

## Human Relations within Family and Society in Shakespeare' *King Lear*. Universal and Timeless

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Article History

Published Online: 14 Oct 2019

#### Keywords

Shakespeare, Family, Human Relation, Society and Love.

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### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare is considered not only the national English poet but also the greatest playwright of all time. His writings can be read not only in a large number of printed editions, but also his versions are available on smart-phones and tablets, and it can be watch on screen today. As far as his plays are concerned, they are abounded in his ideas, opinions, knowledge and power but his **King Lear** is a timeless story. By the closer study of the play, this paper will focus upon the human relations of universal themes of love, jealousy and family relationships within family and society of 16th century which make it applicable to 21th century. As our society has been facing against the problems of partiality, intolerance, misunderstanding, narrow-mindedness, rude and brutal behavior. So, I think, considering the present scenario of society, Shakespeare's ideas of human relations are relevant to improve the psychological, social and familial understanding to one another so that everyone should make interpersonal relationships better and making a better life for all mankind.

William Shakespeare is considered a national English poet of Renaissance. As a poet his works consist of 154 sonnets, some long narrative poems: *Venus and Adonais*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The passionate pilgrim*, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, and *A Lover's Complaint* and a few other verses. Shakespeare is also regarded as a playwright who inspired and shaped his thoughts through his works. He wrote approximately 39 plays including tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* etc. and comedies: *As you Like It*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* etc. which are considered some of the finest works in English literature. As far as his plays are concerned, they show familial, social, psychological and political aspects. They delineate feministic values, patriarchal system, conspiracies, class consciousness, knowledge and power of sixteenth century which interrelates to relevant perspectives prevailed in 21<sup>st</sup> century. After closer study of Shakespeare plays, it is found that some familial issues of his age resemble the situation of postmodern age which affects familial and personal life and shows how the human values fall and how can be escaped from such problems.

If there should be observed the familial environment with the respect of behavior toward members within family is not good. There can be seen conspiracy, betrayal, untruth, jealous, races, conflicts etc. which lead us to tragic ends at last that is the impediment for the progress and development of family and society. So considering the present scenario of the family and society it is necessary that there should be studied 16<sup>th</sup> century writings to find the faults that are responsible for seriousness, sadness, unhappiness inhuman behavior in family that would be helpful for not repeating mistakes, and for living the peaceful life. In this respect, Shakespeare plays are useful to study and improve our living life, of which Shakespeare's *King Lear* is preferable to any other one. Today in 21<sup>st</sup> century after a long span, critics, scholars, writers of various approaches and even film makers have been making attempts to work out repeatedly and adapting Shakespeare's works since twentieth century in diverse cultural contexts in all over the world. His works can be

read not only in a large number of printed editions, but also his versions are available on smart-phones and tablets. They can also be watched on screen today. There are some associations in the whole world which have been working out on Shakespeare's works to promote critical and creative interpretation. There are some associations and societies which have been working out on study of Shakespeare and also organizing conferences, seminars and congresses as European Research Association organizes Congresses with a title like "Shakespeare and Twentieth Century" "Creating and Recreating Shakespeare". Shakespeare Society in India has been performing to promote wider interests in the works of Shakespeare, and making microfilms, videos and translation as well. Asian Shakespeare Association organized conference in Taipei (2014), second in New Delhi (2016) and third conference in Manila (2018) with the title "Shakespeare Traffics, Tropics". This association is also dedicated to researching, teaching and promoting Shakespeare. In Hollywood and Bollywood, the film makers have also been making attempts to promote William Shakespeare's works through their movies. Hollywood has produced near about 250 movies on Shakespeare's plays, or his characters, or plots. There have been produced 100 movies of *Hamlet* alone. Other films are: *A Thousand Acres* (1997) *King Lear*, *Let the Devil Wear Black* (1999) *Hemlet*, *She's the Man* (2006) *Twelfth Night*. *Ran* is a Japanese film that sets *King Lear* (1985). As far as Bollywood is concerned, veteran Indian actor Naseeruddin Shah had once said, 'The roots may look lost, but every big story in the Hindi film industry is from Shakespeare.' (gvsu.edu/GVSF Newsletter, April 2017, 3)

The film producers are also admirers of Shakespeare who have turned on his plays and produced films as follows: Haider (2014) *Hamlet*, *Maqbool* (2003) *Macbeth*, *Omkara* directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, *Do Dooni Char* (1968) *Comedy of Errors*, *Goliyon ki Raasleela: Ramleela* (2013) *Romeo and Juliet*. All the above endeavors have inspired to adapt Shakespeare's

thoughts and ideas to the whole world in postmodern times to improve human relations.

