

**AECC -1 , Core L , Humanities General**

**Topic: William Shakespeare's Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day**

**The Text:**

**Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (Sonnet 18)**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Introduction:**The poem "Shall I Compare Thee" is written by William Shakespeare. It is a Sonnet. A sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines with a particular rhyme scheme. Shakespeare has written 154 sonnets. "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" is sonnet number 18. A Shakespearean sonnet is divided into four parts. It has three quatrains followed by a couplet. The rhyme scheme of the sonnet is abab, cdcd, efef, gg. Sonnet "Shall I Compare Thee" is addressed to Shakespeare's unidentified friend Mr. W.H. He is the "the only begetter" of Shakespeare's sonnets. Shakespeare has called him "the fair youth". This led to the speculation that the initial letters of W.H. stand for 1) William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, or 2) Henry

Wriothesley , Earl of Southampton, or 3) William Hall, a stationer's assistant, or 4) William Himself that means Shakespeare himself.

### **Critical appreciation and Central Idea of the poem**

Shakespeare's sonnets are sensitive musings on time and life, transience and permanence, beauty and art, friendship and love. His sonnets are his life's breath, the delight of his existence, the passion of his much agonized soul. Wordsworth said, "with this key, Shakespeare unlocked his heart." To the readers, Shakespearean sonnets are the never-ending sources of verve and inspiration, of hope and delight. Sonnet "Shall I Compare Thee" sings of "immortality through verse". It is addressed to Shakespeare's young friend Mr. W.H. Time devours everything on this earth. Nothing is permanent. The eternizing power of Shakespeare's verse challenges the omnipotence of Time and perpetuates the beauty and glory of his friend. The poem begins dramatically when the poet says to his friend: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" The poet compares his friend's beauty to that of a summer's day but finds the analogy inadequate. Nature and natural things are transient and changeable, his friend's beauty is more perfect. The poet muses on the shortcomings of summer: "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May/, And summer's lease hath all too short a date." The destructive summer wind crushes the "darling buds of May" which are emblematic of the future possibilities of blooming into fullness. Moreover summer is short-lived. The term "summer's lease" is a contractual metaphor. Even the dazzling summer sun is dimmed by the clouds. The noon-time sun loses its brightness during the sunset. The poet uses a metaphor for the sun in "eye of heaven". Every fair object falls off from its beauty at some time. Everything in nature is hastening to its end. Time marches relentlessly. But, Shakespeare's verse knows no death. Mr. W.H. is promised eternity in Shakespeare's lines. He grants his friend immortality. He is born to enjoy an eternal summer in the Shakespearean sonnet. The poet's eternal lines have immortalized his friend's perfect beauty. His beauty is his personal possession. He owns it. Even death cannot claim him. The poet assures him: "Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,/ When in eternal lines thou grow'st:". In Hebrew, the shade or shadow of death means intense darkness. The sonnetting conceit of immortality dispels the darkness of death and restores peace, bliss and happiness. Mr. W.H. will ever be radiant in this glorious sonnet. The poet proves prophetic in his proud proclamation: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/ So long lives this and this gives life to thee." This poetic

conceit of perpetuating love and beauty invites comparison with Spenserian lines in Sonnet "One Day I wrote Her Name", where Spenser also affirms immortality to his beloved: "My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,/ And in the heavens write your glorious name." Another poet Daniel also said in "Delia": "Thou mayst in after ages live esteemed/ Unburied in these lines." "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" champions poetry over death and time. It gives us assertion and assurance, confidence and conviction. It is deathless, perennial. It will continue to shine over the ravages of time. As long as men continue to exist on the earth or they continue to see, this poem will exist and it will keep his friend alive. He is born for no death. This poem will immortalize him with its undying, dynamic appeal to all. It remains a beautiful blend of poetry, prophecy and philosophy.

Declaration: This study material is prepared from several scholarly articles and annotations on Shakespeare's sonnets. I shall provide the names later.