

**SHAKESPEARE'S
KING LEAR AND
INDIAN POLITICS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649519507

Shakespeare's King Lear and Indian Politics by William Miller

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Cover @ 2017

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**SHAKESPEARE'S
KING LEAR AND
INDIAN POLITICS**

Shakespeare's King Lear
and Indian Politics.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY

G. A. NATESAN & CO., ESPLANADE ROW, MADRAS.

1900.

PREFACE.

THIS is not an annotated edition of a play. It is a serious study of what is probably the greatest of Shakespeare's works. It is an attempt to make the wisdom which *King Lear* admittedly contains available for practical guidance in not a few of the difficulties that beset individual, and especially social, life.

I may explain the origin of the book. In nearly every one of the last thirty years I have taught one, and often two, of Shakespeare's plays to classes in this college. Some plays I have taught repeatedly. It has been my custom, after each play has been studied in detail, to give a short course of conversational lectures upon it with the object of bringing its artistic construction and moral significance clearly into view. *King Lear* was the play studied by last year's Fourth, or Senior B.A., Class. I am not likely to teach this play again and have accordingly put the substance of what I said in lecturing on it at the end of last year (though not for the first time then) into a form that is fit for publication.

I hope that the little volume thus composed will be welcome not only to former students of this college but to those who have studied in other colleges and universities in India, and in fact to all who take an intelligent interest in the healthy progress of the Indian community. It may be of considerable value as a help to those who

feel their need of help in dealing with some problems upon the right solution of which the well-being of this country in coming years will to a large extent depend. Mock modesty does not hinder me from saying this; for though the words of the book are mine, all the thoughts in it are Shakespeare's. I claim no credit but that of making an honest attempt to show how his great thoughts may serve the permanent needs of men and the present needs of India.

I dedicate the volume to the many hundreds, indeed I may say the thousands, who have studied Shakespeare under my guidance in by-gone years and who—far apart from one another—are now doing their work in life, no doubt with very various degrees of faithfulness and success. May it help them to work more faithfully and with a greater measure of true success! I dedicate it more especially to those of this number who were members of the Fourth Class, and therefore students of *King Lear*, in the years 1880, 1888, and 1899. In them, if it do no more, it will awaken memories,—I trust not unpleasing,—of what they listened to and thought about in their college years.

I hope all my former students will look upon this dedication as a token of the lasting regard of

Their sincere Well-wisher

WILLIAM MILLER.

MADRAS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, }
November 1900. }

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NEW things are better fitted to enlarge the mind or elevate the thoughts than to come fairly under the influence of one of Shakespeare's greater plays. The student who wishes to receive this influence to the full, must give himself to earnest study along various lines. In the first place, he must read the play with attention enough to make him familiar with the outline of the story and the actions of the different personages. In the next place, he must study it scene by scene in detail. He must master peculiarities of language and learn the force of every pregnant saying. Labour is well spent which helps him to understand the exact shade of meaning in every sentence. The light also which each of the speeches throws on the character of its speaker and the development of the plot,

requires careful and constant notice. With the amount of study implied in these things, most Indian students are content. Probably too many of them are content with less.

But these things alone will not bring one fully under the influence of the play. From the height which he has reached by this preliminary labour, the real student will look back on all that has passed before him, and will try to grasp the meaning of the drama as a connected artistic whole. He will try to form such a conception of the meaning and the bearing of the entire spectacle as must have been steadily present to the author's mind when framing it. In the whole interaction of circumstance and character he must see, as it were, an illuminated portion of the whole system of things in the midst of which men find themselves on Earth,—a means accordingly of coming to understand the principles on which that system works, and of seeing with his own eyes "the very springs of the machine."

Most men, when they visit a factory, need some help before they understand the working of the

machinery by which they find themselves surrounded. They see it as clearly as possible, but they soon discover that mere clearness of vision is not enough. What they see so clearly, is to them little better than a bewildering mass of intricate confusion until some one shows them in detail how rods and cranks and wheels co-operate, and contribute, each in its appointed way, to the common end. If explanation and guidance are thus required by those who wish to comprehend a piece of man's machinery when it is at work in clear day-light before their eyes, much more may it be expected that similar help will be required when, even in the brilliant light of a Shakespearean drama, a portion is displayed of that mighty and mysterious system amid which men play their part in life, and a portion of which they are. My aim in the following pages is to give such help as a student needs when he has studied "King Lear" carefully in detail, and thereby finds himself confronted with a portion of that great world-system which is so vast, so inexplicable, and so terrible, when one attempts

to grasp its deep significance or one's own relation to it. I wish to give such aid towards the student's understanding of that portion of the scheme of things on which the genius of Shakespeare casts light in this great drama as is needed by an intelligent and inquiring visitor who sees every part of the machinery that is working in a factory and yet stands perplexed by its intricacy, and deafened besides by its clank and whirr.

With questions of textual or linguistic criticism, the present Essay takes no concern. The reader is supposed to be thoroughly familiar with "King Lear." He is supposed to have mastered every important passage that is from any cause difficult or obscure, and to remember, with tolerable exactness, what each of the personages has done or said. He is further supposed to know the little that is known about the external facts of Shakespeare's life and to have some acquaintance, at least by name and in outline, with his other works. Also, he is supposed to know and to acknowledge the position which Shakespeare holds, by the consent of all men, as the poet who,