

**PERFORMANCE CRITICISM AND THE MAKING
OF AN INDIAN SHAKESPEARE**

A Dissertation submitted to Gauhati University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy



Submitted by

PINKY SHARMA SAIKIA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
GUWAHATI-781014

2016

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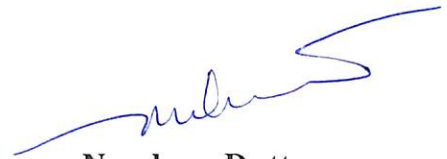
2016

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Pinky Sharma Saikia** worked under my supervision for her M.Phil. Degree in the Department of English, Gauhati University. Her dissertation titled “**Performance Criticism and the Making of an Indian Shakespeare**” represents her original work and it has not been submitted wholly or in part for a degree or diploma elsewhere.

Guwahati

Date: 31.3.16



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “**Performance Criticism and the Making of an Indian Shakespeare**” submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of English, Gauhati University is the product of my own research and investigation.

This dissertation either in part or in full was not submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of my knowledge this dissertation does not contain any instances of plagiarism.

Date: 31/03/16

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M.Phil Course 2015-2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my gratefulness to all those individuals who with their help and cooperation guided me in the process of my research programme. I offer my sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Nandana Dutta for her guidance, remarks and support in every aspect of my research project. I wish to acknowledge her continuous engagement and immense cooperation in the completion of this work. It has been a great opportunity to learn things from her that greatly helped in the improvement and completion of this project.

I sincerely thank all the teachers of the department for their valuable insights and guidance that have greatly helped my work.

I am thankful to Professor Subir Dhar and Natya Shodh Sangstha, Salt Lake City, Kolkata for their kindness and support.

I must mention my thanks to the librarians and staff of K.K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, Laxminath Bezbarua Library of Dibrugarh University for their help and cooperation.

I wish to thank my friends Himaxee, Prerna, Niku, Jyoti and Priyanka whose queries, suggestions and encouragement that helped a lot in the completion of this work.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their love, inspiration and a constant belief in me without which this work would never have happened. I owe my debts to them for everything they have done which makes me what I am today.

I owe a special thanks to my husband for his constant support and encouragement, helping me to collect study materials required for this research. I wish to thank my younger sister, Ankita for always being with me in my difficult days and helping me in every possible manner at various stages of this work.

Date: 31/03/16

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CONTENTS

	Page No.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
INTRODUCTION	1-27
CHAPTER-1	28-53
GENDER AND PERFORMANCE	
CHAPTER-2	54-82
CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE	
CHAPTER-3	83-107
FOLK TRADITIONS IN PERFORMANCE	
CONCLUSION	108-117
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118-126

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare has been a powerful site of cultural and aesthetic contest in several parts of the world and his works have virtually mingled with world cultures. Performance criticism of Shakespearean plays express the difference across cultural borders which elicit strong responses in issues of race, gender, power and conflict that have relevance to our times. Performance studies on Shakespeare illuminate the transformation and alienation that is experienced when performances take place in a particular socio-cultural milieu.

Shakespeare's age was socially, politically and culturally different from ours. Critics therefore argue for the need to undertake alterations in Shakespeare texts to suit the taste of contemporary audiences in different cultures. This change becomes imperative in order to sustain interest in Shakespeare. And it is in this context that performances of Shakespeare become important since these alone provide the scope for change and reinterpretation of Shakespearean plays.

Performance critics observe that performance is "an essentially contested concept" which cultivates an atmosphere of "sophisticated disagreement" and the performers "do not expect to defeat or silence opposing positions, but rather through continuing dialogue to attain a sharper articulation of all positions and therefore a fuller understanding of the conceptual richness of performance" (Carlson, 1996: 1). This observation asserts the power of performance to explore relevance and bring about shifts to suit the interests of a given cultural milieu.

Criticism of Shakespeare performances in India has focused on these issues of relevance and shifts showing in the process that Indian performances of Shakespeare provide an important site for reconsideration of Shakespeare in contemporary times. A reading of the critical literature of adapted Shakespeare performances in India highlights notable shifts in the reproductions of Shakespeare. These critics assert the successful transplantation of Shakespeare by establishing relevance to certain Indian contexts. Shakespeare performances in India demonstrate indigenization, cross curation and re-localization in the Indian milieu where two different cultures interact.

Poonam Trivedi in her “Introduction” to *India’s Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance* refer to the observation of John Russell Brown in *New Sites for Shakespeare*, where he acknowledges that the performances of Shakespeare in the Indian theatrical modes of *jatra* and *kudiattam* enable him to understand Shakespeare in a new way. He opines that “in some ways Asian theaters offer a better site than the new Globe for reconsideration and reform” (Trivedi 2005: 35).

In relation to Brown’s assessment it can be asserted that the richness of Indian dramatic aesthetics itself bears the potential to reinvent and refashion Shakespeare in a creative manner. Indian performance tradition owes its origin to Bharata’s *Natyashastra* (an ancient treatise on the theory and practice of drama) with integrated structure of performing conditions, character, space, spectators, frame and context. In addition to this classical aesthetic tradition India has various forms of folk performance traditions that use folk music, dances, martial arts, efficiently trained performers and several other local devices. The folk theater tradition adopts flexibility in the use of performance spaces to

create a close relationship between the actors and the audiences. So, it is evident that the fertile base of Indian performance traditions promotes multiple experimentations of Shakespeare in India.

The performances of Shakespeare in India invariably attempt to locate his plays in native socio-cultural and political contexts. Indian directors have re-contextualized Shakespeare to serve the taste and temper of Indian audiences. Shakespeare has been performed in folk forms of *jatra*, *nacha*, *yakshagana*, *nautanki*, *bishohara* and numerous other forms in different regions in India. The adapted performances highlight certain themes like gender, race, power, conflict, socio-religious norms and aspects of Indian Vedic philosophy through versions of the plays that culturally transplant the Bard.

Shakespeare and India

Shakespeare plays have had a long connection with India since colonial times and it therefore becomes necessary to briefly survey this relationship in order to understand the subsequent developments in Shakespeare performances and its critical discourse in India.

Shakespeare appears as a highly venerated figure in the canon of English education in India. Shakespeare receives great admiration through his dramatic works that leads him to occupy a unique place in the literary as well as socio-cultural consciousness in India. Shakespeare permeated into the Indian cultural consciousness through the British education policy under colonialism that adopted English literature as the basic foundation for inculcating British morals and values among the Indians.

Shakespeare came to India with the British but did not leave the country with them after independence. Shakespeare became naturalized through innumerable adaptations and decidedly took on an Indian identity. The Indian engagement with Shakespearean plays has served as a vehicle to investigate and explore the multiple possibilities of cross-cultural assimilation that led to the re-presentation of Shakespeare in completely new and different attire.

The early efforts in the promotion of English education in India were taken by the Christian missionaries who played a pivotal role in this field. The action of imparting English education in India took a new turn with the arrival of the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff in 1829, brought about an instrumental alteration in propagating the agenda of English education in the country. Duff's agenda was not only to impart British education to the Indians but also to give them religious instruction in Christianity. He believed that a prior religious education would alone make Indian students imbibe British moral values. With this view in mind Duff established the Mission College in Calcutta in 1830 with a curriculum designed by him containing canonical texts of a religious nature. And Shakespeare did not find any place in the initial selection of Duff as the Bard was not considered religious enough to promote Christian morals.

Direct imposition of religious education in India was also prevented by the government fear of rebellions and protests. So, missionaries like Reverend William Kean were finally forced to compromise and concentrate on the inherent religious and moral values present in English literature. And it was then that Shakespeare came to be favoured with inclusion in the syllabi of the missionary institutions as the source of

Christian morals and values. The Reverend William Kean comments on the significance of Shakespeare in preaching Christian religious values through education:

Shakespeare, though by no means a good standard, is full of religion; it is full of common sense principles which none but Christian men can recognize. Several protestant Bible principles, though not actually told in words, are there set out to advantage, and the opposite often condemned. So with Goldsmith...and many other books which are taught in the schools...(which) have undoubtedly sometimes a favourable effect in actually bringing them to us missionaries.

(Vishwanathan 1989: 80)

With the government policy of religious non-intervention in matters of Indian education Viswanathan again writes that “the tensions between increasing involvement in Indian education and enforced non-interference in religion were productively resolved through the introduction of English literature” ((Vishwanathan, 38).

