

Misguided Literature is a Bad Precedent to the Society: Based on the Play Romeo and Juliet with the Special Preference of English Medium Private School Students in the Eastern Province, Sri Lanka.

Mrs. Vanmathy Remoshan

Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Sri Jayawardenapara

E-mail: vanmathy90@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: July 1, 2024
Accepted: July 25, 2024
Volume: 5
Issue: 2

KEYWORDS

bad precedent, literature,
Romeo & Juliet, society,
suicide

A literature is not only a past history of the memory but norms, beliefs, behaviors, feelings and emotions of the particular society in a particular period. The literature expresses the mindset of the writer or the literary artist directly, or it may be a representative of whole society. The literature would entertain and provide the pleasure to mind of the audience as refreshment and relaxation whereas it is prime that the literature should be a good example to the society and it should not be a bad precedent at all, especially for the school students. In short, the play Romeo and Juliet is a kind of literature which is a play written by the famous playwright William Shakespeare during the Elizabethan era and it is portrayed and concluded with the death of Romeo and Juliet by committing suicide. Therefore, the present study was conducted with an aim to analyze that “Is the play Romeo and Juliet a good precedent to learn as a lesson in the school syllabus?” with the special preference of the English medium private schools’ students in the Eastern province, Sri Lanka. For this purpose, 30 private school teachers, 60 government school teachers and 20 parents were randomly selected, to collect the data, as the participants of the current study. This study employed a qualitative approach in order to accomplish the research objectives. A questionnaire was utilized for teachers and an interview was used as the second instrument for collecting the primary data particularly from the parents. The study sheds light on the misleading factors of unfaithfulness to parents, thought of enmity, revenge and conflict, negativity on Christianity and committing suicide.

1. Introduction

A literature is commonly known as a written work with advanced usage of language and the work which is presented in spoken mode is also accepted as a literature. “Literatures are the pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspaper, magazines, etc.).” (Oxford Dictionary, 2007).

According to the statement of William Shakespeare, “Literature is a comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation.” It is an art of the mind as well it criticizes the life of the human beings with their culture (Katawazai, 2018). At the same time a literature is the mirror of a society, so we can see everything of a particular society through it and it is a wonderful medium to indoctrinate the probity to the society also the human’s life is depicted by, the literature, the performance on the stage or it may be writing on the page (Sahay, 2020).

In that respect, there are different types of literature we have, such as drama, fable, poetry, science fiction, prose and so on. In this line, I would like to study a drama which was firstly staged four hundred years ago during the Elizabethan era. That is, Romeo and Juliet, one of the famous romantic plays written by William Shakespeare in 16th century (Panagopoulos, 2016) and it is known as a Shakespearean tragedy. The play was portrayed the tragic love by the writer who was a tremendous play and an amazing poet also he is a pride of English literature. He always tried to express social issues through his literary works in the manner of history, love, tragedy and comedy (Begley et al. 2015).

Concerning the plot summary of the play Romeo & Juliet, the handsome boy Romeo at the age of 16 from Montague family met a beautiful girl Juliet at the age of 13 from Capulet family in a party and they fell in love, then they got married secretly by the help of Friar Laurence (a Christian priest), next day Romeo left from Juliet as he did a murder for revenge due to the both families' feud and last day Romeo & Juliet were dead by committed suicide in Verona, Italy. Shakespeare depicted the tragedy scene at the climax of the act on the stage through his play and he wanted to make audience cry and feel sad by killing his characters. Whatever it is, a literature should not be the bad illustration to the society for the purpose of reaching the audience.

The Problem of the Study

The bilingual private schools are performed under the supervision of Edexcel which is the Academical Institution established by the British Academy. Also, if the students, who study at the bilingual private schools, want to sit the examination which is conducted by the Edexcel by the sponsor of British Academy. They should be registered under the Edexcel syllabus. Hence, the Edexcel has a strong purpose to observe and monitor the syllabus which is followed by the bilingual private schools. That is why; the syllabus of Edexcel is strictly implemented at the bilingual private schools in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, the students, who study at the bilingual private schools, known as the international schools, should take the subjects which are structured by Edexcel.

