

THE TEMPEST

Notes on 'The Tempest'

T.S.Chandra Mouli

William Shakespeare is a master craftsman who mesmerised audience of his times with the themes that enthused them, employing a language that transcends all norms of evaluation to cast him into a mould. His plays conform to the prevalent conditions of Elizabethan theatre, suited to the tastes of the audience regaling them beyond description. Themes chosen by him carry an abiding appeal, defying tyrannical constraints of time and space. The plots have been sustained by exquisite poetic extravaganza that captivated audience of all times and climes. Many passages are often quoted and innumerable poetic expressions in his plays are used as proverbs. His plays can be related and relished by people across the globe even in the Twenty First Century. Universality is cardinal to his works that have immortalised him. He has liberally borrowed themes and expressions from diverse sources.

One can explore the heart of Shakespeare through his work only. The Tempest, one of his most popular plays belongs to the last phase of his career, which is characterised by an all pervasive tolerance and kindness, hallmarks of a mature person who has witnessed vagaries of life. Scene of action shifts from courts and palaces of his earlier works to an enchanted island. A consummate playwright, Shakespeare took liberty with language and the poetic lines cast an enthralling magic spell in consonance with the charms and power unleashed in the island by Prospero, the protagonist in the play.

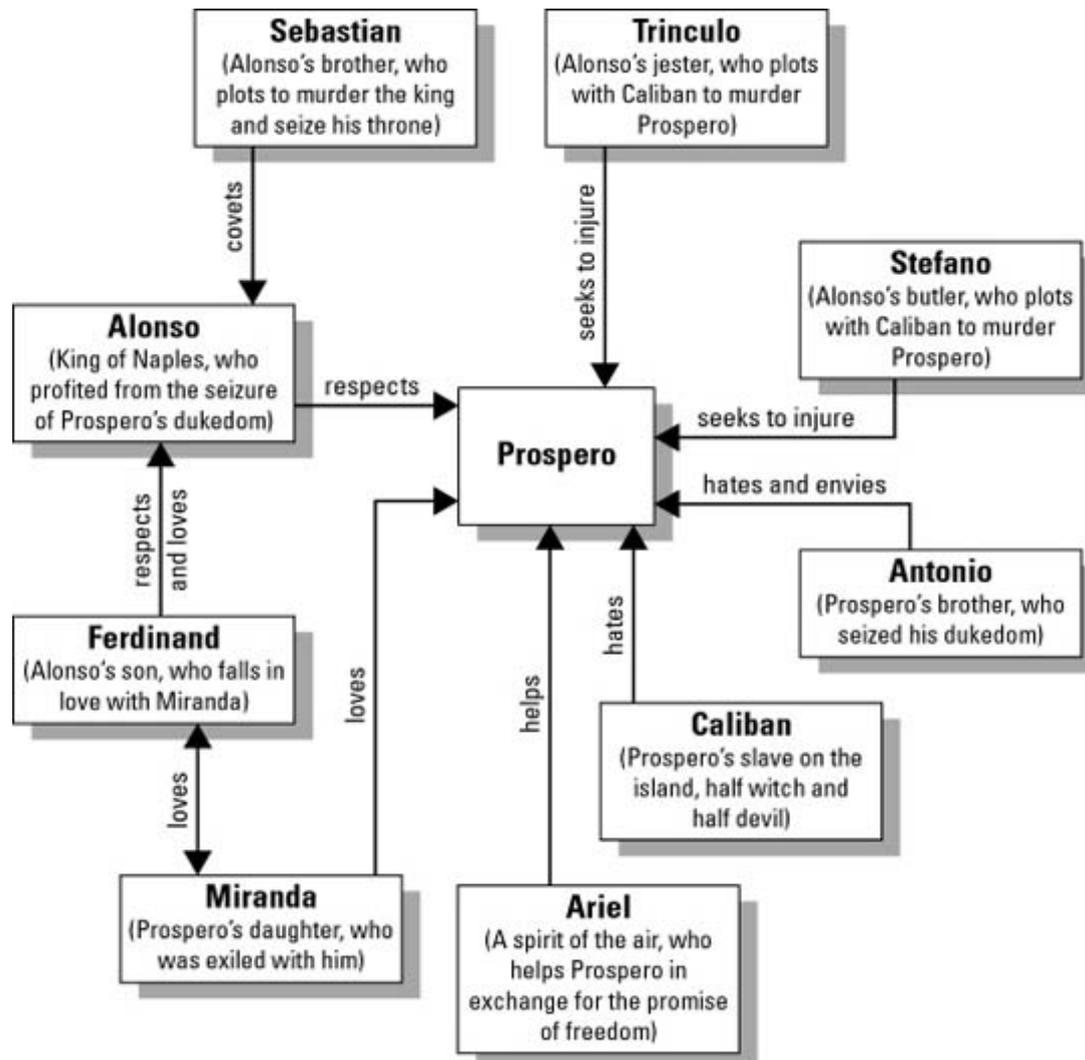
The Tempest may be termed as the last play of Shakespeare, where he bids adieu to the thunderous applause of his audience. Prospero at times reminds one of Shakespeare the master craftsman. 'Revenge,' 'power' and 'forgiveness' make the plot outstanding and one cannot but agree with Prospero when he says:

".....We are such stuff As dreams are made on; and our little life Is rounded with a sleep."

As in most of his plays, the opening scene strikes the key note of the play. A fierce storm rages functioning as antimasque for the real masque presented subsequently. Conflict an essential part of any society manifests itself in this play that carries various strands like hegemony, patriarchy, quest for identity, resistance, rebellion that is quelled with an iron hand by Prospero besides reconciliation and forgiveness that are so vital to establish harmony in society for the survival of humankind. Freedom, confinement, betrayal, love and compassion may also be construed as various themes one comes across in the play. 'Quality of mercy' that is 'twice blessed' is reiterated in this play as a way of life to ensure

peaceful and humane environment. Several aspects of Postcolonial Studies can be traced in the play, though it was literally written for Elizabethan audience. This is where genius of Shakespeare astounds audience even in the Twenty First Century.

Character map furnished here helps in knowing about the characters and understanding the plot of The Tempest.



Colonisation seems to be the major concern as the Elizabethan age was characterised by exploration of seas and finding new lands to settle and establish European Colonies there. Subjugating the natives of the land in addition to introducing educational patterns in a condescending manner suited to perpetuate coloniser's rule was a ploy used then. Prospero represents the spirit of the age in educating Caliban and keeping him in confinement. Power has its own share of prominence to reign as was done by him. Further, he has magical charms at his disposal to cast a spell and direct action as desired. He is at the centre of all action in the play. Ariel, a spirit set free by Prospero remains loyal and lends a hand in softening his master's attitude in forgiving all those who harmed him. Caliban remains

adamant and vindictive till the end. Miranda is the only lady character in The Tempest peopled by men of various hues and proclivities. Caliban who feels betrayed by Prospero, stages a rebellion and attempts rape of Miranda which finds echoes in Raj Fiction of Twentieth Century. That's the charm of a Shakespearean play!

Topics for Discussion:

1. Give an account of Shakespeare's craftsmanship.
2. Is Prospero an antagonist or Protagonist?
3. Do you like Ariel or Caliban? Justify your response.
4. What are the features of the play that appeal to 21st Century audience?