

By William Shakespeare

## INTRODUCTION

Sonnet 55 builds up on Horace's theme of poetry outlasting physical monuments to the dead. In Horace's poetry, the poet is himself immortalised by his poetry but in this sonnet, Shakespeare seeks to build a figurative monument to his beloved, the fair lord. The fair lord is not described or revealed in any way in this sonnet. Instead, the sonnet just addresses the idea of immortality through verse. The ravages of time is a recurrent theme in the sonnets of Shakespeare. So sonnet 55 is one of the most famous works of Shakespeare and a notable deviation from other sonnets in which he appears insecure about his relationships and his self-worth. Here we find an impassioned burst of confidence as the poet claims to have the power to keep his friend's memory alive evermore.

## PARAPHRASE

1 – 4 lines – (Not marble ..... sluttish time)

The first stanza talks about how time will not destroy the poem, though it will destroy the world's most magnificent structures. He wishes to say that poetry is stronger than these structures. At the very beginning, the poet says that whether it is marble or gold plated monuments of princes, all will get destroyed but the magnificence of his poetry will live. The subject of poetry will remain bright and will shine forever in comparison to a neglected stone monument which is spoilt with Time. Time is compared to a slut who loses her glow and beauty with time. Shakespeare compares Time unfavourably to a female subject.

5 – 8 lines – (when wasteful ..... memory)

These lines begin with a new idea. Shakespeare has so far spoken of two destructive forces : time and war. He is here describing war destroying stone structures, which relates back to the 'marble' and 'gilded monuments' in line 1, that likewise do not last. The poet says that when destructive wars will take place, they will destroy statues also and due to its tumult all the work of the masons will be destroyed. Even the Sword of Mars, God of war, or the destructive fires of war will be able to destroy your memory. The poet is basically saying that even wars will not destroy the written memories of your life for they will survive even after deadly wars.

Lines 9 – 14 – (Gainst death ..... Lover's eyes)

This stanza does not talk about survival, but of human appreciation. The poet continues to praise his

subject. There is still a suggestion of survival, but survival of human appreciation and not of the verse itself. Doom refers to the Judgement day, suggesting that this poetic record of his subject will survive and be praised to the end of time. Slight deviation of the metre in the words "Even in" creates emphasis for this permanency.

The poet is saying that death and enmity destroys everything but poetry written on the subject will survive, will move ahead, find place and will be immortalised for all generations to come. Everything else will be judged on the Judgement Day.

The ending couplet is a summary of the survival theme. The couplet not only summarises the rest of the sonnet, but also seems to contradict itself. "Judgement" goes with the talk of the judgement day in the last stanza, but implies that the subject is alive and will be judged on that day, but 'dwelling in lover's eyes' suggest that the subject is love itself. Thus Shakespeare seems to consider the subject so lovely that he is a personification of love, which could be conquered and to which no poetry can do justice.

So the theme of the sonnet is that the subject will be honoured forever in the verses, though the verses are unworthy of them.

## सारांश

1-4 Lines

पहले छंद में कवि कहता है कि समय कविता को नष्ट करने में असमर्थ है जबकि संसार के शानदार भवन समय के थपेड़ों का शिकार हो सकते हैं। वे कहना चाहते हैं कि कविता इमारतों और भव्य भवनों से कहीं अधिक मजबूत है। आरम्भ में ही कवि कहता है कि चाहे वह संगमरमर या सोने का बना हो – राजकुमारों के द्वारा निर्मित भवन एक

दिन नष्ट हो जायेंगे परन्तु उनकी कविता का सौन्दर्य बना रहेगा। काव्य का विषय भी चमकेगा शानदार भवनों की तुलना – जो वक्त के साथ खराब हो जाते हैं – एक दुश्चरित्र स्त्री से की गई है। शेक्सपियर समय की तुलना अनुपयुक्त ढंग से ‘नारी’ विषय के साथ करते हैं।

5-8 Lines

ये पंक्तियाँ एक नये विचार से प्रारम्भ होती हैं। शेक्सपियर ने अभी तक दो विनाशकारी शक्तियाँ – समय और युद्ध का वर्णन किया है। यहाँ वे बताते हैं कि युद्ध पत्थर से बनी इमारतों को तोड़ सकता है जिसका संबंध पहली पंक्ति के ‘संगमरमर और सोने के पत्तर चढ़ी’ इमारतों से है – जो कायम नहीं रहती, गिर जाती हैं। कवि कहता है कि जब विनाशकारी युद्ध होंगे तो वे मूर्तियों को खंडित कर देंगे और उसकी दहल से मिश्रियों की कारीगरी टूट-फूट जायेगी। युद्ध के देवता मार्स की तलवार और युद्ध की नाशक अग्नि आपकी यादों को नष्ट कर देगी। कवि कह रहा है कि ये ताकतें शक्तियाँ भी आपकी लेखनीबद्ध यादों को नहीं मिटा पायेंगी क्योंकि इन नाशकारी युद्धों के बाद भी वे जीवित रहेंगी।