In that respect, there is a subject called Speech and Drama which has three poetic dramas: Macbeth, Romeo & Juliet, and King Lear. The subject Speech and Drama is learnt by the Form -1 students, at the bilingual schools, at the age of thirteen.

According to Sri Lanka, the students at the age of under sixteen years old are considered as children. The children mean, they are the human beings below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the children (UNICEF). Also, they are the immature people to realize the big things of life and they do not have the adequate experiences to understand some prominent activities, such as love, hate, animosity marriage, suicide and death.

Therefore, the present study analyzes that the play Romeo and Juliet is not a good example at the immature age, also it is very difficult to learn a good lesson, through this play, for a child.

As well, following the British syllabus is reasonable for the students who are the native culture of British at the age of thirteen especially the feel of love, marriage and romance. However, it is not very much acceptable for the native children of Sri Lankan culture particularly at the age of thirteen which is not quite mature.

Also, it is essential to learn and to understand a literature through their syllabus of “Speech and Drama”, however it is indispensable to learn a good lesson from the subjects of the syllabus which are learnt. In that respect, there are ample dramas, in both poetic and dialogue, which are valuable in western culture. Such as *The lion king*, *Aladdin*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The jungle book*, *We are the dream* and so on. These sorts of plays can be learnt without any hesitation and the children can learn a good lesson through these plays. However, the play *Romeo and Juliet* does not feed the good lesson for the students who are just thirteen years old.

Meanwhile, when we consider the syllabus or subjects, of the government school children in Sri Lanka, which are taught for the subject “Drama and Theatre”. There are many selected children’s plays, such as *Pillai Alutha Kanneer*, *Arasanin Puththadai*, *Thevelogayanai*, *Sangli Nadagam*, *Arodu Noken*, *Puthiyathor Veedu*, and so on. The children, at the age of thirteen at the government school, study in grade 08 and they are taught these types of above plays, which are suitable for children in Sri Lankan context. Because those plays are much related with the children as they are realized the moral of the play.

Therefore, the present study reveals that the play *Romeo & Juliet* is not a good precedent for the students, at the age of thirteen, study in form - 1 at the private bilingual schools in Sri Lanka. Thus, we should make sure whether the syllabuses are suitable for the children or not according to their age and maturity. Because it is not the proper age to understand love, affection, romance, love failure and committing suicide and it may lead the children to do the same thing in their real life as we have heard many deaths by committing suicide due to the love failure.

The objectives

- I. To determine that the play *Romeo and Juliet* is not good precedent for students to learn as a lesson in their syllabus.
- II. To explain the misleading factors of the play *Romeo and Juliet* for students in society.

The following research questions were proposed for this analysis.

- I. Is the play *Romeo and Juliet* a good precedent for the school students to learn as a lesson in their syllabus?
- II. What are the misleading factors of the play *Romeo and Juliet* for students’ society?

2. Literature Review

This chapter focuses on existing literatures which are related to this current study of misguided literature is a bad precedent to the society based on the play *Romeo and Juliet* with the special preference of English medium private school students in the Eastern Province, Sri Lanka. Therefore, this section concerns the previous researches in different categories under the various titles.

1.1. The Important of Good Literature

All the written works are known as literature, however other than the print literature there are different roles of literature with its genres such as drama, essays, fiction and nonfiction, poem, songs, stories and so on. Apart from this phenomenon, literature is culture, traditions, relationship, society, unity, identity and pathway. Moreover, it helps and emphasize the people to understand and to learn deeply about themselves.

According to the explanation by Janani (2018) using the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, she illustrated that the literature as a key to understanding people, society and life; which mean's the writer of this novel depicts all the characters in this story in order to give the good message not only for a single person but also for whole society in England. Also, this novel clearly indicates the human nature with their inner mind even which is difficult to gain from the studies related to human mind. In addition to this, she picked out that the literature can be accomplish with full of curiosity, ironies, coincidences and lucky or unlucky meetings that the ordinary people have in their life. So, the life and the literature are interconnected each other.

