

Chairperson of the College, Principal – Mrs. Puneet Bedi, Members of the Faculty, Academicians and Friends!

I want to thank Principal, Mrs. Puneet Bedi and Faculty for asking me to participate in this inaugural function to share my thoughts and observing the varied perspective of noted academic persons in this International Seminar on 'Scholars in Shakespeare: A Postmodern Scrutiny'. This intellectually stimulating literacy initiative is, indeed, commendable and shall, in my opinion, usher in a new world view of our understanding of the Great William Shakespeare.

Mehar Chand Mahajan DAV College for Women is, indeed, the front ranking institute of academic excellence in Northern India, particularly in the twin States of Punjab and Haryana as also Union Territory of Chandigarh. India's leading news magazine 'India Today' has now affirmed what we already knew that the college is among the top rated colleges for women in this region. I express my felicitations to Principal and Faculty with a gentle reminder that the journey has only just begin and many milestone await you.

To the distinguished gathering of my young friends present today, I want to say that a youngest democracy of the world – India – looks up to you as the unfathomable driving force for growth, for prosperity, for progress and above all for common good. We do not necessarily judge our strength by the member of replicated trousers, shirts or toys that we can make at a teacher price in a single day. Our strength lies in the intellectual capital that you represent. I take this opportunity to profess, to commend and to salute your youth, your ability, your drive and your never say die attitude. Let this spirit always live.

Like rest of you, I also come present here today, to gain access to the hitherto unfathomed facets of Shakespeare's plays in modern context that will be espoused by noted academicians and experts.

In my humble understanding, nearly 400 years after his death, Shakespeare remains relevant and contextual, both in the past as also in the present and future. His 37 or 38 plays, 154 sonnets and number of poems will always be read, played, translated or performed. It is, however, true that each age, society and generation shall view these works with a new or a different prism reflecting therein and at time exploring their preoccupations or contemporary problems.

Despite the complex nature of phraseology and language in Shakespeare's works, there is straight forward and simple underlying thread that runs through his themes, character, phrases, choice of locations, plot and words.

Most astounding facets of Shakespeare's works is that they are simultaneously periodical and immortal. They may depict a situation that existed 400 years ago, yet the theme, the message, the meaning and the outcome remain immortally relevant even today. His erudite wisdom on relations inter se parents and children, on moral dilemmas, on questions of human versus divine justice, differentiation between indecisive and aggressive action, the fine distinction between determination and madness, about insurmountable and unimaginable wonders, limits and tragedies of love are timeless and relevant to humanity. These are texts and sub-texts to which all of us can relate in different ages and times. Such a representation of human nature shall always be real and relevant though the centuries.

Another important aspect of Shakespeare is that his characterization stands out making it enjoyable and relevant at a personal level. His plays continue to be performed for the beauty of his story and the fact that his characters feel vivid and alive to his viewers or readers. They may be kings, queens, princess or lovers; yet they struggle with the same issues that you and me do and people can associate with such wide range of subject as war, religious, conflict, racial prejudice, class division, betrayal etc. His plots and themes are woven together in a manner so as to be traffic, comedic, dramatic, passionate or thought-provoking or, perhaps, encompassing all of them. Romeo & Juliet is its principal example.

Shakespeare's relevance is most defining from a linguistic point of view. Not only did he give 3000 new words to the English language but many of his concepts, phrases and grammatical structures continue to be in use. In my opinion, he laid down a new foundation for exploration and expansion of English language, particularly for authors and poets who followed him in the literacy world. His eloquent verse and use of words are greatest reasons for his enduring popularity. As someone had said, if you can not find words to express how you feel love or music, Shakespeare can speak for you. In fact, we use his expression all the time without even knowing that it is Shakespeare we are quoting. Bernard Levin has historically described Shakespeare's impact on English language in a most eloquent passage, which I must quote here:

"If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a

tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise - why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then - to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I were dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.”

I think the best way to summarize Shakespeare's relevance is the famous lines by Ben Jonson and I quote the same “He was not of an age, but for all time!”.

With these words, my best wishes to my young friends and I sincerely hope that this Seminar will give you a more than fair understanding of, as Shakespeare would say “the long and short of it”. My good wishes to MCM DAV College for Women and I wish the Seminar a grand success.”