



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
IJAR 2015; 1(5): 304-305
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 13-02-2015
Accepted: 17-03-2015

Dr. Anupama Rajoria
Lecturer, Govt. SS College,
Mahapura, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
India

Shakespeare: A historical perspective

Dr. Anupama Rajoria

Abstract

It is paradoxical that for all his fame and celebration William Shakespeare's biographical details are scarce, and often shrouded in mystery. It was perhaps the insouciance of the Elizabethans about biography that we lost the personal data of the dramatist.

Keywords: Shakespeare, London, dramatist

Introduction

The Church records of the Holy Trinity Church, Stratford indicate that William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, (a local land heiress) at Stratford upon Avon on Warwickshire. He was baptised on April 26, 1564 according to the church registers. It is also recorded that he was the third of eight children three of whom died young. His father was in the position of an Alderman and was running a flourishing agricultural business.

His ancestors were well known and the surname Shakespeare was of great antiquity. They originated in the country of Warwick from where they branched in all directions including Stratford which was a village on the bank of the narrow river Avon. Shakespeare's name may have meant "Shanker of Spears" indicating warrior ancestry. Shakespeare's paternal grandfather Richard Shakespeare farmed in two manors at Snitterfield. One of these manors belonged to Robert Arden the maternal grandfather of the poet. The matrimony between John and Mary was thus a sweet culmination of the neighbourhood acquaintance.

Richard Shakespeare had two sons, Henry and John. After his death (three years before Shakespeares birth) John moved from Snitterfield to Henley Street and became a glover. He further traded in barley, timber and wood. From a small business to a flourishing one, John put in all his dedication and perseverance to achieve this fortune. The Bard had in fact inherited this fighting spirit from his father for he too rose from a keeper of horses to a great dramatist in his life.

Though Church records establish Shakespeare as a Britisher, some people hypothesize him to be of Italian origin.

Mabillard Amanda in her article "Was Shakespeare Italian" hypothesises that the Bard was of an Italian origin. Professor Martino Iunara, a retired Sicilian along with two other professors, carried out research from 1925-1950 at Paleno University Italy. He compounds that Shakespeare was born in Messina as Michelangelo Florio Crollanza. His father Griovanni Florio was a doctor and his mother Grugliema Crollanza was a noblewoman. The family fled Italy during Holy Inquisition. In London, they changed their names. Iunara claims that Crollanza apparently and literally translates into Shakespeare. He further claims that the great dramatist studied abroad and was educated by Franciscan monks who taught him Latin and Greek. Frequent references to Griovanni, Boccaccio, Bandello and Muscuccio Salemitano which Shakespeare uses in his plays, and places like Venice, Padua, Verona Mantua and Milan which form the backdrop of his plays and the realistic portrayal of Italian life and sentiment support this hypothesis.

Unfortunately, no records are available regarding the poet's early education. Some say that he attended the Free Grammar School. This school provided liberal education to boys upto the age of Sixteen. The school had a good reputation and rivalled the Eton School of its days. Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin, Greek and English and his high literary merit suggests a sound education. But it is for certain that he did not attend the University, because of legend

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Anupama Rajoria
Lecturer, Govt. SS College,
Mahapura, Jaipur, Rajasthan,
India

says that the poet's father suffered heavy losses in his business and was prosecuted for his inability to pay the debts. His father had to resign from his position of Alderman and as a result, he gradually sank into fatal depression, leaving behind the financial responsibility of the family on Shakespeare. The poet thus had to leave aside his academic interests for the interests of the family.

Eighteen year old Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway his eight years senior on November 28, 1582, as recorded in the Church register. Since Anne was of a rich disposition, this marriage was comprehended as a vital medium for supporting the family. In 1583, the couple was blessed with a daughter Sussane, and in 1585 twins Hamnet and Judith were born to them. After some time, it is said that leaving the family behind, Shakespeare migrated to London in quest of money and good fortune. Some historians assert that it was a step taken in the state of depression due to a failed marriage. Other critics hold an adscititious reason also and indicate that it was poaching at Sir Thomas Lucy's deer park at Charlecote, and the subsequent threat of prosecution which forced Shakespeare to flee to London. Whatever the reason might have been, Shakespeares going to London was not only a grand decision but it also proved to be a turning point in his life.

Life in urban London had not been easy for Shakespeare. Dr. Johnson records that initially "Shakespeare used to hold the horses of the theatregoers at the stable." But soon the ambitious and hard working boy became an actor, then the mender of the old plays, then the director of the old plays and eventually an eminent playwright.

Most of his plays were staged in different theatre houses of London for days on end, and were well received by the assorted audiences. Consequently, Shakespeare was immensely profited financially. Having attained the epogee of his literary career there was no looking back. From a despicable immigrant villager, Shakespeare became a gentleman of high stature. He became Queen Elizabeth's favourite court poet. No court festivity was thought to be complete without the performance of his play. His theatrical company was honoured by the Queen with the title of "The King's Players" and he was heralded as the "Poet of the Nation". He also gained partnership with the famous Globe Theatre and later purchased it. The motto of the Globe Theatre was "totus mundus agit histrionem" meaning all the worlds a stage. The Globe Theatre was an open air amphitheatre and was the venue of his summer productions. It was a huge building made of timber and thatched roofs. On June 29, 1613 when a canon was actually fired to announce the grand entrance of King Henry VIII, the theatre caught fire and with no steps to control the fire, the theatre burned to ground with no record of the death toll or casualties. This left Shakespeare devastated, but gradually he recuperated, and the Globe theatre was rebuilt. Eventually, Shakespeare bought many properties in London and a lavish house in Stratford and lived a luxurious life.

Even Shakespeare's burial place at Stratford instead of Westminster Abbey where great English poets have been buried, has attracted controversy. Some say that it is the poets insult to not be buried along with other eminent poets, but William Basse justifies the Bard's burial at Stratford in one of his beautiful sonnets thus:

Under this carved marble of thine own sleep, brave tragedian, Shakespeare, sleep alone. (Brown, 202).

References

1. Alexander, Peter. William Shakespeare. English Language Book Society, London; c1998.
2. Andrews WT. Critics of Shakespeare, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi; c1973.
3. Aston NM. Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century. Prestige Books, New Delhi; c1989.