In similar fashion, Bump (2022) explained about the value of literature which represent the world today and tomorrow, and the literature does not only live at present but also it will be for future; as well, that can be engaged with environment, climate and health issues in society. At the same time, he notified in his study that the literature closely concerns the feelings and it tries to assist the audience to direct and guide towards the right path in their life. Additionally, he pointed out that statement from the Encyclopedia Britannica of eleventh edition that the literature has a strong impact on human destiny.

Another study done by Sahay (2020), she claimed that the literature affects and guides us to understand the life style. Also, the literature is indirectly or directly connected to the people who reading the written text, watching action or listening scripts. Because, it has the real-life context which shows the moral principles, values and ethics of human life. So that, she determined that the value of good literature for the society and in particular the literature in the ancient era is closely mingled with the emotions and desires of people.

2.2 The Play Romeo and Juliet

There have been several researches done with the distinguish points of view on the play *Romeo and Juliet* in the Shakespearean plays. Ryan et al. (2015) focused the play *Romeo and Juliet* with the context of a shift in traditions concerning blood feuds facilitating a transition from kinship – based behavior and social organization to the civility required by state – level political organizations. Hence, they did their research on the title of “From Blood Feuds to Civility: *Romeo and Juliet* and the changing evolutionary role of cultural traditions. Additionally, they have confined that the older stories based on *Romeo and Juliet*, more than describe or reflect the shift, may have influenced audiences in such a way as to promote this transformation. Also, they suggested that future scholarship investigate the possible role of the play in facilitating this transition through its demonstration of the tragic consequences of blood feuds to the audience with the experience of such feuds and its communication in England.

Parallely, Bottez (2016) focused her analysis on the “Religion and cultural identity in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* also she studied the musical works of it. She analyzed the religious stances in the play and showed how opera, symphony and music have

been adapting the veteran Elizabethan drama since the 18th century. Also, she indicated that the confusing religious configuration of Shakespeare's England is reinterpreted kaleidoscopically and she found its main approach is comparative also relies on the history of mentalities. Furthermore, she discussed the adaption is dictated by cultural context, the conventions of the lyrical theatre, social and political factors and reception.

Another body of research done by Panagopoulos (2016) argued that victory and Romeo & Juliet are connected on the level of genre, plot and characterization with whole scenes in Conrad's novel mirroring those in Shakespeare's play. Also, he suggested that the striking similarities between the two works can either be explained by a conscious desire on Conrad's part to imitate Shakespeare's art or by a kind of involuntary emulation.

Contrary, Rohan (2018) analyzed the paradoxical theme of love unto death: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the Christian perspective of self-gifting love. He noticed that the death can be used as a proof of the real love. Thus, he clarified a paradox in the concept of love: love unto death with Christianity. Christianity is a religion built on the paradoxical theme of love unto death, that is, Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Similarly, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, though a romantic literary text, in a way vended this Christian perspective of self-gifting loves to a secular situation. Therefore, he examined the secular romantic love of Romeo and Juliet and the Christian religious perspective of self-gifting love to demonstrate that two extreme concepts of love are covering on the paradoxical theme of love unto death. Additionally, he mentioned that the theme of love unto death is apparent in religious as well as secular situations.

At last, Katawazai conducted a study on a critical analysis of William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. He indicated all the possible sides of the play including characters, setting, plot summary historical background, themes and other literary figures' perspectives about the play critically.

2.3 The Impact of Literature on Life

The study of Baharti and Ahmad (2015) on the role of English Literature in Re-Construction society clearly determined that the society is filled with the variety of new creation from the literature which provides new thinking to the people. So that, according to their point of view, literature has an intimate connection with people and the society, and they stated that the individual is also motivated by the literature that gives the variety of feelings including religious affairs. As well, they stressed that the valuable literature is the base for the society and that can be an energy or power to open up the mind of the people in order to build the aware and knowledgeable society.

Similarly, Ahmed (2017) elucidated that the literature reflects the life of a society in which the variety of human issues related to social, political, cultural, economic and intellectual background raise up. So that, most of the scholars in philosophy mention that the literature is one of the wonderful creations of ancient era through oral, written, scientific and technical ways. On the other hand, the people in society can get more understanding about life and they can realize many things connected with their life through the literature. As well, he said that literature gives expression and feeling through the words that may be written or oral.

