

**THE SCIENCE OF CASUISTRY AND MORAL REASONING AND
CONTEXTUAL INTERPLAY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HENRY VI PLAYS*****ANURADHA BASU**

Associate Professor in English

Victoria Institution (College)

Kolkata-700075

West Bengal

India

ABSTRACT:

Casuistry was method of persuasive argument based on situational circumstances which was used quite pervasively in the time of Elizabethan and Jamesian England by the Catholics in the disturbing times of changes of state religion from Catholic to Protestant. It was used by the persecuted Catholics to aid and abet their undercover, seditious activities. In the times of Queen Elizabeth I and James I sedition was highly punished and treason was returned with death. Shakespeare composed his Henry VI plays in the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Living in the contemporary it is highly improbable that he was not influenced by the undercover activities of Catholics and the casuistry they used. This paper is therefore an attempt to study the reflection of such arguments connected to treason and sedition in the times of Queen Elizabeth and King James. It tries to find such reflection in the history plays of King Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3 through the charting of the War of the Roses.

Keywords: Casuistry, Catholic, Jesuit, treason, dissembling, Yorkist, Lancastrian

The oldest form of regulating human behaviour has been through the use of 'codes of rule' that form the core of justice. The pursuit of justice has always demanded both law and equity, respect for morality has always demanded fairness and discernment. However in man's pursuit for justice, human experience has come up with several sets of moral problems, for which a reasonable and effective set of practical procedures had become necessary. This practice of employing such practical procedures goes back to the medieval times and had been given the name of 'Casuistry'. Those who employed these procedures were 'casuists'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines casuistry as 'that part of ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules and morality to particular instances, in which circumstances alter cases or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties'. In short, casuistry may be described as a science of circumstantial morality.

This article intends to deal with the canonical evidence of casuistry in Elizabethan times, its application to contemporary political; historical and religious situations and attempts to trace its relation to the *Henry VI* plays of Shakespeare, especially in the context of 'oath taking and oath breaking'.