

STUDY MATERIAL FOR DEGREE-II (HONS.), ENGLISH, PAPER-III

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A Character Sketch of Orlando

Orlando: Important Character

Drama: As You Like It

Playwright: William Shakespeare

Age ; Elizabethan Age

Genre: Comedy

Orlando is the hero of the drama, 'As You Like It'. He is the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys (deceased). Oliver and Jaques de Boys are his brothers. He is possessed with the qualities of a gentleman. He is generous, polite, noble, brave and chivalrous. He is handsome and proud of his birth. Orlando resembled his father both in his features and nature. He inherited the qualities of a perfect knight from his father. Orlando's kind heart and good nature make him popular and lovable among the people. He truly epitomizes the Elizabethan concept of the ideal manly virtues. He was having all the admirable qualities in him. Oliver, the elder brother of Orlando, hated him and desired to see his end but at the same time admitted about the goodness of Orlando. He says:

...I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned; full of noble device; of all sorts enchantingly beloved; and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised.

No doubt, Orlando was a man of gentle behaviour. He strongly opposed any kind of injustice and oppression.

Orlando remained deprived of all his rights due to the tyrannical and unjust attitude of his elder brother, Oliver. He had kept Orlando ill-nourished and uneducated. He treated him worse than the ox and horse. He revolts against his elder brother who violated the law of the land and had kept him neglected. Orlando, who represents his father in his spirit, is unable to resist this callous attitude of his brother. In a conversation with Adam, the old and loyal servant, he complains and says:

He lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the place of brother, and as much as in him lies, mines by gentility with my education. This is it, Adam, that grieves me;.....

Oliver is a man of negative qualities. He is wicked, jealous, uncivil and capricious. He refuses to give Orlando his share and also humiliates him. Orlando has a deep sense of self respect and concern for the reputation of his family. He strongly condemns his brother's

misbehaviour when he calls him a villain. He retorts against this attitude of his brother saying that:

I am no villain; I am the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys. He was my father; and he is thrice a villain that says such a father begot villains.

Orlando is a brave and fearless young man who does not hesitate to participate in a wrestling match against the strong and ferocious wrestler, Charles of Duke Frederick's court. Charles had defeated three wrestlers. Orlando's courage and his strong determination is seen when he refuses the request of two sweet ladies, Rosalind and Celia to leave the combat. Celia makes him aware of the strength of Charles and requests him to give up and save himself from the peril. She tries to counsel and convince Orlando saying, 'Young gentleman, your spirits are too bold for your years. You have seen cruel proof of this man's strength; if you saw yourself with your eyes; or knew yourself with your judgement, the fear of your adventure would counsel you to a more equal enterprise.' Orlando remains undeterred and requests the two ladies for their good wishes and convinces them that even if he loses the match there would be no shame as he was known by none and if he is killed there is no one to lament. Though, desperate and frustrated his ways were attractive and fascinating. Orlando wins the game as he defeats Charles, the great wrestler. The encounter between Orlando and Charles is of great significance. His bold and energetic ability is revealed. Duke Frederick praised Orlando and calls him gallant youth but soon resents as he knows that Orlando was the son of Rowland de Boys, whom the world considered honourable but to him he was an enemy. He would be happy if Orlando was the son of some 'another father'. Orlando very proudly and boldly affirms that:

*I am proud to be Sir Rowland's son,
His youngest son-and would not change that calling
To be adopted heir to Frederick.*

Rosalind, spell bound by the miraculous performance of Orlando, gives him her chain. Orlando who had defeated Charles was overpowered by passionate love for Rosalind. He says to himself:

O poor Orlando thou art overthrown !

Orlando is a kind-hearted and a helpful man. He pities on the condition of Adam who accompanies him to the Forest of Arden. Orlando along with Adam escaped from Oliver's house as he plotted to kill Orlando. Adam after walking for a long time refuses to move further because of weakness, tiredness and hunger. He carries Adam to a safe place and promises to bring food for him. He requests Adam to 'Live a little; comfort a little, cheer thyself a little.....For my sake be comfortable; hold death awhile...'. He encourages him with hope and moves in the forest for food. He boldly threatens the banished Duke and his company who were preparing for meal. He stops them from eating. However, the polite words of Duke Senior makes Orlando apologise for his rudeness and he tells the reason for this desperate act. His civility and courtesy is displayed when he regrets his act. Very soon

Orlando and Adam join the Duke in the feast. The Duke welcomed Orlando, the son of Rowland de Boys with these words of appreciation:

*Be truly welcome hither: I am the Duke
That lov'd your father*

Orlando is not only possessed with the attributes of a gentleman. He is a true romantic lover who possesses patience, hope and true passionate love. He falls in love with Rosalind and remains devoted to her. He composes love poems for her and hangs them on the tree. He is madly in love with her and calls himself 'love-sick' who will never be cured. He tells Rosalind about himself, '*I am he that is so love-shak'd' I pray you tell me your remedy*'. He earnestly and sincerely expresses his love when Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, a young shepherd, teases him for pleasure. He says, '*Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love.*' He is a sincere and a true lover who faces all the tests that Rosalind puts him in. Orlando has been perfectly portrayed by Shakespeare. If he is strong and gentle, he is weak, docile and submissive in love. Orlando finally succeeds in love and is united with his beloved Rosalind. Orlando's true love is also revealed in his conversation with Jaques, a melancholic and philosophical character in the play, who tries to mock his love poems. He does not appreciate any of his comments and replies, '*I pray you mar no more of my verses with reading them ill-favouredly.*'

Orlando is merciful and kind. He believes in forgiveness. His act of magnanimity is evident when he saves his wicked and cruel brother, Oliver who was the main cause of his misfortune. He fought the hungry lioness and saved him. He was even wounded. Though, seeing Oliver in danger, Orlando decides to leave him to die but the human kindness in him was stronger and he saved him. Oliver's words speak about Orlando's greatness;

*But kindness, nobler ever than revenge,
And nature, stronger than his just occasion
Made him give battle to the lioness*

The immediate impulse, sometimes, did make him impatient but he resolves everything due to the quality of self control. His morally strong and uprighteous nature, his modesty and sensibility helped him to take right decisions.

Thus, with strength and weaknesses, Shakespeare has created Orlando as a perfect and balanced character. He is a combination of gentleness, love, sincerity, kindness and magnanimity. His self control and civility makes him strong and superior. He is active and independent. His intelligence and wit stand in sharp contrast to the melancholic and philosophical Jaques. He is cheerful and hopeful.

With all these qualities, Orlando is a perfect embodiment of Anglo-Saxon virtues.