Furthermore, he mentioned that the literature is an inspiration to a generation and; the information and idea can be gained through that. As well as, nowadays the people try to find out the solution for their problems that they face in day-to-day life with the help of literature. Even though the literature functions through the words physically, that live through the imagination in the human's mind which has tragedies, comedies, love, hate, affection and etc. Moreover, he clarified that the students; who learn about literature; are created to familiarize and overcome the day-to-day life incidents; also, it makes our future generation into life with lots of understandings particularly with relationships that they have at present and they will have in their future.

On the other hand, he explained that the literature is a media to convey the religious matters to the people who are at present and who will be in future. For example, the Bible talks about Jesus and his doctrine of Christianity, Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana portray the Hinduism and Quran was written for Muslim and their rituals. Additionally, he indicated that the literature is an art of new ideas that lead the society for revolution and they are used as weapon by the creator in order to motivate the people into inner realities of societies.

Likewise, Trivedi and Gabani (2014) analyzed the relationship between the literature and human life. For that they said that the literature is reconstructed with the real-life circumstances which the people face in their life. Also, literature acts as a bridge between the past era and present event that connects the future; so, it leads us with our forefathers and their culture. As well, they mentioned that the literature is not only a written or oral text which the people use for their entertainment but also a mirror of the particular society with the ideology, national boundaries, ethical challenges and so on.

All in all, according to the concept of literature the researcher has considered the play Romeo and Juliet which does not provide the good lesson for grade seven students who are the immature children at the age of twelve or thirteen in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, the above studies were done with the different critical manner on the play Romeo and Juliet. However, this study analyzes whether the play Romeo and Juliet is a good precedent or not for the students who are in the Sri Lankan context.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method to analyze that the play Romeo & Juliet is a good precedent for the students of bilingual private school? To answer this question, data were accumulated through the interview with 90 people who are the teachers in government and private schools and a questionnaire was used to collect the data with the 20 parents in the Eastern province. There were 110 participants were erratically chosen for this analysis and they were different in their age (not less than 25 years old), gender (male, female) and working area in the Eastern province. The respondents were asked to share their opinions about the decision done by Romeo & Juliet in this poetic drama. Accurately more than 90% teachers argued that the drama "Shakespearean Romeo and Juliet" plays as a bad precedents for the immature students; at the age of 13; who study at the bilingual private schools in the Eastern province.

The questionnaire was used for collecting data from the parents in order to reveal the parents' point of view on Romeo & Juliet as one of the lessons for the teenage students. Twenty participants were selected for this study as the parents of teenage students.

Two bilingual private schools were selected for this analysis. One was from Trincomalee districts and another one was from Batticaloa districts.

4. Results and Discussion

This section is a comparative or descriptive analysis of the study based on the study results, previously literature, etc. The results should be offered in a logical sequence, given the most important findings first and addressing the stated objectives. The author should deal only with new or important aspects of the results obtained. The relevance of the findings in the context of existing literature or contemporary practice should be addressed.

This chapter provides the finding of the study and the findings are clearly elaborated one by one as follows.

4.1 Thought of Enmity, Revenge and Conflict

In the play Romen and Juliet, there are two main families: the Montagues and the Capulets that have a long-term enmity between them. There are many conflicts which were clearly portrayed by Shakespeare between Montagues and the Capulets.

Example 1: In the starting scene of Romeo and Juliet, the dialogue as follows,

“Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona, where we lay our scene, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny, where civil blood makes civil hands unclean”

According to the above lyrics, it is clear that the both families have a long animosity and it is impossible to have a good relationship between them.

Example 2: The conflict between Romeo who is from the Montague and Tybalt who is from Capulet family and Juliet's cousin. Tybalt killed Romeo's best friend Mercutio due to the feeling of hate on Montague family. As well, the character Tybalt always tries to have the fight with Romeo who is not much interested for fighting. As well as, Tybalt does not want to maintain peace and harmony but he fuels for feud.

“Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries that thou hast done me; therefore, turn and draw.”