On the other hand, the government schools and colleges prescribed books in literature including Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. The inclusion of Shakespearean plays in the syllabi of the government institutions can be regarded as a part of the British civilizing mission as Shakespeare was considered to be the cultural epitome of the English socio-cultural life (Vishwanathan, 54).

Besides all these intimacies of Shakespeare with India, it is with the Indian Education Act (1835) that Shakespeare’s presence in British India was formally consolidated confirming that the education of Indians would be imparted in English rather than Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic. Thomas Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian

Education” (1835) formulated an educational curriculum in India to create- “a class of people Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect”, who would serve as “interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern” (Duff 1839: 729). Shakespeare, then, became the supreme exemplum of European humanistic ideals in India and the ‘cultural metonymy’ of the colonizer’s hegemonic control-in pedagogy and performance (Sen 2001: 203).

Moreover, the Indian response and affinity with Shakespeare can be aptly confirmed in the words of Sisir Kumar Das:

not only widespread, stretching over a vast region conspicuous by its linguistic and cultural diversities, but also of the longest duration so far as any other foreign writer is considered. The Indian engagement with Shakespeare that began from the initial phase of the Indo-British encounter and which continues still today, fifty years after the end of the Raj, is not simply an issue of literary history involving the problematic of influence and impacts, reception and survival, but an integral part of larger questions of politics and culture in a colonial situation. (Das 2001: 52)

Shakespeare performances started as early as 1775 in The Calcutta Theatre (1775-1808) and The Chowringee Theatre in 1813 in Calcutta. Shakespearean plays were staged in India in imitation of the English masters during the colonial era. Several theater companies performed Shakespeare on the western model for the entertainment of British officers and the Indian elites.

Gilbert Ironside , a colonel in the East India Company wrote to David Garrick on 21st August 1775, thanking him for sending Barnard Messink to set up the playhouse:

I have some thoughts of setting at work the happy invention of Machinery...by way of Vehicle for the introduction of the fashions habits dances and music of this Country. (Trivedi 2005: 14)

Here, Ironside indicates his plan to draw the Indians into the grander scheme of the British 'civilizing mission' through the Shakespeare performances. The elite class in India was in search of a cultural identity to be equal with the rulers. Shakespeare was posited as the supreme exemplum of high and refined culture and offered an avenue for serving the interest of the natives. Jyotsna Singh puts forward the account of Susil Mukherjee in this context:

When the English came to Calcutta they brought with them the plays of Shakespeare. Early in the nineteenth century Shakespeare was a subject of study in the Hindu College. Much before that Shakespeare's plays had begun to be staged in the theaters that the local Englishman had set up in the city for their entertainment and relaxation. The names of David Garrick...and Garrick's Drury Lane Theater...were familiar in Calcutta among the readers of Shakespeare and the lovers of theatre. (Singh 1989: 448)

Another significant aspect of Shakespeare performances in India is that the performances of Shakespeare took place much before the plays were taught in the classroom. It is to be noted that the institutionalized study of Shakespeare began with the establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 (Trivedi 2005: 14), and the playhouses were set up as early as 1775 (The Calcutta Theatre). Shakespeare performances therefore preceded the study of Shakespeare in educational institutions in

India and helped to develop a great appetite for Shakespeare in advance. So it is evident that the Shakespeare performances created an appetite in advance that led to the inclusion of Shakespeare in the Indian educational curriculum and Shakespeare's drama became an indispensable part of English education in India. The nineteenth century India loved and adored Shakespeare as his plays were seen as a platform for imitating English cultural norms by an aspiring group of Indian elites. Jyotsna Singh records such favouring of Shakespeare as she writes that:

While the English playhouses by their production of English, specially Shakespeare's plays created an appetite for theatrical performances, the foundation of the Hindu College in 1816, and the teaching of Shakespeare by eminent teachers like Richardson (who was also the founder of the Chowringhee theatre) created in the minds of the students- the intelligentsia of modern Bengal- a literary taste for drama as such, and taught them , not only how to appreciate Shakespeare criticism, but also to recite and act scenes from his plays...in 1837 Bengali students staged scenes from The Merchant of Venice in the Governor's house, in 1852 and 1853, the students of the Metropolitan Academy and David Hare Academy staged Shakespeare plays...Shakespeare's drama became an indispensable part of English education and a popular item in all cultural productions...(Singh 1989: 450)

This in fact reveals that Shakespeare performances prepared the ground for the development of a popular image of Shakespeare in the country that paved the path for further innovative experimentations with his plays.

So it can be said that Shakespeare came to India through the British policy of education; the ‘civilizing mission’ and also due to the Indian people’s aspiration to imitate the Western culture through Shakespeare. The process of Shakespeare’s advent and subsequent popularity among Indians happened in three different layers institutional teaching, discussions and performance.

Firstly, Shakespearean plays were taught in English in several schools and colleges in imitation of the colonial masters which became central to English teaching in India. As a direct result the Bard came to be performed in English on the Western model by several theatre companies but for the English audience only. For example, *Othello* was played at the Sans Souci in Calcutta in 1848, casting a Bengali actor, Baishnavcharan Auddy , “a real unpainted nigger Othello”, (Sen 2001:204) and Mrs. Anderson (the daughter of the actress Esther Leach) as Desdemona.

Secondly, Shakespeare was seen as a colonizer’s writer by a group of nationalist literary activists like Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. They opposed the authority of Shakespeare in comparison to Indian poets and Sanskrit Literature. One example is Bankimchandra Chatterjee wrote ‘Sakuntala O Miranda’ (1875) and ‘Sakuntala O Desdemona’ (1875). These juxtapositions of Shakespeare and Sanskrit drama and especially the comparative approach in fact, created a discourse of Shakespeare in India and contributed to Shakespeare’s popularity in India.

Thirdly, Shakespeare was performed in indigenized form through translations, adaptations and appropriations into various Indian languages that were then played in

folk dramatic styles. It can be said that Shakespeare was recreated, refashioned and repositioned in India facilitating the formation of a trans cultural image of the foreign dramatist, thereby making him a favorite with Indian playgoers (Sen 2001: 204-205).

Amitava Roy, in his *Presidential Address to the Conference*, (World Shakespeare Conference, Calcutta, 2000) raises significant questions regarding the 'Indian Shakespeare'. He investigates why Shakespeare is more real and alive in India today and how the Indian connection with Shakespeare could be enhanced. Roy believes in teaching Shakespeare in the classroom by exploring him in the Indian context and re-reads Shakespeare to find the great playwright more relevant and meaningful in India. In the present European world, Shakespeare is a historical writer belonging to the past and a recorder of a vanished age. Today the West lives in a technologically modern age whereas India still has the intermingling of ages---the Medieval, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Modern. Roy refers to Gunter Grass's statement, "India offers the most creative space for a writer to work in, for it is the one country in the world where all the centuries intersect" (Roy 2001: 18) to justify his claims about the indigenization of Shakespeare in India. Roy draws a parallel between Shakespearean plays and Indian society through some significant similarities. Firstly, he relates the witches in *Macbeth* to the superstitious beliefs of burning of brides for dowry and witch-hunting which is a common scene in Indian villages. Secondly, in *King Lear* the joint and extended family of Gloucester's household can be seen even in present times in India. Moreover, the self-sacrificing commitment of a daughter towards her father and the strong father-daughter relationship is a common scene in India. Such family bonding is rarely seen in the

present day mechanized life in the Western countries. So Roy opines that establishing such connection with the Elizabethan world and day to day happenings in India can make Shakespeare more familiar in the Indian classroom (Roy 2001: 19-22).

The importance of Shakespeare is asserted by an Indian Shakespeare scholar twenty years after India's independence:

the long tradition of Shakespeare teaching in our country, a tradition which has run for over a century and a half; we can forget or neglect our tradition only at our peril (Bose "Teaching of Shakespeare," Indian Journal,77).

This reveals that Shakespeare holds an integral position in the field of education in India. Shakespearean influence is deep rooted in the nature of education in India as the Indian education system owes its inheritance to the British colonial legacy. Shakespeare is indispensable for maintaining the standards of English education even in the post independence period as he was part of the foundation and remains the backbone of English education / English studies in India.

The reception of Shakespeare in post-colonial India can be seen in the remarks of the noted critic C. D. Narasimhaiah made during the commemoration of the fourth centenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964:

To us educated Indians, the coming of the British...meant among other things, the coming of Shakespeare, of noble speech and brave deeds and so Shakespeare must have a special significance for us in India. Until recently for hundred and fifty years or so (since 1835), we have learnt English through Shakespeare, and

thanks to him the learning has been so pleasant and profitable. Indeed to most of us, English educated Indians, Shakespeare's characters, the situations in his plays, and those memorable lines of his have become almost as intimate a part of our lives as those of the best of our own writers. Shakespeare, more than the English monarch, seems to be the true and vital link between India and England.

