his own mistake and restores the dukedom to his elder brother, Duke Ferdinand. Later, he renounces the worldly pleasures. The transformation of Oliver and Duke Fredrick relieves the tension in the play.

Rosalind promises to solve the problem with the help of magic. After shedding her male attire, in private, she appears in her real self. This revelation comes as a surprise, joy and relief to everyone, especially to Orlando and Duke Senior. The play ends happily as all the couples are united. Orlando and Rosalind, Celia and Oliver, Silvius and Phebe, are married.

Thus, the play ends on a happy note. All the problems are solved. The tyranny of the bad brothers end as they relinquish their wickedness.

As You Like It, as a true Shakespearean comedy ends on a happy note. The careful development of plots, the superb handling of characters, the exquisite creations of fools, portrayal of pastoral environment and use of beautiful songs contribute to the richness of the play. All these features help in creating a perfect environment required for comedy.
