

## Shakespeare was ‘not of an Age, but for all Time.

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### ABSTRACT:

**To be or not to be?** Still echoes in our minds when we talk or discuss any issues in our life. This question still passed over the lips of countless people and we must thank Shakespeare, whose reach is so extensive that he gave us such tagline. Shakespeare’s words are emotional, hilarious, and pithy and they reflect the ‘text of modern life’. It is really important for the scholars of English literature to retain studies of Shakespeare because it has strongly connected to modern and classical literature and life. The betrayal we are seeing and facing in Post Modern Age is well reflected in Julius Caesar. The more we see Shakespeare’s word, the more we discover that time in our culture is already disseminated, scattered, appropriated, part of the cultural language, high and low. Shakespeare’s 450th birthday on April 23 offers the perfect reason to me to ask about the crux of his plays and what the future may hold from them. He wrote the most eloquent version of human character. But he is the most anti-digital of authors. His complexity and richness for exceptional literacy, concentration and quiet, things not typically associated with the Computer Age. But we still read him want to see his plays and learn a lot from them. In London, you always can find 4 to 5 performances of his plays. People still visit his native place Stratford upon Avon. I am also fortunate enough to visit his native place where we can feel his presence round us. My paper will discuss the importance of him after 450 years and will give some suggestions on his writings. Also I will ponder some points on the authenticity of him in present times.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare’s influence on the English literature runs so deep that we quote examples from him have and there. No study of English Literature is complete without Shakespeare study even if we talk about under grade students, we teach those sonnets and his works too. Even Oxford English Dictionary identified him as the sole use or first user of a word or phrase: To be or not to be? When we are here to celebrate 450<sup>th</sup> birthday of this magical Dramatist, suddenly I feel like connecting him and his works with modern life and to my surprise. I find then closely connected. Of course, England and Englishman are the real heart of Shakespeare. The Britishers or the travellers of Britain or London never considered their visit complete without going to Shakespeare’s hometown Stratford-upon Avon. I am fortunate enough to visit the place in 2014 and the experience was mesmerising. We, the Indians have different cultural background when compared to Britishers. But to my surprise, visiting his ancestral home was like visiting an Indian countryside farmer’s home. The love and affection of a parents can we still experienced with the maintenance of the home. I feel so connected and overwhelmed after seeing this. Then only this idea struck into my mind about his writings and their relevance to the modern life style. Shakespeare’s works are emotional, hilarious and pithy. He had mastered in bringing his stories and characters with so many qualities that readers and audiences identify them from their personal life. One can easily search Othello’s impatience, Hamlet’s indecisiveness and above all Lady Macbeth’s ambitious and political face. Characters like Romeo, Macbeth have become stereo typed which cannot even recognised in society but their modern version still match with Shakespearean model which is totally imaginary and nearly 500 year out. Thus their appropriateness to the modern culture and life make their reading significant even now.

#### Shakespeare and Post Modernism:

Say that Shakespeare is modern is hardly appropriate as he is worth matching to all the situations we are facing in there 450 years. We still experience Love, loss of possessions and emotions, war, betrayal, tragedy, humour in his works. This makes him popular as well as an important thread to connect. To the modern world ‘Life is a melodrama’ and Shakespeare repeats life. His writings are legendary Imagery and thoughts came so spontaneously from his pen that we feel they are lively characters living with us or are from one of us. Human life is full of all emotions such as love, hatred, loss of money and property, war within the family or war outside the family and Shakespeare wrote for live audience so his plays really gives a live impression too. Cavern always encourages students and readers to see his plays if they want to really understand him. My personal experience also says this. I saw Macbeth in India and Othello in Globe and their understanding and adaptation is

has more better and superior to other plays. Cavern said, "His plays were written to be performed. He conceived in then what an audience needs to know." Even the emotions of Romeo and Juliet have a great impact on us and our teenager students.