(Quoted in Singh 1996: 133-134)

Such comments affirm Shakespeare's everlasting relation with India but it proves to be true only for the elite educated minorities. So I would assert that the non-English speaking majority in India acquainted themselves with Shakespeare through the adaptations made for performances. The Indian theatrical productions of Shakespearean plays adapted in terms of Indian contexts offers significant and insightful contribution to the field of Shakespeare studies as a whole. Shakespeare received widespread admiration, modifications and re-contextualization in the hands of Indian directors and adapters who facilitated the successful negotiation and appropriation, detaching his plays from the English culture and bringing them closer to the Indian. Thus, the contemporization and indigenization of Shakespeare appears to be a fruitful endeavor that increases his relevance in India. The post-independence adaptations specifically reflect a sincere effort on the part of the Indian directors to reinvent Shakespeare without hampering the essence of the original plays. The hybrid productions especially metamorphosed Shakespeare not only into someone 'rich and strange' but also into someone 'rich and familiar'.

Shakespeare in India today has crossed all cultural, racial, geographical, social and linguistic barriers. There have been translations of Shakespeare into almost all the

major languages in India. Besides, there has been countless number of Shakespeare adaptations at different points of time across the country that has given birth to a new critical discourse on dramatic literature in India. The records and criticisms of these innovative experimentations with Shakespeare find place in a collection of essays edited by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz titled *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance* (2005). This work illustrates the various explorations of Shakespeare in India reflecting the translations, interpretations and performances. The book provides insight into the performances of Shakespearean plays in several folk forms and also on the changes brought about by the cultural transformation through localization of the plays in India. Another significant contribution towards Shakespeare in India is provided by the anthology edited by Amitava Roy, Krishna Sen and Debnarayan Bandopadhyaya, *Colonial and Postcolonial Shakespeares: Papers and Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Conference Calcutta 2000*, (2001), which records the image of Shakespeare in India in both colonial and postcolonial period. It focuses on postcolonial responses to Shakespeare particularly in Bengal and establishes his strong presence in India. *Shakespeare in India* (1987) gives the universal view of Shakespeare without any special reference to innovations; it presents the scholarly views of noted Indian scholars in various aspects of reading the playwright. Jayanti Datta's *Only Connect: UGC Seminar on Shakespeare* (2012) negotiates with certain central themes of Shakespeare, his reception in India and also records a historical lineage of Shakespeare along with the newness he attains in the local adaptations. Further, Suresh Awasthi's *Performance Tradition in India* (2001) gives elaborate definitions and explanations of the folk

performance forms of India which are used by the Indian directors and actors to refashion Shakespeare. Above all these several notable records can be found in journals like *Indian Literature*, and *Hamlet Studies* and in various newspaper reports on the performances on the indigenization of Shakespeare in the country.

This project focuses on the critical evaluations of the adapted Shakespeare performances in India in order to show how certain themes and ideas have emerged out of the productions on stage. I argue that certain themes that have come out of such performances and have been further elaborated and consolidated through critical assessments have contributed to the development of a popular image of Shakespeare in India. The themes taken for discussion are selected in terms of their relevance to the Indian context. These evaluations constitute a critical discourse about Shakespeare even as they form part of a critique of aspects of Indian society and culture. This dissertation examines these themes as they appear in the critical work and also in the process considers the shifts from the original Shakespeare text in the adapted performances.

Moreover, this dissertation shows how the Shakespearean adaptations strategically lend new meaning to certain themes and issues of the plays owing to the changes in perception brought about by the cultural transformation of Shakespeare's text. It concentrates on the criticism of selected adapted performances of the plays of Shakespeare which inevitably resonate with one or more Indian themes.

Shakespeare in India is localized and represented in a new guise so that the plays are able to transcend barriers of time, place and culture. The Indian adaptations generate

new creative interpretations of Shakespeare's universality by pointing to the plays in the Indian context. The various modes of Shakespearean experimentations in India transform the Bard not only making him our contemporary but also enabling him to occupy an intimate and close relation to the audience.

The infusion of Indian cultural norms, beliefs, folklore, folk modes of performance, Indian forms of music, dance and innumerable native performative devices enables the Indian translators and directors to boldly face the challenge of transforming the British, Elizabethan, and Christian Shakespeare into our contemporary. The experimentations with Shakespeare since pre-independence times have taught the Indian adapters that the earlier Shakespeare performances in the western model could not attract the Indian audience as much as the later adapted performances have done. And it was only through the adaptations that Shakespeare's popularity with the Indian viewer increased.

This dissertation attempts to make a cultural reading of the performance criticism of Shakespeare in India in order to bring out the social cultural and political themes that have been noted by critics and have helped in the easy acceptance of Shakespeare. It focuses on these themes and notes the shifts that have occurred as a result in the adapted Shakespeare performances in India. Since this is largely a translation effort – translation of the Shakespeare text into Indian languages, translation of Elizabethan cultural aspects into an Indian cultural scene, and translation of socio-political elements to fit into Indian society and politics - I would like to bring in the views of translation theorist Philip E. Lewis in order to understand this process. My attempt here is simply to draw an idea

about the effects of cultural translations and transformations in relation to my reading of changes in the Shakespeare adaptations. In the article “The Measure of Translation Effects”, Lewis opines that translation is always a translation in difference. Lewis suggests that translation does not mean only to capture the performative dimension of the original through a simple reproduction but also to bring about an invention in the translated work. A translator can make a formulative discovery through a studious and valid transgression. The replacement in the translation must be able to meet the challenges of the original in order to supplement the translation strongly on a performative register (in Lewis 2000: 283). These views are applicable to the cultural transformations made by Indian directors in their adaptations of Shakespeare. The Indian versions of the Shakespeare plays are creative inventions of the foreign playwright in an Indian socio-cultural context and against traditional Indian dramatic aesthetics. The process of transformation and transgression in the adaptations from the original Shakespearean texts seem valid since they are grounded in the ancient performative text of the *Natyashastra*, in religious and socio-cultural norms prevailing in India, and in varied forms of traditional folk performative devices.

Bharata’s *Natyashastra* conceives the art of the actor in a four-fold scheme namely- *vachik* (speech), *angik* (bodily movements), *aharya* (costume, make-up and scenic design) and *sativika* (psychic states). The Indian performance aesthetic drawn from this text particularly emphasizes aspects such as performing conditions, characters, space and arrangement of audience. Some of the adaptations of Shakespeare plays in India attain these traditional characteristics of performance. For example, the adaptation

of *Macbeth* by B. V. Karanth as *Barnam Vana* using the performative devices of *Yakshagana* enables an energetic performance with leaps and pirouettes (signature movements in *yakshagana*). Such indigenous performance elements provide strong inputs from Indian performance culture into Shakespeare. Again the adaptation of *Othello* by Sadanam Balakrishnan as *Kathakali Othello* adopts the form of *kathakali* with the use of elaborate costume and make-up and also emphasizes bodily movements because *kathakali* is basically performed in a dance-drama mode. The staging tradition of Sanskrit drama is incorporated in Raghuvir Sahay's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entitled as *Bagro Basant Hai*. In this version the director Mohan Maharshi used costumes to convey meanings (a part of ancient Sanskrit theatre tradition) where the costumes were designed with a lot of attention to detail. The various socio-cultural attitudes are highlighted in Kuvempu's *Raktaksi*, an adaptation of *Hamlet*. These include echoing the Vedic practice of viewing woman in the incarnation of *Sakti*, showing aspects of *maya*, incorporates Vedantic philosophization for Hamlet's soliloquy, and inserting political and religious elements as underpinning. So, the transformation of the Shakespeare text in the process of performance strongly challenges and supplements the original works.

Lawrence Venuti in his "Introduction" to *The Translation Studies Reader* considers the primary objective and function of translation to be communication. He describes communication as a process whereby meanings shape reality according to the changing cultural and social situations. Thus, the deviations in the translation of the foreign text are determined on the basis of how the translated text is connected to the target or receiving culture (Venuti 2000: 5). The Indian process of transformation of

Shakespeare links his plays to the socio-cultural issues by referring to the Indian context. Annie Brisset in her essay “The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity”, explores the identity forming power of translation. Brisset reads a translation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* into Quebecois by Michel Garneau to show that when a canonical foreign text is translated to Quebecois (which is a French dialect) it elevates the status of the dialect. It seems that the Indian dramatists too were aiming to elevate the status of Indian traditional dramatic aesthetics through their engagement with Shakespeare. Pona Mahanta, for instance, in his work on *Western Influences on Assamese Drama* mentions that the five-act structure of the Shakespearean play brought about a major change in the tradition of writing one-act plays in Assam (Mahanta 1985: 68).

