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Search of Happiness and Wellness through Literature with Special Reference of William Shakespeare

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Abstract

With unsustainable development, growing materialism, increasing mechanization, grasping techno-savvy sensibility, choking emotionlessness, poisonizing intolerance, misguiding cynicism and illusive-pleasure-seeking mentality in the globalized and commercialized modern world we have lost the faith in 'Nature', humanity and social identity. Consequently, we have become the subject of physical and mental illness at the early age when the full energy should guide us for the better health. To acquire proper health the human beings have tried different ways from the time immemorial. Yoga is one of the ways to find balanced health; on one side it increases the physical capacity by focusing breathing habits, and on other side it transforms us in the world of mental peace by enriching concentration acumen. It provides tools to find out the constant happiness and eternal wellness. Literature also plays the vital role to understand where the real happiness lies and what the perfect wellness is. In this respect where yoga takes the help of different 'moves' and 'postures'; literature depends on 'words' and 'emotions'. Both of them adopt the technique of 'transformation' from one world to another. As far as yoga is concerned it takes us into the 'inner psyche' from the 'outer identity' through the process of self-realization

while literature motivates us to delve deep into the 'higher reality' from the 'outward experiences' via the employment of the imitative aestheticism.

The present paper intends to scrutinize the lessons through happiness and wellness, whether physical or mental as it is, induced by English literature with special reference of William Shakespeare in respect of his approach towards human life, his understanding of human problems and his efforts to provide possible solutions. This research paper also concentrates to bring forth the immediate impact which he provides on the world by his universal characterization and harmonious equilibrium of happiness and wellness generated by his dramas.

Keywords: Yoga, Literature, Happiness, Wellness, William Shakespeare, Self-realization, Literary bliss.

Introduction

Happiness is the most desired goal of human life through which human beings endeavour to pass this unintelligible world full with 'doubts, disputes, distractions and fear' (Arnold, 1850). The celebration of 'International Day of Happiness' on 20 March, the establishment of University of Happiness, running of courses for wellbeing and happiness, organization of festivals and festive seasons, and opening of meditation centre in abundance at world level are those things which suggest that human beings are in search of eternal and constant happiness and wellness. Different thinkers and writers have tried to find out the meaning, nature and ways of happiness in accordance to their own moods. **Aeschylus** accepts: 'Hold him alone truly fortunate who has ended his life in happy well-being.' (Quotes, 2014) **E. M. Forster** believes that happiness in the ordinary sense is not what one needs in life, though one is right to aim at it. The true satisfaction is to come through and see those whom one loves come through (Quotes, 2014). John **Buchan** is of opinion that the combination of peace and joy makes happiness (Quotes, 2014). **Nathaniel Hawthorne agrees:** 'Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidentally. Make it the object of pursuit, and it leads us a wild-goose chase, and is never attained. Follow some other object, and very possibly we may find that we have caught happiness without dreaming of it.' (Quotes, 2014) George Sand opines that happiness lies in the consciousness we have for it not its future promises (Quotes, 2014). George Elliot says: 'One has to spend so many years in learning how to be happy. What a miserable augury for the progress of the race and the destination of the individual if the more matured and enlightened state is the less happy one!' (Quotes, 2014) **J.R.R. Tolkien has strong faith in the thought:** 'If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.' (Quote, 2014)

Brooding over the 'happiness' as a concept Bertrand Russell, **an English philosopher, mathematician, and Nobel Prize recipient for Literature in 1950** is of opinion that the closing yourself off only leads to sadness and boredom. **If we focus only on what is missing in our lives, on our problems, failures, and fears, we lose enthusiasm for life. In return, if we focus our attention outward, life becomes simpler.** These external aspects of life are made up

of many different realities, such as, knowledge, other people, work, hobbies, etc. (Andrew, 2017) All of these things make life more interesting and full and brings happiness. In his seminal essay 'The Road to Happiness' he remarks that:

"The whole subject of happiness has, in my opinion, been treated too solemnly. It has been thought that men cannot be happy without a theory of life or a religion. Perhaps those who have been rendered unhappy by a bad theory may need a better theory to help them to recovery, just as you may need a tonic when you have been ill. But when things are normal a man should be healthy without a tonic and happy without a theory. It is the simple things that really matter. If a man delights in his wife and children, has success in work, and finds pleasure in the alternation of day and night, spring and autumn, he will be happy whatever his philosophy may be. If, on the other hand, he finds his wife hateful, his children's noise unendurable, and the office a nightmare; if in the daytime he longs for night, and at night he sighs for the light of day--then what he needs is not a new philosophy but a new regimen--a different diet, or more exercise, or what not. Man is an animal, and his happiness depends upon his physiology more than he likes to think. This is a humble conclusion, but I cannot make myself disbelieve it." (1952)

William Shakespeare's literary creation is epitome of true ways to achieve happiness and wellness. He frees the mind as well as heart simultaneously. Shakespeare, the most celebrated dramatist of English and known for his universality, desires to create a literary world in his dramas and poetry to lead the people who are 'poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more'(1606, IV, iv, 23-25) towards health, happiness and harmony in the world which creeps 'in this petty pace from day to day,/ To the last syllable of recorded time;/ And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/The way to dusty death.' (1606, IV, iv, 19-24); for the life which is 'but a walking shadow' and 'a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing.' (1606, IV, iv, 25-27) He makes efforts to redeem the human beings who are captivated in web of the complexity of the universal question of 'to be or not be' whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, /Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, /And by opposing end them?' (1601, I, ii, 56-60) William Shakespeare has been successful in his motives that is why he is praised for his knowledge of the human heart; superb poetry; esthetic cunning in his disposition of the action; theatrical skill; ability to create living worlds of people while himself remaining (Daiches, 2004, p.246) "Like the god of creation within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence; indifferent, paring his fingernails".(Johnson, 1765) John Milton, a Puritan poet of English remarks in his poem 'On Shakespeare' that Shakespeare is beyond of worldly honour and even kings can not achieve the same:

*Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die. (1630)*

The answer of how Shakespeare achieves this atemporal and spatial identity in creating nearly 1297 characters in his dramas without being biased, and in becoming writer of without boundaries of nation and culture lies in the John Keats' coined phrase 'negative capability' which means 'the ability of the individual to perceive, think, and operate beyond any presupposition of a predetermined capacity of the human being.' Keats has all praises for Shakespeare in his description of 'negative capability':

"I had not a dispute but a disquisition with [Dilke](#), upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which [Shakespeare](#) possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrallium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration." (1817)

Employing his 'negative capability' William Shakespeare confirms that the real end of human life is to be happy and the search should not be made for it outside because 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars but in ourselves that we are underlings.' (Caesar, 1599, I, ii, 80) 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' (1601, I, iv, 167-8) He seems to be of opinion that happiness should not be sought under other's perspectives because 'how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes.'

(As You Like It, 1599, IV, ii, 48) Further Shakespeare remarks that it is nothing else but only thinking which brings forth happiness or sadness in us because 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.' (1601, II, ii, 259)

William Shakespeare seems to be of opinion that there are certain social things which provide joyfulness among which are- unfulfilled desires 'Love sought is good, but given unsought, is better.' (Twelfth Night, 1601, III, i, 154); pure laughter 'O Lord that lends me life, Lend me a heart replete with thankfulness! With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come.' (1592, I, i, 19-20); to be content 'My crown is called content, a crown that seldom kings enjoy.' (1596, III, i, 62); not to be envious to others 'I am a true laborer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm.' (As You Like It, 1599, III, ii, 78)

It is also ample clear that Shakespeare suggests that forever thinking of unhappiness is one of the obstacles in achievement of wellness, whether physical or mental because 'There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord: she is never sad but when she sleeps; and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and waked herself with

laughing.’ (1598 II, i, 321-5); or ‘I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad and to travel for it too!’ (As You Like It, 1599, IV, i, 25-7) That is why Shakespeare is crystal clear in his view that the social company has always been source of happiness so ‘How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping?’ (1598, I, i, 27); and ‘We came into the world like brother and brother,/And now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another.’ (1598, V, i, 438-441)

Concentrating on human nature and its different shades as hurdle in achieving the happiness and wellness Shakespeare’s four great tragedies are exemplary masterpieces of human psyche. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is ‘the tragedy of moral sensitivity in a wicked world, the tragedy of the idealist come suddenly face to face with reality, the tragedy of imagination betraying its owner.’(Daiches, 269) Hamlet’s ‘innocent world is shattered by the marriage of his adored mother to the uncle who has succeeded his hero-worshiped father to the throne which in any case rightly belongs to Hamlet himself.’ (Daiches, 269) Hamlet can do nothing but brood and indulge in his festering imagination, and before meeting his doom at last by Laertes’ rapier he kills Claudius in surge of anger. Here in the play Shakespeare wants to convey that procrastination is always a hurdle in path of happiness and especially when he tries to find happiness through eyes of others.