9-14 Lines

यह छंद सुरक्षित बचे रहने की बात नहीं कर रहा बल्कि, मनुष्य के गुण-दोष विवेचना – गुण-ग्रहण की योग्यता का विवरण प्रस्तुत करता है। कवि निरंतर अपने विषय की प्रशंसा में संलग्न है। अभी भी सुरक्षित रहने की ओर एक हल्का सा इशारा है। परन्तु

यह इशारा मनुष्य की गुण-ग्रहण योग्यता की ओर है, कविता की ओर नहीं। “Doom” शब्द का इशारा उस दिन की ओर है जब ईश्वरीय दंड दिया जायेगा। और समय का अंत होगा। तब भी कवि का यह अभिलेख बच जायेगा और अंत तक प्रशंसनीय रहेगा। इन शब्दों द्वारा कवि अपने लेख के अमरत्व की ओर इशारा करता है।

कवि कह रहा है कि मृत्यु और शत्रुता सब कुछ नष्ट कर देती है। परन्तु काव्य जीवित रहता है वक्त के साथ आगे बढ़ता है, अपना स्थान ग्रहण करता है और पीढ़ी दर पीढ़ी अमर हो जायेगा। बाकी सब कुछ निर्णय के दिन फैसला होगा।

अंतिम छंद फिर एक संक्षिप्त विवरण है “सुरक्षित बचे रहने” के विषय प्रसंग का! इसमें बची हुई कविता की पंक्तियों का भी

समावेश है, साथ में आभास होता है मानो वह स्वयं का खंडन कर रहा है। “Judgement” अन्तिम छंद में निर्णय के दिन के साथ जाता है परन्तु निहितार्थ तात्पर्य में वर्णन का विषय कर्ता जीवित है और उसका फैसला उस दिन किया जायेगा परन्तु “dwelling in lover's eyes” का संकेत है कि कर्ता स्वयं प्रेम है। इस तरह शेक्सपियर की दृष्टि में कर्ता इतना सुंदर और आकर्षक है कि वह प्रेम का स्वरूप है जिस पर विजय प्राप्त की जा सकती है और जिसके साथ कोई काव्य न्याय नहीं कर सकता। इस तरह कविता के अनुसार काव्य में उसे सदा सम्मानित किया जायेगा जबकि कोई काव्य उसके साथ न्याय नहीं कर सकता।

### WORD-MEANINGS

- **outlive** : live afterwards      ● **rhyme** : poetry
- **overturn** : destroy      ● **room** : place, space
- **dwel** : live

### LITERARY DEVICES

#### PERSONIFICATION

- **‘Gilded monuments’**: Shakespeare personified these by giving them life-spans.
- **Posterity** : It is given a human characteristic of ‘sight’
- **Mars** : war is given the title of ‘mars’. This is rooted in Greek mythology, as Mars is the God of war.
- **Time** : as a slut. Just as the beauty of a slut undergoes great changes, so does time usher in great changes.

#### HYPERBOLE

This means exaggeration, but too much exaggeration which sometimes becomes unbelievable. In this poem, the poet claims that no amount of time or change can obliterate the words he writes, shall make his reader understand the awesome power as he as a wordsmith wields.

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

### TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

7. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) Why do you think the rich and the powerful people get monuments and statues erected in their memory?

Or

What, according to the poet, do the rich and

powerful long for? [C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]

**Ans.** The rich and the powerful people erect monuments to not only show their wealth and power but as living reminders of those people. They want the future generations to know and remember them. They are extremely vain people.

(b) Describe how the monuments and statues brave the ravages of time?

**Ans.** Whether the monuments are gold-plated or otherwise, all the monuments crumble with time or they are destroyed by war. Climatic reasons, manual desperation or otherwise all crumble and break with time.

(c) Why does the poet refer to Time as being sluttish?

**Ans.** A slut loses her charm and beauty with time. Similarly time also changes fast as the charms of a prostitute. Time keeps changing, so does the beauty of such an inferior female.

(d) The poet says that neither forces of nature nor wars can destroy his poetry. In fact, even godly powers of Mars will not have a devastating effect on his rhyme. What quality of the poet is revealed through these lines?

[C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]

**Ans.** The poet believes that his subject will be honoured forever in his verses and they will never face extinction or destruction by the powers of nature and time. The poet's extreme optimism and deep faith in the power of love is revealed in these lines.

8. Shakespeare's sonnet has been divided into three quatrains of 4 lines each followed by a rhyming couplet. Each quatrain is a unit of meaning. Read the poem carefully and complete the following table on the structure of the poem.