One of the earliest adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, was made by Girish Chandra Ghosh at Minerva theatre in Calcutta in 1893. In Ghosh’s adaptation the alterations were very few and not at all satisfactory because of the dominant original essence of the play. The adaptation of *Macbeth* opens with an apology in the form of a prologue to acquaint the Indian audience with the foreign playwright, his aspirations, his style, characters and the age. Ghosh considered this prologue to be necessary for the Indian audience and critics. Further, Ghosh uses some phrases and words and also songs in his translation, through which he subtly changes the idiom of *Macbeth* from that of Shakespeare to that of an Indian viewer; he turns the ‘dusty death’ of Shakespeare into the dust to which dust returns, the dust as the final resting place in order to relate to the Indian audience. He insists on the rightful monarch coming to the throne in the adaptation and spreads a message of hope in the tragedy.

Besides, Ghosh spent a tremendous amount of time and energy on the project. As he said "It is hard to translate from one language into another. It took me 16/17 years to translate and act *Macbeth*" (in Chakraborty 2001:194). Among the indigenous elements introduced into the translation were the following: - a sailor's wife was changed to a 'Malo girl' to indicate a Bengali fishing and sailing community but great care was taken to maintain historical accuracy and the Shakespearean aura of the play. Ghosh comments that "I have freely availed myself of European aid in mounting and dressing the piece with strict adherence to time and place" (in Chakraborty 2001:195).

But I would like to analyze the record of the aftermath of this performance in relation to my study of the role of the Shakespeare adaptations and their critiques in familiarizing Shakespeare in India. As we shall see, it was not only the adapted performance that was important. Equally important were the critical perceptions that were generated by these performances.

With regard to Ghosh we can see both these things. Although Ghosh maintained "an admirable reproduction of all the conventions of an English stage" (in Chakraborty 2001:195) yet the performance of Ghosh's *Macbeth* was a dismal flop. Ghosh realized most poignantly, that the Bengali audience of his day was not ready for works of art or fare that departed from the usual mythological diet they were accustomed to. The ancient myth and epics of Hindu India, and the folklore of Mughal India had enjoyed unparalleled popularity (Datta 2001: 180-181).

Ghosh later commented bitterly, “If Shakespeare himself came to Bengal, the Bengali spectators would not understand him” (in Chakraborty 2001:195). Such views clarify that the cause of Ghosh’s disappointing experience was his inability to draw a proper connection between Shakespeare and the Indian context. As he did not use any local devices in his adaptation the Bengali audience who were not attuned to Shakespeare failed to find any affinity with the foreign playwright. On the other hand the later indigenized adaptations like ‘*Hamlet*’ as ‘*Hariraj*’ (1897), and *The Merchant of Venice* as ‘*Soudagar*’ (1915) were more popular. Utpal Dutt commented on adaptation of Shakespeare that Shakespeare was particularly suitable for ‘*jatras*’, or folk opera type plays performed in villages (in Chakraborty 2001:195). Further, Amitava Roy again asserts the importance of adaptation for easy acceptance of Shakespeare in India as he says:

One major reason for Shakespeare’s popularity and acceptance in our country lies in the fact of the playwright’s stagecraft and dramaturgy being very close to our own grassroots, traditional folk forms like the *jatra*, *nautanki*, *bhavai* etc. (Roy 2001: 14-15)

Hence it is clear that the use of the folk forms and the establishment of thematic and cultural connections in the adaptations of Shakespeare in India in r have contributed to make popular in the country.

Saubhik Dutta in the article “Rice and Fish in Inverse: A Study of Girish Chandra Ghosh’s Bengali Translation (1893) of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*” observes that the later generations of Indian directors learnt from Ghosh’s failure. Ghosh wrote an

extensive opening to his Macbeth in order to educate the native audience about his objectives; yet his attempt was a failure due to the lack of indigenous folk devices and a contemporary context. The directors now understood the need to adapt a foreign playwright with local dramatic techniques and familiar contexts. . And from these began a process of refashioning and recreating Shakespeare in innovative yet well known modes. These new adventures were capable of fulfilling the desired expectations of the audience, allowing a mingling of cultures across borders. The explorations and encounters collided and also dislocated Shakespeare at times but at the end the performances in India beautifully merged and assimilated all dissimilarities to reveal a friendly image of Shakespeare in the country. Therefore, the adapted performances locate Shakespeare amidst the masses in India, repositioning him with a variation in spatial, temporal and contextual elements which provided him an altogether different incarnation from the Elizabethan one.

This dissertation aims to make a detailed and distinct study of the themes evolving out of the criticisms of the adapted Indian performances in three chapters. The first and second chapters engage with a systematic reading of the relevant themes reflected in the selected criticisms of the adapted performances of Shakespeare in India. The selection of the adaptations is done on the basis of the themes that they highlight. The fourth chapter on the other hand looks into the localization of Shakespeare in various modes of folk performances. In this chapter the use of folk forms to create an alternative Shakespeare is basically assessed as another dimension of Shakespeare performance

criticism in India. The thematic concerns in the folk performances come together with the various performative devices adopted in the plays.

The first chapter entitled “Gender and Performance” explores the change of women’s role in the three plays of Shakespeare as assessed in the criticisms of the adapted Indian performances in three different sections entitled as i) *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ii) *Othello*, iii) *Hamlet*. In this chapter I would specifically focus on the alteration made in the portrayal of the character of Hippolyta of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the adapted version named *Bagro Basant Hai* by Mohan Maharshi. Again I shall deal with the changes in the character of *Hamlet’s* Ophelia in Kuvempu’s adaptation entitled *Raktaksi*. Further, this chapter would look into the performance of gender as revealed through the characters of *Othello’s* Desdemona and Emilia in the adaptation directed by Alque Padamsee. The chapter emphasizes on the theme of gender as evident in the critical evaluations of the Indian performances.

The second chapter entitled “Culture and Performance” focuses on four themes relevant to the Indian context as illuminated in the criticisms of the adapted Indian performances. This chapter is divided into four sections entitled i) Socio-political Aspects, ii) Power, iii) Race, iv) Conflicts. The chief concern here is to examine the given themes and their alterations as promoted in the critical discourses of the selected performances in respect to the cultural transplantation of Shakespeare.

The third chapter entitled “Folk Traditions in Performance” investigates the performances of Shakespeare in India in several folk performance spaces such as *Jatra*, *Nacha*,

Bishohara, Yakshagana, Nautanki and Puppetry. In this chapter an attempt will be made to study how the localized performances facilitate an alternative site for experimentations with Shakespeare to create a cultural revival across boundaries.

The argument of this thesis is that Shakespeare performance criticism in India foregrounds certain themes relevant to the Indian context. These themes have re-contextualized Shakespeare performances. This project examines the critical discourse growing out of Shakespeare adaptations. It looks at several critical interpretations of the performances to consider the alternative perspectives propagated by these themes.

This project makes an analysis of a narrow aspect of Shakespeare performance criticism in India. It reveals a proliferation of Shakespeare through the innovative performances and shows the inter-weaving of alien cultures that subverts stable conventional attitudes to socio-cultural aspects. Such trans-culturation generates a bond and fluidity in acceptance of the norms and values of another culture.

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CHAPTER-1

GENDER AND PERFORMANCE

Shakespearean plays engage with the issue of gender in a disruptive manner. Shakespeare presents gender in a complicated way where the identity of the male and female characters becomes uncertain. He provides an in between space where the masculine and the feminine are interfused, the maleness and femaleness intersect and mingle providing a possibility to express the fluidity of human identity. The socio-cultural milieu of Renaissance England recognizes the meaning of gender in terms of the two existing polarities between masculine and feminine, men and women with fixed gender roles. But Shakespeare's disruption of gender in his plays in the context of these existing polarities in the Elizabethan society is itself a radical challenge to patriarchal values. Shakespeare's ability to view gender as flexible gives a sense of his modernity and speaks to contemporary concerns.

