

**Subject: ENGLISH**

**Class: B.A. Part 11 Honours, Paper-111[DRAMA]**

**Topic: Shakespeare's Comedies: An Analysis**

**Lecture No:128**

**By: Prof. Sunita Sinha**

Head, Department of English  
Women's College Samastipur  
L.N.M.U., Darbhanga



## **Shakespeare's Comedies: An Analysis**

Shakespeare's comedies have stood the test of time and till today continue to enthrall and entertain audiences worldwide despite our idea of humour being different from the idea of humour in Shakespeare's time. He wrote about 16 comedies and his major comedies were written in the 1590s, that time in English history when the professional public theatres were just flourishing. The main theme of Shakespeare's comedies was love. It was usually about the

separation and re-unification of lovers and disputes among various characters for example families like that of Rosalind and Orlando, Benedick and Beatrice. As mentioned earlier Shakespeare's comedies differed from his tragedies and histories when it came to plots. 'Mistaken Identity' is one of the plot elements that is commonly found in his plays. This could be either because of mixed-up twins or clever disguises as seen in 'As You Like It' where Rosalind disguises herself as a man and Celia as a shepherdess to hide in the Forest of Arden. Shakespeare created such characters and situations in his comedies that are funny and also loved and appreciated by the public but at the same time were critics of society. For example, Feste, Touchstone and King Lear's fool. In his plays the fools help realize who are the actual fools in reality. And not all of the fools are fools, like Speed in 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' is very quick and witty. Because according to Shakespeare answering something completely different to what question is asked is a great source of laughter. In some of

Shakespeare's later comedies his fools seem to become wittier and more sarcastic like Lance and Bottom. Apparently the 'full of life' characters who make his plays even more amusing and hilarious are Falstaff, Touchstone and the other jesters, fools and larger than life characters. Another major aspect of Shakespeare's comedies is 'complex plots'. And with that several intertwining plot lines like stories of different people in a funny way to keep the audiences guessing and surprised. Eventually the plot is straightened out.

### **Conventional plot elements in Shakespearean comedies:**

- Happy ending, usually involving marriages between the unmarried characters
- Light-hearted tone
- Tension between Apollonian values (reason, control and abstinence) and Dionysian values (such as desires, wildness and abandon)

- Separation and re-unification, eg. lovers who overcome obstacles and re-unite in harmony
- Mistaken identities and deception
- Disputes between characters
- Complex plot with several, intertwining plot-lines
- Heavy use of comic devices
- Comic language full of clever puns, metaphors and insults
- Country setting which is often idealized
- Main theme: love
- Gender mix-up and disguise (men dressing as women and vice versa; ie. male )
- Frequent use of improbable, fantastic, or supernatural elements
- The best comedies often contain a philosophical thematic undercurrent

### **Frequent plot structure in Shakespearean comedies:**

1. Introduction of main character(s)
2. Tragic Event
3. Journey (physical or self-discovery or both)

4. Reconciliation
5. Resolution
6. Happy Ending

The climax of the play most often occurs in the third act. The final scene has a celebratory feel with declarations of love.

### **Recurrent characters in Shakespearean comedies:**

- Young lovers that struggle to overcome the difficulties created by parents, society etc.
- A clever servant
- The fool
- The drunk
- The characters are often stereotypes, so the audience can maintain distance and laugh at them

\*\*\*\*\*

By:

**Prof Sunita Sinha**

Head, Department of English  
Women's College, Samastipur

L.N.M.U. Darbhanga

Mob: 9934917117

E mail: [drsunitasinha@gmail.com](mailto:drsunitasinha@gmail.com)

Website: [www.sunitasinha.com](http://www.sunitasinha.com)