Thus, today Shakespeare's ideas and thoughts are universal timelessness definitely. They are relevant to be shaped considering the relationships among the members of the family and society especially human relations. For his play *King Lear* (1608) shows the human relations of love, lust, greed, jealous, discrimination, devotion, royalty, dishonesty and of betrayal which affect the family, society and country, and give a message to the whole world to improve, to develop and look forward through our actions enacted in lives.

Human Relations refer to the interrelations and emotions which not only integrate the members of the family and society due to strong relationship which makes feel safe, protected and loved, but also disintegrate them because of weak, negative and dynamic relationship which affects the future course of that relationship. As in his *Diversity of Human Relationship* Ann Elizabeth Auhgen writes,

Human relation is complex because it is not just a matter of what two think about one another. It affects and is affected by friends, and relations their culture, their physical situation. (Auhgen, Ann Elizabeth, 1996, 10)

For the part of Shakespeare, he also shows the positive and negative human relations which are universal and timeless. They correlate to the postmodern age considering atmosphere of families today. Shakespeare's view on life, love and human relationships is that love is the most important thing in life. Human relationships move around love and life. It means that love, life and relations are interrelated to one another in the family. In his *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Modern Critical Theory* quotes, Novy treats Shakespeare as 'the supreme literary repository of trans historical knowledge about human relation.' (Cunningham, James, 1997, 148)

As far as the relationship between father and child is concerned, it is unique and pure because he brings them up, imparts learning primarily, and shares everything etc. He has love and affection with them. But because of physical situation, carelessness and not to be proper nurturing there is scratched a demarcation line in between the thoughts of both of two and then the discrimination is flourished. Such kind of human relation can be traced out in Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*. In this play, Shakespeare shows the relation of false love of elder daughter Goneril and younger Regan towards her father Lear. Both sisters are flatterers, greedy and they know about their father that her father has become petulant, aggressive and unwise because of his old age. It is coincident that in such conditions they should help and take care of their father but on the contrary, they not only ignore the situation and condemn his psychological status but also they mock his toils. Such manners and etiquettes show that they don't have the true love but false love which is ephemeral, changeable and destroyable whenever alternations find. Being a father as well as a king, he was honest and loveable but because of sparkling of materialistic world he could not feel and observe their elder daughters' false love, while Earl of Kent, an honest courtier to

the king got the intuition their daughters so he made his best effort to convey him saying that

'Thy youngest daughter does not love the least;  
Nor are those empty hearted whose low sounds  
Reverbs no hollowness.' (*King Lear*, Act I Scene I,  
151-152)

At present it is too much difficult to see clearly something and know somebody through a thin curtain of materialism that is loved by the temporal world. It is caused by the sparkling of selfishness, of carelessness, of responsibility, of power, miscalculation and lack of knowledge which lead us to fall and create a discord between the relations and then disharmony, maladjustment, and then at last familial and social environment is polluted. So it is necessary to know the value of love and non-violence, otherwise chaos, instability and looseness and loss of believe are flourished. In *king Lear*, would be husband of Cordelia, Earl of France dislikes the father's decision, his partiality, injustice and behaviour against his youngest daughter, Cordelia. He says that the love of Goneril and Regan for her father is not pure but materialistic. Though he tries his best to understand the king:

Love's not love  
When it is mingled with regards that stand  
Aloof from the entire point. (*King Lear*, Act I Scene I,  
lines- 237-239)

Yet Lear could not understand the means of Prince of France. So he had to repay for his error of judgment in the form of conspiracy by his daughters. They tried to get murdered him for usurping the all properties. On the contrary, his youngest daughter Cordelia was humiliated and disclaimed to her all his kinship and from property by the king as a father who did not keep his responsibility towards his daughter while she had love for her father did not least. She loved him truly as before as after. Her love did not change with the alternations because her love was permanent, non-destroyable and unchangeable. Her paternal feelings were always with her father. Therefore, when she departs with Earl of France she says to her elder daughters Goneril and Regan: 'Love well our father.' (*King Lear*, Act I Scene I Lines - 270)

But they did never care of her statement and the condition of their father. They continuously kept exploiting him in many ways. When he felt that his daughters have been oppressing and torturing him mentally. He reminded his youngest daughter Cordelia, to whom had been banished from the state by her father due to lack of knowledge or error of judgement. King Lear sent a message to her about the conspiracy against him being made by Goneril and Regan. On hearing the message she was shocked at heart and became very sad. Without thinking of her father's behaviour towards her Cordelia immediately decided to come to his father to take care of him. When she with her husband reached to her father, on seeing his lovely, honest and modest daughter he became so pleased cordially and he says, 'Thou art a soul in blissess;' (*King Lear*, Act IV Scene VII Lines - 46)