#### **Shakespeare's posthumous popularity and reasons:**

Shakespeare apparently began writing plays around 1589. He was the author of two historical tetralogies—the three parts of Henry VI along with Richard III constituted the first tetralogy, and Richard II, the two parts of Henry IV, and Henry V constituted the second. The history plays are concerned with the consequences of civil strife and with questions about the nature of kingship and the relationship between humanity, morality, depth of character, and the ability to rule well. Overall, Shakespeare presents paradoxes, dilemmas, and questions rather than answers. His comedies such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure* are wonderfully complex, entertaining, and perplexing. Shakespeare never ceases to examine the nature of human life and the mysteries of sexual attraction and romantic love. The tragedies are generally taken to be Shakespeare's most profound works. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are all intensely engaging, disturbing, and enriching works that probe the darker mysteries of human life and the human heart with unrelenting eloquence and honesty. Their greatness triumphantly survives translation and transposition, compelling attention in virtually every culture in the world. In the romances, as *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare returns to the great themes of the tragedies with a more hopeful and quiet mind. Shakespeare died without publishing his plays. Apparently, he had little concern for their ultimate fate or for his own enduring fame. Fortunately, John Heminges and Henry Condell, gathered copies of thirty-six plays and published the first Folio edition of Shakespeare's dramatic works in 1623. Only *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* were missing from the first edition. The fact that Shakespeare did not oversee the production of the Folio, as Ben Jonson had overseen the publication of his *Works* in 1616, means that neither the Folio texts nor other surviving quartos and playbook copies of particular plays can be said to be definitive. Although there are numerous discrepancies among the surviving copies of the plays, textual critics and editors are in general agreement about the most accurate versions. But these plays when published once, owes a lot not only to literature student but to the society as a whole.

When his first folio was published in 1623 even after his death, Ben Johnson said this "not of an age but for all time." The interpretation of the sentence can be two fold; one, Shakespeare's work are immortal their meaning with change according to the changes in society. The second interpretation is the one that has been borne out. In 1710, Jacob Tonson used his image as logo of his book shop and in the books which he published. And to our surprise things have become very popular in England and Europe by now. People find depth in his plays and learn a lot about practicality of life. His influence on the English language runs deep and fast. Even OED (Oxford English Dictionary) had definite record his phrases. That is the question that has passed over the lips of countless actors playing Hamlet in the last four centuries on stage and screen. It's also a question that people in almost every country and in any language know quite well. We can thank playwright William Shakespeare, whose reach is extensive.

#### **His centenary celebrations and Modern Society:**

In April, people around the world will celebrate the Bard's timeless works on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. There will be performances of his plays, readings of his poetry and new publications dedicated to analysing his prolific and time-honoured text. Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare. I could perhaps put the second "Shakespeare" in quotation marks, so as to indicate that what I have in mind is our idea of Shakespeare and of what is Shakespearean. But in fact it will be my claim that Shakespeare and "Shakespeare" are perceptually and conceptually the same from the viewpoint of any modern observer.

#### **His characters and present Human beings**

Characters like *Romeo*, *Hamlet*, or *Lady Macbeth* have become cultural types, instantly recognizable when their names are invoked. As will become clear, the modern versions of these figures often differ significantly from their Shakespearean "originals": a "Romeo" is a persistent romancer and philanderer rather than a lover faithful unto death, a "Hamlet" is an indecisive over thinker, and a "Lady Macbeth," in the public press, is an ambitious female politician who will stop at nothing to gain her own ends. But the very changes marked by these appropriations tell a revealing story about modern culture and modern life. The idea that Shakespeare is modern is, of course, hardly a modern idea. Indeed, it is one of the fascinating effects of Shakespeare's plays that they have almost always seemed to coincide with the times in which they are read, published, produced, and discussed.

#### **Shakespeare's modernity**

Shakespeare's modernity would also be proclaimed in nineteenth-century America. In 1850 Ralph Waldo Emerson announced that, after centuries in which Shakespeare had been inadequately understood, the time was finally right for him: "It was not possible to write the history of Shakespeare till now," Emerson wrote. The word "now" in his argument becomes the marker of that shifting category of the modern, and it is repeated

for emphasis a few lines later. "Now, literature, philosophy, and thought, are Shakespearized. His mind is the horizon beyond which, at present, we do not see. Our ears are educated to music by his rhythm." 13 Thus Emerson could say of Shakespeare, simply and resoundingly. "He wrote the text of modern life." We live today in a new "now," a century and half removed from Emerson's, but this sentiment – "he wrote the text of modern life" – seems as accurate as it did then. The premise of this book is simple and direct: Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare. I could perhaps put the second "Shakespeare" in quotation marks, so as to indicate that what I have in mind is our idea of Shakespeare and of what is Shakespearean. But in fact it will be my claim that Shakespeare and "Shakespeare" are perceptually and conceptually the same from the viewpoint of any modern observer.

