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Dr. Vathana Fenn

**The Vindictive Adjudication -
An Analysis the Art of Negotiation in Shakespeare's
*The Merchant of Venice***

K. A. Krishnalalitha, M.A., M.Phil.

Negotiation as a Conversation

This paper traces the concept of negotiation in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. Negotiation is a conversation between two or more people or groups expected to reach an understanding, to produce an agreement upon courses of action, to bargain for individual or collective advantage, to craft outcomes to satisfy various interests of people or parties involved in the process. Negotiation, a part of business communication, plays an important role in our day to day life. One has to cultivate the art of negotiation to master his/her business as well as personal life. The paper presents only a few negotiation characteristics found in the play.

Concept of Negotiation

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*The Vindictive Adjudication - An Analysis the Art of Negotiation in Shakespeare's
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The concept of negotiation is well delineated in the play *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. The play revolves around the life of a Venetian merchant named Antonio. There is a turning point in the play, because of the first negotiation between the titular and Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. The business conversations serve as the quintessence of the play. The paper mainly focuses on facts like the negotiation techniques, different types of negotiation, types of negotiators, etc., in relation to the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice is one of the plays of Shakespeare, of a lighter vein, set in the romantic mode. The play is believed to have been written between 1596 and 1598.

Bassanio is a close friend of the titular, Antonio. His needs are taken care of by Antonio, the merchant of Venice. Bassanio, though he appears to be a man of good nature, is also a business man of some standing. He is a person with a clever mind. His love for Portia and the smart way he selects the lowly lead box shows how he can think and make good decisions. He tells his friend Antonio that he has fallen for Portia, one of the rich ladies of Belmont. While describing Portia to Antonio, he not only comments about her beauty but also emphasizes the fact that she is one of the richest ladies of Belmont. He refers to her as a lady who is “richly left” (217). He is after Portia mainly because of her beauty and her character; he is not after her wealth, but he is impressed by it.

He describes her thus to Antonio:

In Belmont is a lady richly left;

And she is fair, and fairer than that word,

Of wondrous virtues....

Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,(Act I, Sc, i,217)

Vying for Love

Bassanio considers the fact that he owes even his acquaintance with Portia to Antonio. He tells Antonio that he owes most in love as well as in money to him. He asks for some financial help from Antonio to go to Belmont and enter the contest to win the hand of Portia. He also adds that if he could only get to look like a man of some wealth, he would be in a good position to compete with all the other guys vying for Portia's attention. He puts it thus to the titular:

I owe the most in money and in love,

And from your love I have a warranty

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To unburden all my plots and purposes

How to get clear of all the debts I owe. (Act I, Sc. I, 216)

Bassanio's Negotiation

Bassanio negotiates for his love. Indeed the play starts with the negotiation of Bassanio. He plans to woo Portia, so that he will get a beautiful, virtuous and rich wife who will satisfy all his needs. Portia, even though is a rich woman has a problem; she is not allowed by her father to choose somebody she likes as her husband. Her father had devised a bizarre test to choose her suitor. He had kept three caskets made of gold, silver and Lead respectively. He had also told her that the person who chooses the casket with her portrait in it will be her spouse. She too has Bassanio in her mind, which she reveals to Nerissa, her friend.

Portrayal of Shylock

Shylock is portrayed as a desperado in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. Many critics call Shakespeare an anti-Jew for creating a character like Shylock. His character occupies a dominant role in the drama. Shylock is a Jew, who is also a Christian-hater. He is also portrayed as a cruel money lender in the play. He is an enemy to all the Venetian Christians and is one of the complex characters in the play. Shylock is a master in the art of negotiation. It is natural for a money lender to be business minded. But one cannot expect such qualities from Bassanio as he appears to be a normal person with a benevolent nature. Bassanio too negotiates like a business man in order to settle down in life.

Business-minded Approach

The business-minded approach of Bassanio and Shylock is commented thus in the article, *SparkNotes on The Merchant of Venice*:

He negotiates with the Jewish moneylender, Shylock, asking for 3,000 gold coins (ducats). Bassanio borrows the money on his friend Antonio's credit. Trouble is, Antonio is anti-Semitic (he is prejudiced against Jewish people) and is offensive to Shylock whenever he has the chance. Slyly, Shylock says he'll try out Antonio's method of business by lending him the money interest-free. But, this is on condition that Antonio sign a bond promising that if the debt goes unpaid, Antonio will give Shylock a pound of his own flesh.