In other case, Shakespeare reveals the violation of a presumptive contract, trust, or confidence that produces moral and psychological conflict within a relationship

amongst individuals. He shows the relationship of betrayal between father and son, and father and daughter in the play. It is not only used as a literary element and in films and TV serials but also Shakespeare and other writers have tried to expose betrayal. In his *Daughters Betrayed by Their Mothers* Holli Kenley points out:

There is something that automatically comes to mind when I think of betrayed... like violated.... violated some sort of basic principles of trust and protection. (Holli, Kenley, 2018, 106)

It is very serious problem prevailed in the family and society. So it is essential to show the futility of human being relation that can be worked out in the scenario of society in 16<sup>th</sup> century still today resembles the scenario of society in 21<sup>st</sup> century in respect of human behavior. Every human being has lost his trust to one another within family and society.

In postmodern world whether son or daughter murders his or her parents for getting property and government services as in *King Lear* on one hand, Earl of Gloucester who has legitimate son Edgar and illegitimate son Edmond. Though he loves both equally yet he betrays his older legitimate son and who is betrayed by his younger illegitimate son. The relationship is seriously flawed in ways such as miscommunication and disaster led by thirst for power and property of the young and the susceptible father. Despite of certain sister Goneril betrays her husband Albany by making love affairs with handsome and young Edmund and gives poison to Regan. In this connection a gentleman tells to Albany,

Your lady, Sir, your lady! And her sister  
By her is poisoned, she confesses it. (King Lear, Act V  
Scene III 230-231)

The tragic play unfolds the story of the unnatural betrayal of parent and child which is the cause of decline of human relations within family and society. So it is necessary to make strong relationships to one another in all over the world for healthy family and society. Maggie Tomlinson brings up a rather significant point when she comments on the nature of the relationship and the trust that is abused. She states that the evidence is simply not the sort of thing anyone let alone a father would cordial relationship of father and daughter.

Society is the whole complex of social behaviour and the network of social relationship. Society exists wherever there are good or bad, proper or improper relationships between human beings. These social relationships are not evident which can't be seen but feel. Society consists in mutual-interactions and inter-relations of worldly people and it is the structure formed by their relations.

And another negative aspect with the respect of human relation presented by William Shakespeare in his play *King Lear* that is Jealous which is a complex emotion that encompasses feelings of abandonment to rage and humiliation. It strikes people of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations. In his *Jealousy and Comparison in Close Relationship*, Pined defines jealousy as, 'a complex reaction to a perceived threat to valued relationship or to its quality.' (Duma, Ulrike, 2009, 5) It can also arise among siblings competing for parental attention as in *King Lear* both the sisters Goneril and Regan want to make illegitimate relationship to Albany so they had jealousy to each other. In *King Lear*, Edmund considering their state of psyche says to Albany for Goneril and Regan:

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;  
Each jealous of the other, as the stung  
And of the adder. (*King Lear*, Act V Scene I Lines –  
490-492)

Although jealousy is a painful emotional experience yet it is a valued relationship. So it is need to be taken to regain the affection and love of human beings mate or friend. In jealousy, an individual feels insecure and threatened by another person who seeks a relationship with someone they are emotionally related such as a lover, friend or family member.

In some places, controversial attempts such as quotas have been used to benefit those who are believed to be current or past victims of discrimination but they have sometimes been called reverse discrimination. In the world, government policies are making attempts to institute and to encourage employers and universities to seek out and accept groups or class, or category.

To summing up I would like to say that the human relations are connection between persons within family and society. Relationships are connection between persons. We share a relationship with our family members and social people. As far as the present paper is concerned, I have tried to traced out the human relations between father and daughter, father and son, master or king and courtiers or servant in respect of love, jealousy, betrayal, discrimination, honesty etc. from Shakespeare's *King Lear* in which human relations are failed due to lack of knowledge, negativity, dishonesty, weak relationships and multifarious aspects of the society. So maintaining healthy family relationships and strengthening the social system, it is important in making strong relationships which would be helpful to enhance family trust and unity. There are some human relations of socio-psychological and unethical aspects which are failed because of not considering by the society. Therefore, we should have a sense of royalty and devotion towards our family and stand by each other during times of trouble. I think it is more important to care the particularities by avoiding social evils to give the right of equality and consider them in society.

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