#### **My encounter with Shakespearean studies:**

My students feel really happy and excited when we teach them Othello in II<sup>nd</sup> year and Macbeth in III<sup>rd</sup> year. Also we have some sonnets from his sonnet sequence in I year. We encourage them to participate in scene enactment context in our college where they learn a lot. Some of the students take lessons of life from Othello even, which is really as eye opener. They said that a brave person like Othello can be prey of others who took advantage of his flaw of character. This gives them lesson of life that we must not trust easily on others without researching the facts of life. Similarly Julius Caesar can teach teenager students the reality of true cone. In teenagers attraction for opposite sex is quite natural but when they read and see themselves they learn some lessons of life which no one can teach them. Similarly 'black and deep desires' of Macbeth, Political over ambitiousness of Lady Macbeth is so contemporary and appropriate in present modern concept. These days' people are even playing tricks and games in their personal and professional life which is really heart rendering. All these plays give us lessons of life and teach us that "We actually reap as we sow", so we all should always be careful in our deed and works.

#### **His Plot and Stories:**

The plot and stories of Shakespeare are timeless treasure. Not only are the storylines exciting, they are still relevant today. Shakespeare's plays are dramatic and full of conflict. He captured the essence of human conflict in his writing which transcends ages and people. He gave us a solution to the problems too or else taught us the bad impact of that conflict. His words are influential and he can be called the creator of vocabulary. Nearly 3000 words and expressions that we use today, originated in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. It's enriching for students to see well-known expressions in their original contexts. He is an icon who played a huge role as part of the history of English Literature. His name is written in golden words in British culture. EFL lessons are not just about teaching language. We need to teach culture to our students to provide them with the full picture. He is inspiration for all of us who are the students of English Literature as we can connect find references to his work all the time. He has influenced not only other literary giants such as John Keats, Milton and Dickens but also fiction and drama of coming Ages. According to Jill Levinson 'Romeo and Juliet' was the first time romance had been used as a context for tragedy? Teens might also be interested to know that Moby Dick was inspired by King Lear.

#### **Modern Technology and Shakespeare:**

Obviously, Shakespeare's time is different from our time. The advent of modern technology is one of the major reasons why our time is different from Shakespeare. Modern technology made our lives easier in terms of communication, mode of production, and presentation. In today's time, communication is made easier; we can send our personal messages to our friends or love ones by just a single text message. In terms of mode of production, there is a huge difference during Shakespeare's time. Today, production of your own literary works can be done very easily with the help of online sites. But, during Shakespeare's time, it was too difficult to publish a certain work due to the lack of resources which I think was one of the reasons why some authors during Shakespeare's time didn't published their works. Another big factor to the difference of Shakespeare's time to present time was the presentation of events and situations. The magic of cinematography captivated the modern generation because of its special effects sound and music systems. Now, Shakespeare's The Tempest can be easily performed on stage because of the availability and the arrival of special effects and sounds. Another major difference is the language because Shakespeare's language is different from the modern English language that we are accustomed to. Having a disparity of the use of language, sometimes students find it challenging to understand the full meaning of the lines of Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, and all of his other works. But for this we have modern version of Shakespearean text by Spark Notes. My personal Experience with Shakespearean writings and their understanding is so worthwhile when we talk about cultural, political and even family traditions in present era. After these 450 years when many generations change and so are values but we still find characters like Iago, Lady Macbeth and King Lear. We have over ambitious persons in society who try to fulfil desires by hook or crook. We have examples of many industrialists, business tycoons, Politicians and even family politics is so insane that Shakespeare looks like a harbinger to the present era. He seems to be the torch bearer who is admonishing us even after 450 years. My encounter with my students who even sometimes

discuss their personal matters too, but when we teach them Shakespeare with illustration from present times they find solution to their problems or at least solace to their issues.

## II. CONCLUSION

Thus Shakespeare and his writings are and will always be our torch in the darkness of life. They were written by him just for performances on the stage but the depth, emotional turmoil and gravity of thought they paint is really the nectar of life. I think all the students of English Literature should give his days and nights to Shakespearean writings, so that they can understand reality of life and how life hacks and how we can rescue from odd circumstances of life. Shakespeare was, is and will always be our master who teaches us realities of life.

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