

‘Shakespeare lives-2016’

—A Program of events and activities organized by the English Language Teachers’ Association of India (ELTAI)

In collaboration with the British Council and SBOIA Educational Trust, Chennai.

**Inaugural speech delivered by Dr. Rosaiah, Governor of Tamilanadu at
S.I.E.T. College for Women, Teynampet. Chennai on 18-6-2016**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to inaugurate the Shakespeare festival organized by the English Language Teachers’ Association of India, familiarly known as ELTAI, this morning. I am glad to learn that ELTAI is the oldest and largest professional organization of teachers of English in our country and the festival includes a number of events and activities all relating to Shakespeare in commemoration of his 400th Death Anniversary. There are going to be competitions conducted for students and seminars for teachers conducted in six different cities in our country. These activities will surely contribute to their acquiring greater knowledge about this great poet and playwright among them.

One may wonder why should we celebrate Shakespeare’s 400th Death Anniversary at all? Ever since the British came to our country and promoted English education among our people, one or more of his plays have been included in our school and college curriculum. Every one of us would have surely read at least one, if not more, of his plays— The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Julie, Julius Caesar and A Mid-summer Night’s Dream. In fact we are told Shakespeare is read more in our country than Britain itself. Not surprising at all, I should say. We love Shakespeare and enjoy watching his films and stage productions. We are told the immortal poet of Avon didn’t write his plays to be studied in

our classrooms but he wrote them only for the stage and what is more he himself acted in some of them.

We all know Shakespeare in the greatest poet and dramatist in the English language and one of the greatest dramatists of the world. What makes him great? His works cover or deal with not just one or two but almost every aspect of the life we lead in this world. He should have been a keen observer of life around him and no wonder his characters are drawn from different walks of life and hence are all real. Among his characters are kings and clowns, heroes and villains, philosophers and idiots, criminals and victims, generals and soldiers, grave-diggers, barmen clowns— all types of men and women we meet in real life also. We could easily recognize among the men around us, miserly Shylocks, love-lorn Romeos and Juliets, enigmatic Hamlets, suspicious Othellos and blood-thirsty Macbeths. The greatness of Shakespeare lies, not only in the creation of real characters in life but also depicting different situations in life.

Shakespeare belonged to a different age. He lived and wrote his plays during the end of seventeenth century in England. He belonged to a different culture and age. Still we read him and adore him. Why you may ask. The answer is simple. He is a man of all ages, countries and all cultures. For he speaks the language of humanity. His characters may be

found in life everywhere around us wherever we may live and whatever culture we may belong to. No wonder his plays have an universal appeal. He is as relevant today as he was 400 years ago. He is rightly considered as one of the greatest playwrights of the world.

It is not surprising that his plays are the most-performed ones in the English language. He is one of the dramatists whose works have been translated in a large number of languages in the world. He continues to enthral us, instruct and inspire us and give us profound enjoyment.

There have been two predominant attitudes towards Shakespeare among both teachers and students: a reluctance to engage with his texts because they are seen as boring and outdated, or a reverence that treats them almost like sacred texts that cannot be touched or questioned. Both attitudes are unhealthy and unhelpful. As teachers, we should try to find ways of bringing Shakespeare to our learners that help them engage and enjoy his plays and poetry as much as readers and audiences have been doing for over 400 years.

Our students may find it difficult to read his plays. But we should remember here that he didn't write them for people to read but he wrote them for the stage. Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed. So you should bring drama into your classroom and not just teach the text. Dramatization is a great way to get students collaborating, communicating, speaking and listening – not to mention building up their self-confidence too. If we teach Shakespeare this way, they would surely appreciate and enjoy their study of his plays.

The contribution of Shakespeare has been

most significant not only in the field of English literature but also in the growth of the English language. He has enriched it with a number of beautiful and unforgettable expressions by them. Scholars tell us he has coined about 3000 new expressions and most of them are even now in common use such as 'Bated breath', 'All that glitters is not gold', 'Bag and baggage', 'All's well that ends well', 'Best foot forward', and 'Be all and end all'.

We find in Shakespeare's plays many memorable proverbs too which are quite common now. For example, 'Better three hours too soon than a minute too late'

'Tis the mind that makes the body rich.

I may also remind you of a few famous quotes from Shakespeare too.

"All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them

One may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Shakespeare is a world celebrity. His reputation as a playwright has been growing since the seventeenth century. Generations of theatre-goers, poets, prose writers, artists, journalists and scholars have contributed greatly to increase the admiration for his plays. And I congratulate the English Teachers' Association of India in organizing this 'Shakespeare lives! Program. Though the great dramatist and poet is no more, truly he lives for ever in his plays and sonnets. He lives for so long as English is spoken in our world.