Example 3: After the death of his friend "Mercutio" by Tybalt, Romeo wants to do a revenge on Tybalt for his friend's murder, so that he killed Tybalt.

Therefore, these types of conflicts and violence are not necessary for school students who are teenagers and they cannot learn a good lesson from these cruel events. As well, they have the path ways to learn negative things from their lesson which cannot guide them as a good citizen.

4.2 Unfaithfulness to Parents

The main protagonists of the play Romeo and Juliet who both are dishonest to their parents. That means early part of the play Juliet falls in love with Romeo without any further details about him and his family background. Nevertheless, when she finds that Romeo is a Montague who is her family enemy, she should have stopped her affair with Romeo but she continues. Also, she secretly meets her boyfriend and she cheats her parents. At the same time, Juliet refuses and delays a marriage proposal; with Country Paris; is arranged by her parents because she already has an affair with Romeo. So, she could have convinced her parents to get married Romeo and at least she can have a small conversation with her mom about her love but she does not. Instead of talking to her mom she reveals love to her nurse who is helpless in order to do any arrangements for her love.

As well as, Juliet married Romeo secretly without the acknowledgement of her parents and the marriage is not a simple event that can be done in private. Hence, the marriage either love on arrange should be done with the permission" and the blessings of the parents and it is the most essential though that can be realized and followed by the young generation, since their teenage.

On the other hand, in order to avoid her marriage with Paris arranged by her parents Juliet acts as a dead body by the help of the sleeping medicine and she cheats her parents again, Finally, her acting comes true so she is no longer in the world.

4.3 Negativity on Christianity

Christianity and Church are the most important parts in the play Romeo and Juliet; and these play a crucial role for Romeo and Juliet's life. In that respect, the character Friar Lawrence; who is the priest in Verona; is known as a wise, religious, respectful and kind man. Also, he is the one who leads the main plot of this story in the play. Because Romeo and Juliet's marriage was done by the support of friar Lawrence without the acknowledgement of their parents. Even though the marriage was done in the church that was a secret marriage which was done without anyone especially their parents and blessings. Hence, according to the Christianity, marriage is important and that should not be done alone, particularly the parents' blessings and their permission that are much more important for the church wedding. However, the secret marriage of Romeo and Juliet may make a negative feeling on church to the audience

As well, the sleeping potion; was given to Juliet by friar Lawrence; that is a kind of liquid to make us dead body for sometimes. Thus, the idea of the temporary death was taken part by Frail Lawrence and that incident lead the play into tragedy with the climax scene of two young people death. Especially at the end of the play, Romeo and Juliet ended up their life by committing suicide which is not allowed in the doctrines of Christianity.

Therefore, these actions in the play *Romeo and Juliet* may show the wrong ideology about Christianity to the audience especially to the school students who are at their age of teen.

4.4 Committing suicide

Life gives many challenges for us so we should face them bravely to tackle and survive our life happily because sorrows and joys are impermanent for anyone. Thus, it is vital to overcome the problems and issues faced in our day-to-day life; and we should experience and learn the situations in order to handle them correctly especially in our young age.

In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, they both commit suicide at the end of the play in order to bring the tragedy to the audience as this play is also known as one of the tragedy dramas of Shakespeare. Further, the situation is not investigated and realized by these main characters and they take the instant solution which is committing suicide. So, they come to the conclusion by ending up their life instead of living, managing, facing overcoming the critical situation. Therefore, the people; who face these types of circumstances especially failure of love in teenage; may have opportunity to take the same decision in their life.

Consequently, this play with the conclusion of two deaths by suicide is not appropriate as a lesson in the school curriculum particularly to the young students who should be handled in a gentle and humble manner.

5. Conclusion

Therefore, a literature is not belonging for one nation, one society or one generation in a particular time because it is conveyed from generation to generation by the time. Shakespeare tried to show the true love, by sacrificed themselves each other, through his play *Romeo & Juliet*. However, it is impossible practically at this contemporary era and it is a tragic prototype for the society especially for youngest because they may follow the same decision to prove their true love like *Romeo & Juliet*.

