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us the first striking evidence of Shakespeare's extraordinary power of bestowing an unimpeachable and fascinating individuality on ideal reproduction of our human life. Shakespeare was the greatest of poet dramatists because of the universality of his genius.



her clear vision and her intellect. Among the characters, Shylock is the one figure that stands forth as an anti-thesis to every other that he comes in contact with.

The Merchant of Venice illustrates two contrasted and predominantly emotional and intellectual characters — the man of heart represented by Antonio and the man of brain or intellect represented by Shylock. This basic conflict is resolved and a possible tragedy avoided by the intervention of Portia who combines in herself both intellect and emotion.

Antonio is all heart and love for Bassanio, his friend, "I think that he only loves the world for him", say Solanio. His purse, his person, his extremest means lie unlocked for Bassanio's use. Apart from this friendship Antonio has no interest in life. On the altar of friendship he is ready to lay down his life. As against Antonio, the man of heart, is Shylock, predominantly the man of intellect and indomitable will. Just as Antonio has dedicated his life to the service of friends, so has Shylock dedicated all his energies to revenge. Portia is more than a match for Shylock in point of intellect and emotional force and lenity. So she is able to avert the tragedy!

Shakespeare's insight into human nature was profound. His sensitive imagination ranging over all times and places, created nurslings of immortality? He was the greatest of poets because he was gifted with a more profound insight into the truth of men and things with deep imagination and creative power.

Thus The Merchant of Venice gives

with Gratiano's fierce jets of wrath and fiercer jets of mirth — is hardly surpassed in tragic power anywhere. The Merchant of Venice is a monumental instance of Shakespeare's greatness in plot-construction.

"The Merchant of Venice is a romantic comedy verging on tragedy. It presents a variety of situations, tragic and comic. It is admittedly the most popular among Shakespeare's comedies. It was staged eight times in the very year of its production being the most dramatic among the comedies of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's tragi-comedy remains the finest example of such a form in English literature. The sadness of Antonio strikes the key-note of tragic and the note of tragedy deepens as the story advances till it reaches its climax but at long last it passes into happiness for all but Shylock. Shakespeare has interlocked both the elements with superb skill and this interlocking adds a great charm of change, colour and variety to the play. We are transferred from the sadness of Antonio and the hatred of Shylock to the gaiety of Portia, to the mingled mercy and justice of her noble nature.

The characterisation of the drama is also excellent. The melancholy of Antonio is contrasted with the mild riotousness of youthful Gratiano — the only character whose light-hearted mirth is never crossed for a single moment by a sad thought. Portia is the magnet of universal attraction and the pivot of every kind of romantic interest aroused in the course of the play. She dominates the casket scene, as well as the Trial scene and the Ring-episode by her beauty commanding grace, high bred airy elegance penetrative wisdom, lovely wit, charm of manners

Write notes on ① B.A-I(S), English

The Merchant of Venice

Theme and Title

by William Shakespeare

The Merchant of Venice owes its popularity to the universality of its theme, to wonderful structure of its plot, to the sublimity of its tone and to its poetry. Some of these qualities are to be found in Shakespeare's other comedies as well but in none are they so harmoniously combined into single whole as in 'The Merchant of Venice'. There are so many dramas of Shakespeare as 'Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Merry Wives of Windsor, Comedy of Errors, Tempest, Cymbeline, Macbeth, The Winter's Tale etc.; but none of these plays combines height and depth, experience and wisdom, matter and manner, soul and substance, fused into a complete artistic whole, so enjoyable, so thrilling, so pure in tone and so splendid in diction as The Merchant of Venice. The play itself bears evidence that it was written at a time when Shakespeare had attained, by observation and experience, the highest use of his powers as a playwright, when his faculties, as poet and philosopher, were approaching their grand maturity, it has been judged that 'The Merchant of Venice' is one of the earliest productions of Shakespeare's middle period, and this indication agrees well with the external evidence which would assign it to his thirtieth year. For descriptive power, the opening scene of Antonio and his friends is not easily rivalled and can hardly fail to live in the memory of anyone having an eye for such things. The Trial scene with its tugging vicissitudes of passions and its hush of terrible expectation now ringing with the Jew's sharp, spiteful snaps of malice, now made musical with Portia's strains of eloquence, now holy with Antonio's tender breathings of friendship and dashed from time to time