Antonio's Role

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Antonio agrees to this deal of Shylock as he is sure that he will earn his money back before Shylock's due date. Bassanio allows Antonio to sign in the agreement without any panic. It is for the sake of him that Antonio is taking a risk, which does not worry Bassanio, since he is preoccupied with the matter of winning Portia's hand. His heart is all set to begin a journey to Belmont. He leaves for Belmont as soon as he gets the money. There in Belmont he chooses the lead casket and wins Portia. Bassanio involves himself in merry making without any thought about Antonio. In the meantime he gets news about Antonio that all of his ventures, in every port, have failed and he is in the cruel hands of Shylock. The Money lender Shylock insists on the original terms of the agreement for a pound of Antonio's flesh and more over bothers the Duke morning and night about the fact that justice must be served. He wails thus to the Duke about justice:

The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought. Is mine, and I will have it.
If you deny me, fie upon your law!...
I stand for judgement. (IV, i, 235)

Portia and Antonio

Portia is all shaken when she learns about Antonio. Portia is a clever lawyer, and she has great wit. Before she lets Bassanio go to Venice, she tells him that she'd like to get first things done first. She says that Bassanio should go to church with her so they can get married, and then he can go to Venice to take care of other business. But she is moved when she reads the letter of Antonio. She then instructs Bassanio to rush to Venice.

Portia's Oration

Some characters in the play act according to the way of the world. But it is Portia who helps Antonio to escape from Shylock. She arrives in Venice as a learned lawyer named Balthazar. She converses with Antonio and Shylock. She pleads with Shylock to show mercy to Antonio. Portia's oration at this point about the quality of mercy is brilliant. Shylock refuses to this request of Portia and demands justice. Portia says she would like the judge to allow Shylock to take a pound of flesh (from Antonio from near his heart), but without spilling even a single drop of Christian blood, as it is not mentioned in the bond. She also warns him declaring that if he acts against the agreement, he will immediately be put to death and all his worldly goods will go to the state.

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Types of Negotiations

There are different types of negotiations employed by the characters in the play. The negotiation between Portia and Shylock falls under the category called distributive negotiation. This is also called as positional or hard-bargaining negotiation. Both the characters adopt an extreme position to come to a conclusion. It is Portia who wins in the negotiation. She can be categorised as a principled negotiator. She negotiates with a professional standard, and bargains to seek integrative solution. She tries her level best to be accommodative in the beginning, but ends up as a skilled negotiator. It is the brinkmanship - a hard nut approach of Portia that gains her the victory. It is Portia's brilliant oneupmanship that locked Shylock in a vice he seemed to create for himself; he has no other go but to accept her offer in the end. The wit of Portia is commented upon by N. Chandra in the article, "Masculinity and disguise: a Study of Portia and Viola":

...Portia is quick-witted, has high sense of morality and intelligence and uses free will, all of which constitute the characteristics of men... She is much more intelligent than all the male characters in the play. ...Even in the last scene, both Bassanio and Antonio never try to find a device to escape from the cunning bond of Shylock; Antonio is getting ready for his death whereas Portia uses her intelligence and shrewdness to liberate him from the clutches of shylock. (86-87)

Shylock – A Hard Negotiator

Shylock, on the other hand, is a hard negotiator. His style of negotiation is competitive negotiation. He uses contentious strategies to influence the opponents. The hard negotiators apply pressure to negotiate. His negotiation can also be termed as bad faith negotiation, wherein the party is considered to be negotiating in bad faith, with no intention to compromise. The bad faith in Shylock is mainly nurtured by his cruel behaviour as well as his usury as moneylender, toward the people around him.

Bassanio - A Soft Negotiator

Bassanio is a soft negotiator. His style of bargaining is very gentle. Soft negotiators maintain good relations with fellow negotiators. His style of negotiation is compromising. Emotions play an important role in his negotiation. Almost all the characters in the play are emotional and show it while negotiating.

To Conclude

There are also other negotiation tactics found in the play *The Merchant of Venice* but these are not discussed in this paper.

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K. A. Krishnalalitha, M.A., M.Phil.
Department of English
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham
Amrita Nagar
Ettimadai-641112
Tamilnadu
India
krishna_lalithasamy@yahoo.co.in