Another notable aspect of the performance of gender in the Renaissance stage was the tradition of cross-dressing which introduced uncertainty and discontinuity of identity in the characters. Audiences were confused about the gender of the speaker where a woman's part was played by a male actor. Shakespeare complicates this uncertainty further when he allows Rosalind in *As You Like It* to become Ganymede, stepping out from one role into another which generates plurality and unsettles gender identity.

Shakespeare depicts a fluctuating masculine and feminine attributes in the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It appears that both

Theseus and Hippolyta take up distinct positions in all the issues- when Theseus is cynical about the moon; Hippolyta invokes conventional poetic imagery and when Theseus supposes that the young lovers have been deluded Hippolyta reacts with wonder. But Hippolyta finds the mechanicals' play "the silliest stuff that ever I heard" ; here Theseus exhibits imagination: "The best is this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them" (V. i.207-209). So this shows that the identities are not fixed as the masculine rationality and feminine imagination are reversed. Therefore, the play does not mark a strict distinction between genders and enables multiplicity to coexist with difference (Belsey, 1985: 189).

Shakespeare's plays accommodate the fluidity of gender roles, and performance can serve as an agent to reveal alternative meanings of gender. Judith Butler in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" considers gender to be basically an innovative affair. She states that "Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, ---through subversive performances of various kinds" (Butler, 1996: 132). Likewise the opinion of the new-historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt sounds relevant in reading gender and performance in Shakespearean plays. Greenblatt states that Shakespearean plays are "self-conscious about the performance of power, and the power to produce the selves it supposedly governs" (Greenblatt 1980). So, it is evident that Greenblatt believes in performance as the agency to explore gender roles in Shakespeare.

Shakespearean plays regularly explore the relations of gender with the central theme of conflict between men and women in love, specifically in marital love. Moreover, the power relation becomes a key factor to arouse conflict in the male-female relationships in most of the Shakespearean plays. And Shakespearean concept of gender is definitely related to performance as performances alone can provide a concrete meaning to such complex relations. These complexities can be encountered through various modes of Shakespearean performances.

Shakespeare treats gender as a fluid entity and asserts that human identity can be obtained in a flux between masculinity and femininity which can be achieved only through performance. The notion of gender was not fixed in the Renaissance cultural ethos. The portraits and sculptures of that period frequently presented the figure of the hermaphrodite as interchangeability of gender was a popular concept at that time. This form of traditional gender prevalent in the socio-cultural life inspired Shakespeare to engage with gender.

In this chapter I examine certain characters in selected Shakespearean plays in order to read their gender roles as presented in the criticism of the Indian adaptations of the plays. I attempt to identify the shifts in the presentation of gender in the critical discourses of the adaptations. The chapter has three sections on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* respectively in which I discuss each play in relation to its adapted version in India and the criticism that has pointed out key aspects of the play.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

In this section I attempt to establish the reading of conflict in the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta. For this purpose I look at the critical writings on the issue of Hippolyta's silence in order to understand the impact and result off her silence in performances of the play. My particular concern is to discuss the criticism of an adapted performance of the play and its interpretation on Hippolyta's silence against the backdrop of a few other performances of the play on the western stage and their take on the issue of gender representation.

In the original Shakespearean play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons is presented as a silent and passive character. As mentioned earlier the female characters in most of the comedies of Shakespeare appear to be strong and lively, but Hippolyta here is an exception. Criticism of the play records the play's affirmation to patriarchy as the important female characters in the play - the Amazonian Queen Hippolyta and the Fairy Queen Titania - are subjugated and denied of power in the play. Titania, after her initial resistance is subdued -curbing her attachment for the Indian boy and being humiliated through to the magically created desire for an ass. This directly challenges the notion of female rule and female power and thereby develops the conflict with their male partners. The negation and curtailment of female power leads to disequilibrium in the male- female relationships that threaten love and marriage in the play. Critics view this tendency of curtailing female power as an echo of the widespread discontent with female rule during the last decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

The opening words of *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* is those of Theseus to Hippolyta:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
 Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
 Another moon; but, O, methinks, how slow
 This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires
 Like to a stepdame or a dowager
 Long withering out a young man's revenue. (I.i.1-6)

Hippolyta reply constitute the only words she utters in the opening scene- Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,

Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
 And then the moon, like to a silver bow
 New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
 Of our solemnities. (II.7-11)

Hippolyta's silence in the play has received much critical attention. Her silence critiques the male dominance of Egeus and Theseus as they silence Hermia over her choice in love. Helen Hackett in *The Play's Depiction of Female Power*, considers the issue of Hippolyta's silence as:

For many years, it was assumed that Theseus's bride -to-be, Hippolyta, is cheerfully acquiescent in the play's first act. Recent interpretations and productions of the play have explored the different ways Hippolyta's silence may be understood. (Hackett 2001: 56)

Hippolyta maintains silence onstage throughout the play and the once aggressive Queen of the Amazons is pictured as the mute spectator of the actions of the man who "won" (Hackett 56) her love by doing her "injuries" (Hackett 56). On the other hand it is seen that for Theseus time moves slowly towards the "nuptial hour" (Hackett 57) but for Hippolyta time moves swiftly. The differences in response signal the absence of harmony

between Hippolyta and Theseus and echo the underlying conflict. The formidable Queen of the Amazons is silenced and that silence is to be recognized as the problems of conflict for power between the genders. There arises a suspicion in every critical mind to rethink on the issue of the apparent submissiveness of the Queen. But there arises the problem of how to read Hippolyta's silence to give specific and precise meaning for interpretation. As readers it becomes a complex task to imagine what is going on behind the scenes and to understand the privacy of Hippolyta's mind. Moreover, Hippolyta is represented on stage as silent and the few words that she utters in the opening of the play appear to be insufficient to interpret her silence. Yet we must note that she does not speak. She is tongue-tied in the way Bottom is tongue-tied in the later part of the play when Titania commands her fairies to seize Bottom, "Tie up my lover's tongue, bring him silently" (III, i,186). Hippolyta's silence cannot be simply read as her love for and obedience to Theseus.

Theseus is found admiring Hippolyta's silence:
 Dumbly have broke off,
 Not playing me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
 Out of this silence I picked a welcome,
 And in the modesty of fearful duty
 I read as much as from the rattling tongue
 Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
 Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
 In least speak most to my capacity. (V, I, 98-105)

Yet it is not quite adequate to read Hippolyta's silence as performing sign of her love. Theseus likes her silence but misinterprets it as her submission and obedience to him. Hermia too wants to speak in answer to her father, to speak with his authority but her desire and her plea are overruled by male authority. Both Hermia and Hippolyta are

tongue-tied and their fate lies in executing the orders of others. Thus, Hippolyta's silence can be read as an indirect way of protest against the male orthodoxy, a strong, silent resistance from the once formidable Queen of the Amazons, now benumbed by circumstances.

Philip C. McGuire in "Hippolyta's Silence and the Poet's Pen" opines that Shakespeare deliberately leaves Hippolyta without words, refusing to give any definite clue to Hippolyta's silence.. Shakespeare intentionally retains her silence, and this allows a great deal of freedom to the director and actors to interpret the silence in specific ways and to create particular effects during a performance. Shakespeare has cleverly facilitated directors of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in giving a local habitation and name in all times and across different cultures. McGuire further states that to provide meaning and effect to Hippolyta's silence the directors must "enact intentions that are theirs, not Shakespeare's" (McGuire 1996: 156). Besides, no other character comments on Hippolyta's silence leaving it textually indeterminate. Her silence is open with possibilities to take different shape and meaning during performances. So, the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its openness over Hippolyta's silence carries within itself the potential to change from performance to performance across time and cultures.

Shakespeare performance studies today have become a fertile ground to establish the new-historicist idea of theatre as the site for cultural and aesthetic exploration all over the world. In my attempt to study Shakespeare adaptations and appropriations and their criticism in India, I examine an adaptation of *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* in India produced by Raghuvir Sahay entitled *Bagro Basant Hai*. Shormishtha Panja in "An

Indian (Mid)summer: *Bagro Basant Hai*” records the performance of this play by the final year students of the National School of Drama in Delhi in November 1997. Panja in her criticism of the cross-cultural adaptation of the Shakespearean play emphasizes that the adaptation arouses strong responses on the issues of women’s rights and gender roles. The performance incorporates various Indian socio-cultural attitudes. It was adapted by Raghuvir Sahay and directed by Mohan Maharshi. Sahay made it clear that the play was only an adaptation and not a translation. But Mohan Maharishi who directed the play changed the names of all the original Shakespearean characters into Indian names and the setting into an Indian one, somewhere in Gujarat or Rajasthan in order to express the trans-cultural ethos.