Ans.	Rhyme scheme	Theme
Quatrain 1	ab ab	Comparison between poetry and monuments.
Quatrain 2	cd cd	Ravages of time on monuments contrasted with living record of the beloved.
Quatrain 3	ef ef	The recorded memory of beloved will continue till posterity
Couplet	g g	Poetry immortalises friend

### SOME OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of sonnet 55?

**Ans.** Shakespeare believes that love is eternal and everlasting. It cannot be destroyed or controlled by materialistic things that are made to stand forever, but in the end all are doomed to destruction like the gilded monuments. Not even the sword of Mars or wars can destroy love, Shakespeare's true idea of love is that love will exist till the end of time. Since there is no end to love it will exist forever.

This sonnet shares this theme with other sonnets which oppose the power of verse to death and Time's cruel knife and promise immortality to the beloved. The

concluding couplet seems to curiously satisfy the curiosity as to who is being referred to. It is enough that it lives in 'the lover's eyes for all the mysteries will be comprehended on the last day of judgement. What distinguishes Shakespeare from others is that he values the identity of the beloved, he recognises that the beloved has his own personal immortality, that is no way dependent upon his poetry. So the poet's verse will continue strongly even in the face of death and dispassionate enmity. It will always live in poetry and in the eyes of the lovers who will read this. So the theme is love and the power of love that outlives all.

### REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – MCQs

Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. "Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of prices, shall outlive this powerful rhyme"

- (i) Here poetry as compared to monuments is
- (a) long lasting
  - (b) short-lived
  - (c) as powerful as gilded monuments

2. "You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes."  
 (ii) The phrase 'lovers' eyes signify  
 (a) the loving eyes of a lover  
 (b) the poetry will be forgotten forever  
 (c) the poetry will survive all destruction
3. *Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn*  
 (iii) Here sword of Mars is referred to  
 (a) sword of mars, God of war

- (b) fires of wars  
 (c) Destructive nature of war
4. "Living record of your memory."  
 (iv) Here living record refers to  
 (a) the sonnet the poet has written for his friend  
 (b) an existing statue of his friend  
 (c) his friend who lives in the poet's memory

**Answer :** (i) (a) (ii) (c) (iii) (c) (iv) (a)

## REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – NON-MCQs

Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow.

1. *Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
 of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme*

(a) **What are gilded monuments?**

**Ans :** The monuments that are decorated and embellished with gold.

(b) **What purpose do the monuments serve?**

**Ans :** They are symbols of power and riches to remember the dead and the mighty.

(c) **What will powerful rhyme achieve?**

**Ans :** The powerful rhyme will immortalise the person in whose memory it is written.

2. *But you shall shine more brightly in these contents  
 Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time*

(a) **Identify 'you'**

**Ans :** The subject of the poet's poem (it is not clearly indicated)

(b) **Explain – "sluttish time"**

**Ans :** Time is known to bring great changes. Similarly, the beauty of a slut also undergoes changes.

(c) **Who shall shine more brightly?**

**Ans :** The subject of the poet's poem will be remembered forever and its worth will not diminish with the passage of time.

3. *Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
 The living record of your memory.*

[C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]

(a) **Who is 'Mars' ?**

**Ans :** In Greek mythology, he is the 'god of war'.

(b) **How will 'living record' survive the test of time?**

**Ans :** The written words of the poet will never be destroyed by nature or time.

(c) **How are other things destroyed with time?**

**Ans :** Other things, like monuments, statues will be destroyed by nature-made or man-made disasters or war.

4. *Shall you pace forth, your praise shall find room  
 Even in the eyes of all posterity  
 That wear this world out to the ending doom*

(a) **What will happen to the praise of the poet's friend?**

**Ans :** The poet's friend will be remembered even by the coming generations.

(b) **What is the future of the world predicted?**

**Ans :** The physical world is doomed, it will be destroyed.

(c) **What do the above lines reflect about the poet's personality?**

**Ans :** The poet is too concerned and loves his friend too much.

5. *So till the judgement, that yourself arise  
 You live in this and dwell in lover's eyes*

(a) **What is 'judgement'? Who delivers it?**

**Ans :** Judgement Day or Doomsday is when everyone is rewarded or punished for their deeds by God.

(b) **Who will survive? How?**

**Ans :** All else will be destroyed but poet's love for his friend will survive.

(c) **Explain — "dwell in lover's eyes".**

**Ans :** Poet's love for his friend will survive because it will live on in the eyes of the lovers.

## SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

**1. How does the poet compare ‘gilded monuments’ with ‘powerful rhyme’?**

**Ans :** Both gilded ‘monuments’ and ‘rhyme’ are for someone’s memory. But all kinds of monuments will never stand the test of time, they all will be destroyed with time. But the poet’s love for his friend will survive and be immortalised.

