A Study of Relationship between Father and Daughter in Shakespeare’s OTHELLO

Abstract

Relationships have been playing a crucial role throughout history. One of the most important roles is the relationship between a father and daughter. The idea of writing the research paper is to expose and examine the complex and provocative relationship between the father and daughter. This paper will highlight the difficult and challenging process with its psychological conflicts. It will show how father and daughter challenge the traditional family model in conflict with ruling philosophy of life. The present research paper is a witness of the conflicts between father and daughter in two important conflicts: the political and emotional conflicts. It will also flash how father-daughter pair undergoes with political and emotional conflicts. The present research paper is also the mark of great discussion regarding society in Shakespeare’s time, the family and marriage in that period. By assuming the role of father and daughter, this paper explores new light on complex and compelling relationship between fathers and daughters.

Key Words: Relationship, Conflicts, Traditional, Emotional, Political.

Introduction

The aim of proposed research paper is to examine the challenging relationship between father and daughter. It is a universal fact that there was a great dominance of male in Shakespearean society. The father or the head of the family was the decision maker in those days. The daughters and sons had to follow their instructions and should do what was suggested by the father. It was very complex that the daughter had no chance to think separately. In those days, daughters are perhaps the greatest victims of a patriarchal family and Elizabethan daughters were no exception. But, there were some facts in Shakespearean tragedies where the daughters challenge to the traditional patriarchal family issues and made their own decisions. In Shakespeare’s ‘Othello’, we come to know that the heroine of the play does not follow his father’s idea and got married to Othello, the man of her own choice. Actually, in those days, it was very much strict that the father or the head of the family chose husband for a daughter and the daughter did not have their own choice. But, writing this research paper does not intend to lead the traditional male formation of Renaissance but to challenge it. Here, the researcher has taken only one drama of Shakespeare ‘Othello’ and by flashing the light over the character of Desdemona, her behavior with her father, her marriage with Othello, the research has taken a chance to challenge a patriarchal system of Renaissance in England.
Fathers and Daughters in Renaissance England

In Renaissance England, the relationship between parents and their children was very different than what we know today. In modern society, this relationship is an ever changing one; parents have to be different things for their children as they grow up, be it a teacher, confidant, a friend, and even a disciplinarian. In Renaissance England, the parent child relationship was based on the fifth commandment, which stated, “Honor thy father and mother” but most importantly was “honor thy father.” England at this time was a patriarchal society and, “Daughters are perhaps the greatest victims of a patriarchal family and Elizabethan daughters were no exception” Prospero and Miranda, the father and daughter in William Shakespeare’s The Tempest, are an example of a relationship between a father and daughter in Renaissance England, however they were slightly different from the norm of their time.

During this time in England, the father was the head of the household and his wife and children were to answer to him. “A woman’s status depended upon that of her husband, or if she remained single, upon that of her family.” A Girl during this era was always dependent on a male figure. It was most likely her father until she was married then it became her husband. Everything was based on the male line and girls were treated as inferior beings within the household because they were essentially being raised to be good future wives.

In this male centered society, women were held at a lesser status, and always had to answer to her father. A man had complete control over his family; they were considered his property to do with as he pleased. His sons inherited this lands and titles, but his daughters were sold off to live in another man’s household when they married. Boys were educated to take over for their fathers; girls were taught skills to help them run their own households and please their husbands. Fathers chose their daughter’s husbands for them, which usually had nothing to do with love, the concept on which marriage is based on today.

Women in Renaissance Time

In Shakespeare’s age, Kemp claims, the accepted women’s roles were to be a daughter, sister or a mother. Duties of women were closely related with the household and family. Their purpose was to keep the household in appropriate state, to give a birth to the children and to bring them up.