Claire Colebrook in her book *Gender* states about the power of performance in this way:

Power produces bodies as gendered through performance.

Bodies become gendered through their presentation,

performance and enactment of themselves as either male

or female---Shakespeare’s plays reflect upon the

performance of power, and demonstrate the power of performance (Colebrook 2004: 29).

My focus here is to read the significance of the alterations in this performance, especially with regard to the presentation of Theseus and Hippolyta as pointed out by Panja. The account of the production is taken from Panja. In the production Theseus is named Sanbal Singh, symbolizing someone very strong and muscular and Hippolyta is called Sadaphuli, which means she is like the perpetual blossom but contains within “the

ironic suggestion of something perpetually puffed-up” (Panja 2005: 184). Along with the names it is also the body language of the two characters that is brought to our attention. The body language of Sanbal Singh makes it clear that his presence onstage is not a dominating one while Sadaphuli dominates the stage from the moment she enters. It is because she is ‘tall, large and dark, with piercing eyes and with a permanently dissatisfied grimace’ on her face (Panja, 2005: 184). Again, it is to be noted that Sanbal Singh tries to subjugate Sadaphuli’s dominating attitude by reminding her that he has won her with his sword and attempts to unsheathe his sword from its case but at that moment itself Sadaphuli gives such a contemptuous look at Sanbal Singh that he does not dare to take his sword out from its case.

Moreover, Sadaphuli aggressively protest when Jagir Singh (Egeus) recommends that his daughter Chameli (Hermia) be punished with death if she disobeys her father. Sadaphuli here no longer remains silent and passive but expresses her displeasure at the injustice meted out to Chameli. Therefore the character of Sadaphuli in the Indian adaptation addresses the questions of women’s choice in life and is presented as a strong female character. Her appearance and facial expression creates a bold and challenging image of Hippolyta in the Indian performance that reflects her explicit refusal to submit to the sovereignty that the male authority claimed over her as well as Hermia. The silence of Hippolyta in the original text is overthrown and the vibrant image of Hippolyta , the Queen of the Amazons is achieved as a determined and defiant one through Sadaphuli. Shormishtha Panja recounts her exchange with the director: “Maharashi told me that he

was trying to represent the women's point of view in the portrayal of Sadaphuli" (Panja, 2005: 184).

This adapted performance rightly points to what Colebrook marks as "the performance of power demonstrates the power of performance" (Colerbrook 2004: 29). . Sahay elevates the character of Hippolyta by providing a powerful image through Sadaphuli. The vesting of power in Sadaphuli through her powerful physique and her active and aggressive gestures register her dominating presence on stage and the power of her performance alters the image of the character from a passive, obedient one to someone who challenges male power over her. *The Statesman* (New Delhi edition) carried a report of this adapted performance of the play *Bagro Basant Hai* under the title "Shakespeare Goes Rajasthani" which considered the adaptation by Raghubir Sahay to be a radical one. This radicalism was achieved through the director's use of Rajasthani names, locales, social norms and customs. Besides, the report praised the staging as a standard NSD product with good acting, attractive sets and costumes, efficient stage management with entries and exits.

Comparing this Indian performance with accounts of other western performances help illustrate my point. Philip C. McGuire in *Hippolyta's Silence and the Poet's Pen*, analyses specific performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to analyze the different meanings given to Hippolyta's silence. Peter Hall's production of the play in 1959 at Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon confirmed the harmony between Hippolyta and Theseus through her silence. In the production Hippolyta's passivity and inaction as seen in her silence conveyed her as untroubled and obedient. She stood by

Theseus throughout the play, unresisting and unresponsive even to Egeus's accusation and threats to Hermia. This performance denied any conflict in Hippolyta and affirmed her submission to the masculine order of the play in stark contrast to Hermia.

Another production by John Hirsch in 1968 marked a striking difference from the earlier production in interpreting Hippolyta's silence. In this production staged at the Stratford (Ontario) Shakespearean Festival, the opening exchange between Theseus and Hippolyta reflected the conflict in their relationship rather than harmony. McGuire records the performance as:

As Hippolyta spoke of how quickly 'the night of our solemnities' would arrive, she stepped away from Theseus and stood, downstage right, on the lower of the two steps around most of the Festival Theatre's thrust stage. Theseus followed her, and when he ordered Philostrate to 'stir up the Athenian youths to merriment' (1.12)--- an order that took on sexual overtones and stressed his own age---Hippolyta again distanced herself from him. Using the bottom stage she crossed to the downstage left corner, where she sat on the first step. Theseus followed her again and, dropping to his hands and knees, tried to kiss her at the conclusion of his pledge to wed her 'with pomp, with triumph, and with reveling'. Hippolyta avoided the kiss by drawing back without rising---a gesture that conveyed her distaste for Theseus (McGuire, 1996: 144).

Furthermore, Celia Brannerman in 1980 produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the New Shakespeare Company at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park in London. In this production Hippolyta's silence was endowed with quite different meanings and

effect where Hippolyta wore a near eastern grab with 'Turkish harem pants' and Theseus wore a military dress uniform of the late nineteenth century.

Here, Hippolyta did not move away from Theseus, who kneels on one knee and declares, "But I will wed thee in another key,/ With pomp, with triumph and with reveling." Again both Theseus and Hippolyta stood side by side listening to Egeus' complaint about Hermia and Lysander. Egeus gave the book of Law to Theseus and Theseus handed the book open to Hippolyta. He turned towards Hermia and said her to obey her father ... "Either to die the death, or to abjure/ For ever the society of men" (II, 62-66). On hearing Theseus deciding Hermia's fate Hippolyta angrily and loudly shuts the book of laws. This gesture signals the displeasure of Hippolyta which is unspoken yet uncovered. One significant change in this production where Theseus is seen to be responding to Hippolyta's displeasure as he addresses his words to her rather than to Hermia as in the Hall's production, where he explains to Hippolyta his inability to break the Athenian laws. Hippolyta finally slapped the book into his hands and proceeded to exit without him. So, this performance uses gestural modes to voice Hippolyta's silence and helps to present the conflict in the relation. (McGurire 1996: 146)

Likewise, the Peter Brooks production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970 yielded a much acclaimed effect to Hippolyta's silence and the ongoing split between her and Theseus.

In this interpretation Theseus and Hippolyta stood together during the opening exchange and Hippolyta did not give the word quickly but walked away from stage right to stage left after Theseus voiced his pledge to wed her. Further, when

Egeus placed his case against Hermia before Theseus, Theseus and Hippolyta were seated apart, downstage right and downstage left respectively, emphasizing their separation. After Hermia's refusal to marry Demetrius, Hippolyta rose to her feet and the timing of her movement brought into focus her unspoken resistance to the sovereignty that Theseus had got over her in the battle and now would exercise through marriage. Theseus gave his final warning to Hermia and said 'Come, my Hippolyta'...she stood motionless; he asked her again, 'What cheer, my love?'...yet she was silent and spoke nothing to him. Theseus turned in embarrassed anger and he exited through the door upstage right without her. Hippolyta walked alone the stage upstage left, silently challenging Theseus claim that she is 'my Hippolyta', 'my love'. On reaching the doors Theseus and Hippolyta stopped and looked at each other briefly before each exit separately...a final definition to Hippolyta's silence and her explicit refusal to submit to the sovereignty that man claimed over her. (McGuire 1996: 147-149)

These types of innovative performances provide a new meaning in contemporary times. Thus, the Indian version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* adapted as *Bagro Basant Hai* attends to the values and concerns of women's rights. The director Mohan Maharishi, voices Hippolyta's silence through the innovations in the character of Sadaphuli. The adaptation by exploring the creative possibilities to be located in a local habitation and culture provides for a better affinity with the audience. Maharishi has rightly realized his own intentions with the contemporary insight into the play of gender through Shakespeare. His special focus on the issue of Hippolyta's silence with the postmodern concerns of women's role and their place in performance includes the perspective of the

power of performance. The alterations in the depiction of gender generate a new notion of a powerful woman who appears to satisfy the Indian Vedic norms of viewing woman as the incarnation of *Sakti*. Besides, it is the fluid perception of gender that Shakespearean plays originally provide that enables the Indian directors to experiment with this theme.

In the name Sadaphuli, Phuli means both “blossomed” and “inflated” (Panja 2005:184) in Hindi---Maharshi brings in to the performance the debate regarding Hippolyta’s silence in Western criticisms and attempts to give Hippolyta the power and the position of a Queen. The performance highlights the presence of conflict in the pair through the names and their actions during the performance.