**2. What happens to monuments with time?**

**Ans :** The monuments are erected to honour someone or to show one’s wealth or power. Any man-made disaster like war or natural calamities can destroy these physical signs of memory. They can be razed to the ground.

**3. Explain – “Nor Mars his sword nor wars’ quick fire shall burn the living record of your memory.”**

**Ans :** The poet says that no kind of wars and even the God of war with his powerful sword can ever destroy the poems the poet has written for his friend. He means to say that written words are immortal and cannot be destroyed by anyone.

**4. How will ‘posterity’ react to the verses that are written?**

**Ans :** ‘Posterity’ means ‘coming generations’. Writing is a permanent record of memory. Since the poems written for the poet’s friend will live forever, so future generations will remember and revere them.

**5. Explain – “You live in this, and dwell in lover’s eyes”**

**Ans :** The poet’s friend will live forever for he is immortalised in the verses written by the poet. Everything else will perish on the Judgement Day. But the poet’s love for his friend will not perish, it will live in the eyes of the lovers forever.

**6. How has the poet eternalised the subject of his attention in the poem, ‘Not Marble Nor the Gilded Monuments’?**

**Ans :** In this poem, the poet has eternalised his subject i.e. love. The poem reveals poet’s extreme optimism and deep faith in the power of love. According to him, Love is beyond all barriers whether materialistic or physical. All other things are doomed for destruction but love will stand the test of time. Since there is no end to love, it will exist forever in the eyes of the lovers.

**7. Explain in your words how his ‘poetry’ has been glorified by the poet, in the poem, ‘Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments.’**

**Ans :** In the very beginning of the poem, the poet talks about how time will not destroy the poem, though it will destroy the world’s most powerful structures. He glorifies his poetry by saying that all the marble or gold plated monuments of the princes will get destroyed but the magnificence his poetry will live. The subject of poetry will remain bright and will shine forever in comparison to a neglected stone monument which is spoilt with time.

## LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

**1. How is Time personified in the poem? What purpose does it serve?**

**Ans :** Time is a great leveller. It destroys everything like the monuments or statues. All the magnificent structures of the world will be razed to the ground. Then ‘time is personified as a slut which is an unfavourable comparison. Just as a slut’s beauty changes with time, similarly, time also changes everything. A slut’s physical beauty does not last, nor does her attractions. Similarly time changes all relations or equations that one forges in life.

**2. What is the poet’s message in sonnet 55?**

**Ans :** The poet wishes to communicate that Love is beyond all barriers, whether materialistic or physical. All the other things are doomed for destruction but love will stand the test of time. Since there is no end to love, it will

exist forever. Time’s cruel knife cuts everything, changes all relations but not love. So the poet’s love for his friend will continue strongly even in the face of death and dispassionate enmity. It will live forever in the eyes of the lovers. So the theme is love and the power of love that outlives all.

**3. Discuss the use of literary devices in the poem.**

**Ans :** The poet has resorted to the excessive use of personification in this poem. Shakespeare personified gilded monuments by giving them life spans. ‘Posterity’ is bestowed with the human quality of ‘sight’, war is given the title of ‘Mars’ and time is also called a ‘slut’, who changes too often. The poet also indulges in hyperbole, when he claims that no amount of time or change can obliterate the words he writes, shall make his readers understand the awesome power he wields as a poet. Then

literary embellishments heighten the critical value of the poem and make it more effective.

- 4. You were extremely impressed to read the poem, 'Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments'. Write a letter to a friend telling her about the poem and your new found interest in poetry. Sign yourself as Amit / Amita of 39, D-Block, Model Town, Delhi.**

**[C.B.S.E., 2011 (T-1)]**

**Ans :** Dear Mamta,

Surprised to see one more letter in succession! Yes, but I could not resist myself from telling you something about my new-found love. Do not guess it wrong—It is poetry.

Mamta, you know I never liked to read poetry, as you do, although you always asked me to do so. It was only yesterday that I met a friend of mine who is a diehard fan of Shakespeare's poetry. There I got a chance to read

Shakespeare's poem, 'Not Marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments.' At first it just went over my head but when my friend explained the poem and the theme i.e. love, in her own words, I was totally engrossed. The way the poet has eternalised love, stating that it is beyond all barriers, all other things are doomed, but love will stand the test of time, is simply marvellous. I couldn't restrain myself and read the poem on my own.

You will be surprised to know that I immediately went to her library and borrowed poetry books from her to read. I kept on reading the books till late at night. I am eagerly waiting for the day when you will come to my place and we both will sit together and read the poems from different poets. My regards to everyone at your end.

Waiting eagerly

Your friend,

Amita

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- 1. Prepare a project on SONNETS of Shakespeare which deal with the theme of Time.**
- 2. Locate similar sonnets and list them out.**
- 3. There is great suspense regarding the identity of the subject in Shakespeare's sonnet. Locate similar poems which are addressed to mysterious subjects.**