In the Elizabethan times, everything was in hands of men: property, heritage and power and the most importantly, the power over women. The ideas of women’s roles were quite different in the Renaissance from what they are today. In the era of Shakespeare, submissiveness and obedience towards the male members of the family were characteristic of women; whether to a father or a husband, in a case of fatherless daughter even brothers were to be obeyed. This situation is well reflected in the words of John Knox, who stated that “Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man.” Furthermore, as Kemp observes in her book Women in the Age of Shakespeare, women were perceived as inferior. But some of them had seen themselves as exceptions to this general rule. For instance, Queen Elizabeth I was the opposite of the majority’s expectations. She did not marry because it would mean a submission to her future husband and
thus she would lose her power, which was not easy to be achieved even for a woman of her standing. However, this exceptional perception of women was not common.

The generally accepted social position of women in that era was that of housewives. Women were there to take care of the household and they were absolutely dependent on their male relatives. They were not supposed to work or even to keep a business, but again there were some exceptions and Kemp argues that women sometimes “could run business as femme sole”, but these were discouraged by the society, the male fellow tradesmen and by laws.” Access to education was very limited; women of lower rank were educated in practical subjects related to the household management. Though girls from richer families often had private tutors who educated them in subjects important for fitting into a higher society or court such as music and singing, this kind of education was primarily aimed at making the girl more attractive for her suitors and helping her to get a rich husband. We can observe this phenomenon of education in some of Shakespeare’s plays where the daughters were taught by tutors, e.g. in The Taming of the Shrew, in which Baptista is looking for tutors for his two daughters, or The Tempest, where Miranda is educated by her father. However, “women were absolutely excluded from universities.” It was not appropriate for a woman to be too educated.

**Relationship between Desdemona and Brabantio in Othello**

Renaissance period is the mark of male presentation and Shakespeare’s ‘Othello’ is the mark of domestic tragedies. Here the researcher has tried to show the relationship between father and daughter. The researcher is not in mood to show obedience nature of Desdemona by taking the reference of the play Othello but the researcher has made a mark and has drawn attention how Desdemona challenges Patriarchal ideology of Renaissance instead of obeying blindly.

In the tragedy Othello, the conflict between father and daughter starts at the point at which Desdemona has secretly married Othello. In marrying Othello, she leaves the sphere of her father’s control and power. Dreher suggests that this fact creates identity crises for Desdemona as well for her father.

The conflict between Desdemona and her father does not develop through the play. It appears from the beginning of the play and it will have consequences in terms of individual deaths. Given these considerations, Desdemona has divorced her family and country, rejecting traditional stereotypes of the good woman in that time. She defies the patriarchal world to affirm her love for Othello.

When Brabantio came to know that her daughter Desdemona got secretly married to a Moor named Othello, he was never ready to accept Othello as Desdemona’s husband. As a father, he thought that her daughter should obey each and everything suggested by him. Moreover, he thought that he must have the right to choose the husband for her daughter. But, Desdemona instead of asking her father’s permission, she secretly got married to Othello, a man of her choice. Brabantio was surprised to think that how Desdemona could love to a black Othello. He complained to Duke and accused on Othello for deceiving her daughter. Then the duke called Desdemona where she herself announced that she has chosen Othello as her husband and she has complete trust on him. When Brabantio heard these words from Desdemona’s mouth, he was completely
shocked and suspected whether Desdemona chose Othello as her husband or Othello, that Moor deceived her beautiful daughter, Desdemona. And the confusion remains the same till the end of the play.

**Conclusion**

At the first point of view, when we read the play and try to judge the relationship between father and daughter, we feel that Brabantio treats Desdemona as her child and it is supposed to say that Brabantio takes extra care of her daughter. That is why when Brabantio came to know Desdemona’s marriage to Othello, he was not happy and blamed on Othello for deceiving her daughter. Brabantio is the representative of patriarchal system of Renaissance where all the rights were reserved in the hands of father. But, in the play ‘Othello’ when Desdemona married to Othello and when Desdemona herself declared that she has chosen Othello as her husband, it was not quite bearable for Brabantio. Here, Desdemona broke tradition of Renaissance. Instead of obeying her father’s ideology, she married to Othello. It is therefore assumed that Desdemona slapped to her father and made him realized that she is not a puppet. In simple words, we can say that Desdemona challenges to the patriarchal ideology of Renaissance and took the decision of her life in her own favour by choosing her own husband.

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