Othello

In this section I examine the theme of gender in the play *Othello* in relation to the critical evaluation of the representation of gender by Kamala Ramchandani in an India adaptation of the play. The adaptation under analysis is directed by Alyque Padamsee and portrays Desdemona and Emilia as unconventionally active and vibrant. The performance links the Shakespearean play to contemporary feminist concerns in India.

Othello is significant for discussing gender relations in Shakespeare. It has generated radically conflicting views from the critics through the ages, its gender relations coming in for rigorous scrutiny with critics exploring the ideas of male-female relationships through sex and violence, love and hate, honesty and dishonesty, loyalty and betrayal, trust and suspicion. Conflict is again seen at the locus of the man-woman

relationship in the play and power struggles appear to be the root cause in such conflicting relations.

It is to be noted that the character of Desdemona evokes much critical concern and has been judged from different angles, her role as a catalyst leading to Othello's tragedy being of some interest. Carol Thomas Neely in *Men and Women in Othello* reconsiders the criticism of women's space in the play as scrutinized by various critics. The gender relations in the play are invariably positioned in the triangular relation of Othello, Desdemona and Iago. The traditional criticism of the play (by Coleridge, Bradley, Knight, Granville-Barker, Gardner etc. otherwise known as "Othello critics") affirms Othello's love and attacks Iago's diabolism. A second group of reactionist critics, known as "Iago critics" (Eliot, Empson, Kirschbaum, Rossiter, Mason, Leavis and so on) react against the traditionalist by attacking Othello on the point of his love and praises the realism and honesty of Iago. But whatever be the view the significant aspect that I would like to focus on is that both these groups have misunderstood and misinterpreted the perspective of women in the play.

The first group idealizes the image of Desdemona and seems to portray her as an object. They consider her to be totally passive and voiceless and regard her inactivity as the source of her sainthood, obedience and purity. One such opinion is the following:

Desdemona is helplessly passive. She can do nothing whatever. She cannot retaliate even in speech; no not even in silent feeling...She is helpless because her nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute...Desdemona's suffering is

like that of the most loving of dumb creatures tortured without cause by the being he adores (Neely, 2003: 80).

The Iago critics too condemn her:

But the damage to her symbolic value is greater when we see her passively *leaving everything to Heaven*. She ought in a sense to have *embodied* Heaven, given us a human equivalent that would 'make sense' of Heaven. For this task she had the wrong sort of purity (Neely, 2003: 80).

So we find that Desdemona is marked by her passivity. But in the recent trends Othello criticism is chiefly concerned with the central conflict that finally calls forth the tragedy of *Othello*. There comes a third group of "Iago-Othello critics" (Kenneth Burke, Arthur Kirsch, Stephen Greenblatt, Stanley Cavell, Edward Snow, Richard Wheeler etc.) who provide an alternative perspective to define the cause of the tragedy in the play and this is the kind of position that substantiates my argument. Although this group asserts the anxieties of Iago and Othello towards women, making sexuality and marriage as inevitable causes of the tragedy, they also move a step forward to an impersonal, implacable external agency that finds in Desdemona's active, loving, and passionately sensual nature, the catalyst for Othello's sexual anxieties. This indirect and incidental aspect of character becomes the cause for Othello's downfall.

I have taken these aspects of *Othello* criticism in order to lead up to the point of my thesis that such critical views of the play that reread the women in *Othello* as vibrant and challenging are reflected in Indian performances of *Othello*. The Indian adaptations of

Othello attempt to vigorously review the play in exploring the roles of the women characters, especially Desdemona and Emilia as the primary participants in the conflict and the tragedy engulfing the play. Kamala Ramchandani in the essay “A Majestic Tragedy” interestingly notes that an Indian adaptation of *Othello* by Alyque Padamsee wonderfully presents the issue of women and thereby effectively modifies the role of Desdemona.

Ramchandani reports on the performance of *Othello* directed by Alyque Padamsee in the Tata Theatre as a moving performance of the opulent play. Ramchandani comments on the character of Desdemona in this performance as unusually bright and active. She asserts that Nikki Vijaykar as Desdemona was the perfect foil for Othello, not only because of her physical appearance and crystal clear diction, but for the transparent innocence of her portrayal. At the same time, in his direction of her, Padamsee has very effectively diverged from the traditional view of Desdemona as a quiet, serene, almost colorless character, and made her a rounded, flesh-and-blood woman, completely guileless and naive in matters of sexual wrong doing, yet a woman of character, alive, gay, coquettish with her husband, not above trying to light-heartedly seduce him to gain something she wants. She is shown full of the joy of life. And this makes her tragedy even greater. (Ramchandani, *The Independent*)

Besides, *The Statesman* also records the viewpoint of the director Padamsee, who says

As soon as I saw Nikki, I knew she had everything in her, I wanted this idea of a high- bred girl marrying outside her caste, below her caste, if you will; embarrassed because she is sensually attracted to this black moor Othello. Nikki is ideally cast from my point of view. Desdemona is a slip of a girl, just 18 years old, but with a mind of her own. I wanted her to be an innocent flower crushed by the series of events that overwhelm her... (*The Statesman: 1991. np*)

So, the character of Desdemona as it appears in the original play is subverted and from an altogether passive foil she becomes a lively character, full of determination. In the original play itself she is seen as asserting her power to overthrow the patriarchal confinement by disobeying her father but ultimately submitting to another male domain through her marriage where she even loses her life. The adapted version in India portrays her as a woman of action and attempts to reject the total passivity attributed to her character.

Again Neely in his essay "Women and Men in Othello" analyses the role of Emilia in recognizing the central conflict in the play. He opines that Emilia played the role of a potential mediator in locating the central conflict in the play. Emilia maintains a balanced view between the good and evil in the play—"and though we have some grace, / Yet have we some revenge" (4.3 .92-93). Emilia possesses a sharp-tongued honesty that is combined with warm affection. At times she corrects Desdemona's naiveté and at times again defends Desdemona's chastity. She demands sexual equality and at the same time understands yet tolerates male fancy. Critics emphasize Emilia's importance therefore as a strong, realistic yet compliant character.

The character of Emilia in the adapted performance of Alyque Padamsee acknowledges the significance of the role of Emilia in giving a successful staging of the play. In this performance Emilia was played by Sabira Merchant who herself said

At first I did have my doubts, I thought it's going to cost me a lot in time, and I didn't know if I would get enough satisfaction with a role as small as this." But she discovered later and again said "Emilia is like the conscience of the play. She puts the truth on the line. It's an out and out feminist role and I have the audience with me in the last scene, where the pathos and futility of death comes through Emilia. It's a dramatic scene which I decided I would exploit thoroughly. (*The Statesman* 1991)

Therefore, this adaptation represents the theme of gender in a new mode through the performance in order to relate to the recent attitudes about women as active participants in cultural life.

The adaptation of *Othello* by Padamsee shows that the localization of Shakespeare in India is done with the effort to bring out conscious readings that connect to the Indian context. The adaptations in performance accommodate diversions and also similarities in portrayal of the characters in the plays. This shows that the cultural transformation of the idea of gender in an Indian context takes diverse form pertaining to the suitability of differences in time and place.

Hamlet

This section attempts to portray the deviation in the presentation of the role of Ophelia in an Indian adaptation of *Hamlet*. The criticism of Basavaraj Naikar in “*Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural Adaptation of Hamlet.*” emphasizes the transformation of Ophelia into a terrifying and ferocious lady in the play’s appropriation as *Raktaksi*. This section recognizes Ophelia’s incarnation with the Indian view of considering women as the form of sakti and relocates the notion of gender in an Indian context.

The play *Hamlet* contains significant issues of gender as Hamlet’s relationship with his mother Gertrude and his beloved Ophelia appear to be problematic throughout the play. Hamlet is unable to respond to his love for Ophelia although he reveals his intense passion for her upon her grave. He considers Ophelia as a distraction to his task of revenge, a threat to his dedication and to his whole existence. The relationship between Hamlet with Ophelia therefore turns to be one of misunderstanding and disappointment.