Also, this play gives a space to commit suicide if they fail in their love ones. The thing is negativity has more power than the positivity so the teenagers and youngest may be guided by the negative decision at their immature age. Katawazai (2018) also observed similar thinking of *Romeo & Juliet* in his study.

The love is a root for life of any living creature especially for human beings and, love & life has its interconnection between them. As well as, true love should be together and cope all the problems as well, they should live together compatibility for long time happily. Rohan (2018)'s findings also emphasized this point of view. Therefore, the drama *Romeo & Juliet* should have been concluded with happy ending as a good precedent for the society.

A good literature gives a good message to the society and our society should be built by the valuable literatures. At the same time, it should not be a bad precedent for the society. Thus, the literature should guide to rehabilitate the generation in all the time and it should create a healthy environment around the audience or readers, as well the audience should be enthused by any type of literature.

Furthermore, a good literature should be a medicine, a relief and a remedy for the broken heart, also it gives the stress-free mind and it should grant a good solution without creating new problems. In that respect, if we think or hear the name Romeo & Juliet, automatically their death only can come first in our mind and it is still reflected in the society. Hence, we don't welcome a literature like Romeo & Juliet which is not a good precedent to the society.

1. Acknowledgement

My completion of this study could not be accomplished without the useful support and encouragement of my family first and my friends. As well, I thank all the people who participated in this study for their great contribution during the process of the data collection.

6. References

- Ahmed, A. (2017). Literature and Its Influence on Human Life. *National Conference Cum Workshop on Recent Trends in Technical Language & Communication: Emerging Requirement's Rajkiya Engineering College, Chandpur, Bijnor*. ISBN: 978-93-86171-41-2.
- Babace, R. and Yahya, W. R. B. W. (2014). Significance of Literature in Foreign Language Teaching. *International Education Studies*. Vol 7 (4). ISSN: 1913-9039.
- Baharti, K and Ahmad, S.S. (2015). The Role of English Literature in Re-Construction Society. *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*. Vol.7, 2015. ISSN: 2422-8400.
- Begley, R.O., Coe, K & Palmer, C.T. (2015). From blood feuds to civility: Romeo and Juliet. *ASEBL Journal*. Vol 11 (1) January 2015.
- Boro, A.R.I. (2021). A Critical Exploration of Love and Death for Family Reconciliation through Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. *Revue Internationale de Linguistique Appliquee, de Literature, et d'Education*. Vol 4 (3), Oct- 2021. ISSN: 1659-5521.
- Bottez, A. (2016). Religion and cultural identity in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the musical works in inspired. *Messages, Sages and Ages*. Vol3(1) 2016.
- Bump, J.F.A. (2022). The Value of Literature, Today and Tomorrow. *Literature 2:1-25*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/Literature 2010001>.
- Janani, R. (2018). Literature as a key to Understanding People and Life. *CADMUS Promoting Leadership in Thought that Leads to Action*. Vol 3(4), May, 2018.
- Katawazai, R. (2018). A critical analysis of William Shakespeare's: Romeo and Juliet. *International journal of scientific and Research publications*. Vol 8 (10) October 2018.
- Lew, B., Chistopolskaya, K., Osman, A., Huen, J.M.Y., Talib, M.A and Leung, A.N.M. (2020). Meaning in Life as a Protective Students. *BMC Psychiatry*, 20:73

- Panagopoulos, N. (2016). Romeo and Juliet: A new context for victory? *Yearbook of Conrad studies (Poland)*. Vol,11.2016. pp.75-86.
- Rohan, J.C.P. (2018). The Paradoxical Theme of 'Love unto Death': Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the Christian Perspective of Self-gifting Love. *The Sri Lankan Journal of south Asian studies*. Vol (4)1, April 2018, University of Jaffna.
- Sahay, P.N. (2020). Literature as the Foundation of Life and Its Values. *Internation Journal of Linguistic and Computational Applications (IJLCA)*. Vol 7(4), Oct-Dec 2020. ISSN: 2394-6393.
- Trivedi, K.M and Gabani, S.J.D. (2014), Literature: Replica. Of Human Life. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*. Vol 2 (2), May 2014, ISSN: 2320-2882.