

BA Part 1 Hons (2019-20)

Elizabethan sonnet

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The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word sonnetto which means a sound or a song. It is a verse form consisting of 14 lines English iambic pentameter and basically deals with the theme of love. Sonnet. It was originated in Italy. In the early 18th century and was successfully Dante and Petrarch whose sequence of sonnets to the lady named Lora established the convention of Renaissance love poetry. In the first part of 16th century sonnet appeared in English in the work of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Earl of Surrey. The form was later used by most of the major Elizabethan poets such as Spenser, Sidney, Daniel, Drayton, and Shakespeare. After Milton, the form ceased for a time but was revived by the romantic poets and has been in vogue since then. Basically sonnets are of three kinds – Petrarchan sonnet, Shakespearean sonnet and Miltonic Sonnet.

Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two parts, the first eight lines are called octave which rhyme abba, the remaining six lines are called Sestet which rhyme cdecde. The octave generally contains the problem or theme which the sonnet will develop some times an expression of desire or doubt may take place in the octave which is resolved in the sestet.

The first twelve lines of Shakespearean sonnet are divided into three quatrains with four lines each which is followed by a couplet containing two lines in the quatrains the poet establishes a theme or problem which is resolved in the couplet. The rhyme scheme of quatrains is abab cdcd efef whereas the couplet has the rhyme scheme gg. He has discussed the problem in the quatrains and used the final couplets to

express the central theme. The Petrarchan sonnet style was extremely popular which Elizabethan sonneteers. Shakespeare has compiled 143 sonnets of which 124 sonnets have been dedicated to his friend the Earl of Southampton whom he loved from the core of his heart. The rest 19 sonnets have been dedicated to the dark lady. It is still uncertain who the dark lady was. Someone predicts that the dark lady might be one whom Shakespeare had developed relationship. Shakespeare had great affection with his friend the Earl of Southampton. He had a very charming personality and had developed narcissistic tendency, a tendency to love one's own personality. He had also refused get married. Shakespeare was apprehensive that if he continued to behave in the same manner he would be forgotten very soon since nobody would remember him. He decided to find out a way in the event of his friend remaining unmarried and made his love for his friend the theme of his sonnets in order to immortalize him.

Milton retained the structure of Petrarchan sonnet and preferred the rhyme skm abba abba throughout the 14 lines without giving any pause in the middle as Petrarch has earlier preferred dividing the 14 lines into octave and sestet.

Spencer in his sonnet amorette has preferred Shakespearean sonnet with a milled difference. It has the epigrammatic final couplet of Shakespearean sonnet and contains no break between octave and sestet.