

Subject: ENGLISH

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

**Topic: TWELFTH NIGHT -SIGNIFICANCE
OF ACT ONE**

Lecture No:168



By: Prof. Sunita Sinha

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

TWELFTH NIGHT

SIGNIFICANCE OF ACT ONE

**PROVIDES CONTEXT OF THE PLAY AND GIVES
BACKGROUND TO THE ACTION/STORYLINE**

- We learn that Orsino is the Duke of Illyria, a historical ancient area opposite Italy, in the Balkans
- We are introduced to the fact that Orsino is in love with Olivia.
- Viola has survived a shipwreck where she believes her twin brother Sebastian is drowned
- Viola knows of Orsino.

- We meet Sir Toby Belch, uncle to Olivia, and his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek who also wants to marry Olivia.
- Viola has disguised herself as a man.
- Viola reveals herself to be in love with Orsino, even though she is to be his representative to Olivia to win her heart.
- Olivia is depressed and even her clown cannot cheer her up.
- Malvolio is revealed to lack any humour.
- Olivia, on hearing Viola's words, seems to be falling in love with Viola (whom she believes to be a man).

BEGINS PLOT

- Orsino declares his love for Olivia, though seems to be more in love with the idea of love.
- Viola has been shipwrecked and decides to disguise herself as a man and enter Duke Orsino's service as she has heard good things of him from her father.
- She believes her brother to have drowned.
- Olivia has no interest in Orsino.
- Sir Toby decides to promote Sir Andrew as a suitor to his niece Olivia.

- The development of closeness and trust between Viola and Orsino is very clearly revealed.
- Viola is sent to woo Olivia on Orsino's behalf.
- Olivia, believing Viola to be a man, starts to fall in love with Viola.
- Malvolio is introduced and the hints of his own self-love are suggested.

INTRODUCES KEY CHARACTERS

- Orsino is established as the Duke of Illyria. While he claims to love Olivia, as he does not mention her name until further into his speech. It becomes apparent that Orsino is more in love with the idea of being in love than with Olivia herself. His immediate trust and bond with Viola is also shown, which prepares for the development of their relationship, for later in the play.
- Viola is introduced as an intelligent beautiful woman. It is clear that she has fallen in love with Orsino, while mourning the presumed loss of her twin brother. She uses words in a clever way, full of puns which appealed to the audience of Shakespeare's time.
- Olivia is eventually introduced in Scene 5, after being mentioned in the previous three scenes. While others think of her as a recluse, she is shown to be strong-willed and clever in her wordplay. She is more complex than others think, possibly using her 'mourning' to deter the advances of suitors, such as Orsino. She is also attracted to the intelligence and youthful beauty of

Viola, whom she believes to be a man. This also suggests a form of narcissism which will be developed by many of the characters throughout the play.

- Malvolio is introduced as a person who dislikes fun and laughter; though we are only revealed a part of this aspect of him in Act I. He is a cold character.
- Feste, the clown, a contrast to Malvolio is introduced and the dislike between Feste and Malvolio is introduced.
- We are also introduced to Sir Toby, who carries much of the comic element of the play. He revels in pleasure and self-gratification. He too is shown to have selfish motives and reflecting the ideas of festive energies.
- Sir Andrew also is a comic character, almost the second half of a comic duo with Sir Toby. He is described by Maria as ‘a very fool’, and is used as a figure of fun.

ESTABLISHES CENTRAL THEMES AND ISSUES

- Excess is a theme which ties to the title of ‘Twelfth Night’. The play reflects the idea of passions and in Act I, Olivia is described as having an excess of mourning, while Orsino wishes an excess of music. Orsino seems to love the idea of love to excess. Of course there is the obvious excess of food and drink which consumes Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.
- Love and self-love is a theme in its own right in ‘Twelfth Night’. Orsino’s passion for Olivia is more about him being a lover. Malvolio is described as having a self-love and importance.

Olivia herself is more concerned with image and beauty than actual love. Her mourning is seen as almost self-obsessed and indulgent.

By:

Prof Sunita Sinha

Head, Department of English
Women's College, Samastipur

L.N.M.U. Darbhanga

Mob: 9934917117

E mail: drsunitasinha@gmail.com

Website: www.sunitasinha.com