Exploring the paradox of ‘good and evil and the irony of evil being bred out of innocence’ (Daiches, 273) Shakespeare in his play *Othello* ‘concentrates on a domestic issue and produces the most relentless and the saddest of his tragedies.’ (Daiches, 273) The hero of the play Othello kills his beloved wife not out of jealous rage and suspicion but for the sake of his moral universe to save his cause of soul which becomes the reason of his sadness and demise. The play reminds us that any person can not get happiness and wellbeing if he becomes slave of other’s commands. For being alive happy soul one needs to control his anger and suspicion.

Shakespeare’s play *King Lear* is a play known for its symbolic pattern of imagery and Shakespeare’s handling of images of sex, nature, astronomy, order; and his ‘paradoxical counterpointing of symbols of light and dark, of sight and blindness, of knowledge and ignorance, of good and evil.’ (Daiches, 276) Shakespeare shows that happiness and sadness are two aspects of human life; one should try to find out the balance between them which can be only achieved through suffering. In this case Lear begins to see the difference between what man needs as a biological organism and what he wants to sustain his human dignity. Here the play designates that suffering is the greatest teacher of the self-knowledge which is a lesson only William Shakespeare can impart.

O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars

Are in the poorest thing superfluous.

Allow not nature more than nature needs,

Man’s life is cheap as beasts.....(1605, II, iv, 170)

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is ‘a profound dramatic presentation of the progress of evil within a human personality’(Daiches, 280) in which the greed prevails for the crown, the symbol of the ultimate earthly ambition, of something beyond the grasp of ordinary man. As soon as the murder of King Duncan is committed, Macbeth realizes that he has lost his sleep forever which

symbolizes his ill-health and sordid condition of his mental status. The loss of ‘the great means of refreshment and renewal’ (Daiches, 281) in *Macbeth* is expressed-

*Methought, I heard a voice cry, “Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder Sleep,”-the innocent Sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the revell’d sleeve of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.* (1606, II, ii, 36-40)

Lady Macbeth’s belief in that the ‘sleeping and the dead/ Are but as pictures’ (1606, II, ii, 55-56) reflects her mental burden due to her catalyst role in murder. Although the well designed and executed murder provides them their desired fulfillment, they lose their happiness and social identity- Macbeth as ‘gentleman on whom I have an absolute trust’ (1606, I, iv, 12) and Lady Macbeth as ‘our honouerd hostess’. (1606, I, vi, 11) This inner conflict generates the psychological illness in form of ‘hallucination’ in Macbeth and ‘somnambulism sleep-walking’ in Lady Macbeth. In the play Macbeth’s inability to wash his blooded hands: ‘Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood/ Clean from my hands?’ (1606, II, ii, 58) is coincided in Lady Macbeth’s expression-‘Here’s the smell of blood still./ All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.’ (1606, IV, i, 45) Through the play Shakespeare highlights the fact that the materialistic gains do not issue happiness, and only bears mental diseased sordid pains.

In the conclusion it can be pointed that William Shakespeare is prominent dramatist who has written the plays not only to be performed before the ‘groundlings’ and ‘lords and ladies’ for literary bliss but to bring before the whole mankind the ‘eternal note of sadness’,⁴³ and its possible solution in ‘self-realization’ and ‘pure laughter’. He clearly suggests that harmony between mind and heart is the real pathway to lead the happy and healthy life. Whoever loses the balance of these contrary forces actually becomes the subject of ‘sordid doom’. Shakespeare’s message to the world lies in his humane curiosity about man and his nature, and his objectivity of the artist through which he makes us to understand that human life is a mixture of joy and agony, of light and darkness, of gains and loss, and of fulfilled and unacquired; one who finds pleasure in both situations will be owner of ‘constant wellness.’

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