Nigel Alexander in the essay “The Power of Beauty: Hamlet and Ophelia”, states that Shakespeare expresses the human passion in *Hamlet* through the character of Ophelia. Ophelia’s character with her troubled mind and consciousness invites a critical assessment of her conduct. But in allowing Ophelia to reflect the human passion Shakespeare does it in a calm and reasonable way. The point that I want to make here is that Ophelia’s troubles and sufferings are portrayed in a very cold manner. She is the woman who in not only deprive of her true love but also faces the turmoil of death of her

family members. Her grief and passion leads to be self-destructive and suicidal. Ophelia carries the flowers symbolic of her love which alone is a metaphor used for her expression of disgust. Ophelia in the madness scene breaks out violently in thought and deed and in her songs she described herself as seduced, made pregnant and abandoned. Several critics interpret Ophelia's nature in different ways. For some she is a disreputable woman and for others she is an injured innocent. Current critical debates on the character of Ophelia try to simplify her on moral and psychological grounds. Again in the nunnery scene Hamlet approaches Ophelia to find her reading a book where she appears as the symbol of quietness and chastity. Ophelia does not react openly to outpour her sufferings to the extent of her trauma and is never seen to outburst in intense grief. This condition can be called as an effect of stereotypical gender roles in Shakespeare's time. But modern critics like Nigel Alexander suggest that Ophelia's numbness bears a possibility to be voiced in performances of the play. This appears to be true an Indian adaptation of the play entitled *Raktaksi* that allows Ophelia to burst out in an outrageous manner.

The issue of gender roles as represented in Shakespearean adaptations in India can be traced in a particular adaptation of *Hamlet* entitled as *Raktaksi* by the Kannada poet and dramatist Kuvempu. Basavaraj Naikar finds in "*Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural Adaptation of Hamlet.*" this culturally transplanted *Hamlet* bears a challenging and radically dissimilar approach to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The striking alternation that Kuvempu brought about was the change of the name of the play itself from a male protagonist to a female one. The play *Hamlet* which Shakespeare named after the protagonist Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark is replaced by Kuvempu as *Raktaksi* meaning

“the bloody eyed girl” (Naikar 2000: 76) which relates to the character of Ophelia in the adaptation. The adaptation names Ophelia as Rudrambe (Rudra or Raudra which means the Hindu God of anger and Ambe means goddess i.e, Rudrambe means the angry goddess) that connotes the terrific and the ferocious element in her. The naming of the play as *Raktaksi* echoes the atmosphere of bloodshed and death that is to follow in the play and acts in a way as a preface signaling the central theme of revenge and death in the play. Naikar argues that Kuvempu’s creative alteration satisfied the demand of the targeted audience as the Hindu philosophical belief considers woman as a manifestation of *Sakti* or cosmic energy placing woman as not only equal but superior to man.

Naikar in the criticism of the play asserts the point that a cultural transformation of the Shakespearean play into Indian cultural codes have generated new and different concept of gender. The cross cultural appropriation has facilitated the transformation of the otherwise inactive character of Ophelia into an active and ferocious one in her incarnation as Rudrambe. Ophelia in the form of Rudrambe naturally becomes a powerful character in India where woman is worshipped in various forms of the goddess i.e. Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.

Moreover, Rudrambe is not attributed only with a name meaning ferocious but she appears to be unconventionally active and violent. Kuvempu unlike Shakespeare depicts the relationship of Rudrambe (Ophelia) and Prince Basavayya (Hamlet) to be of intense love and mutual trust and avoids the ambiguity in the relation as shown in Shakespeare. In Shakespearean *Hamlet*, Hamlet’s love for Ophelia is tuned with melancholy and Ophelia’s reciprocation of his love is one of suspicion, distrust and

caution. Whereas Rudrambe is in no way cold and passive like Ophelia as she shows clarity and trust in her love.

Naikar focuses on another noteworthy change in the adaptation which is the death of Prince Basavayya as he is treacherously killed by Sivayya (a rival to Basavayya for the love of Rudrambe created by Kuvempu.) in the course of their journey to Sivamogg. And this occasion facilitates the presentation of Rudrambe in her most ferocious form. When Rudrambe gets the false news that Honnayya (a well wisher of the Prince) has killed Prince Basavvaya, she turns angry and dressed in old rags behaves in a maddened manner . She pleads with the stars for mercy and wants to kill the moon; she calls the mountains, forests, sun, moon, sea, ocean to fill the blankness inside her. At this moment she is “the bloody eyed girl”, *Raktaksi*, and she finds Honnayya and stabs him to death. Again, she commits a second murder when she comes to know that Sivayya was the real murderer of her beloved and then also kills herself. The critical views on Kuvempu’s cultural transplantation of *Hamlet* note Rudrambe’s portrayal as a vibrant, violent, energetic woman full of emotions and sentiments. Thus, the reinvention of Shakespeare in the form of Indian cultural codes provides an extraordinarily powerful image of woman and thereby generates new creative modification and interpretation of gender codes.

Indian adaptations of Shakespeare have been exploiting the representation of gender and noted that it is open to endless interpretations. A significant shift in playing the role of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* can be found in the adaptation by Professor Ananda Lal. *The Merchant of Venice* was staged in Max Muller Bhavan in

Calcutta in 1997 by the students of the department of English of Jadavpur University. Vishnupriya Sengupta in her critical evaluation of this performance emphasizes that Shylock in the performance, was subjected to double discrimination being a Jew and a woman as the role of Shylock was played by Sohini Sengupta Halder. This innovation by the director introduces a striking alteration to the Shakespearean play. On the other hand Ananda Lal as the director has his own reasons for this change. Ananda Lal justifies his use of a lady to play Shylock:

Shakespeare did not write for actresses. But today, four centuries later, literature departments across the world have a majority of female students and it was difficult finding so many men. So, I was left with no other option but to transform six of the characters into women. (Sengupta 1997: np)

The criticism again records that the homosexual relationship between Antonio and Bassanio was “exploited” as Antonio became Antonia. Therefore, the male characters change into female ones facilitating the reinterpretation of the play without actually rewriting it. This experimental project acts as a great inspiration to open up new possibilities of further radical innovations and interventions in matters of Shakespearean adaptation in India as far as it remains a positive and creative attempt. Hence, gender as a theme has numerous potentialities to be interpreted in an Indian context.

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CHAPTER-2

CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE

Shakespeare explores the various aspects of the cultural life of England in his plays. His cultural concepts range from all spheres of socio-cultural milieu and represents universally relevant themes. Shakespeare encompasses various issues of religion, politics, conflict, power and race which appear to be relevant even in contemporary times. The Renaissance culture is the culture of self-fashioning and the formation of identity depends on structured stereotypical norms. The age experiences a new social mobility with a growing awareness about alternative codes of the social, theological and psychological dimensions. But there is a tendency to suppress any alternative codes by the autonomous authorities of power. Shakespeare's works neither accept nor deny the changes in the socio-cultural life. In the play *Othello*, Othello's identity is confined to the stereotypical racial construct. Desdemona's assertion of her choice in marriage can be seen as a change in the socio-cultural life and a threatening of patriarchy. But her alternative attempt meets with destruction and a complete loss of her identity as she loses her life at the end.

In this regard I would deal with the performances of Shakespearean plays in order to view Shakespeare's engagement with the cultural element in his plays. As this dissertation aims to point out certain themes evolving out of Shakespeare performance criticism in India I would like to draw in the significance of cross-cultural performances in recent times. Performance studies emphasize the increasing importance of cross-cultural performances with a view to encompass the tensions and dynamics of

multiculturalism. Performance based on cultural context establishes a relationship with other cultures for renegotiating experiences and meanings in that constitute culture.

Marvin Carlson quotes Phillip Zarilli's observation on cultural performance as:

Performance as a mode of cultural action is not a simple reflection of some essentialized, fixed attribute of a static, monolithic culture but an arena for the constant process of renegotiating experiences and meanings that constitute culture. (Carlson, 1996: 179)

I situate my reading of the cross-cultural Shakespeare adaptations in India in the backdrop of such observations. The rich heritage of Indian dramatic aesthetics along with India's diverse cultures and values facilitates the space for the directors to re-invent Shakespeare in alternative forms.

In this chapter I focus on how certain themes suitable to the Indian context are illuminated in the critical discourses of the adapted Shakespeare performances in India. I suggest that alterations seen in the Indian versions of the selected plays have been made through a re-contextualization of Shakespeare in local culture and norms. This chapter engages with the themes of conflict, race, power and superstition. The chapter will have four distinct sections which will discuss the critical views of the adaptations of the selected plays in relation to the themes that they highlight.

Socio-political aspect

I In this section I intend to read the theme of socio-political aspect displayed in the critical review of Basavaraj Naikar entitled "*Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural*

Adaptation of *Hamlet*" on the adaptation of *Hamlet* as *Raktaksi*. Indigenization of Shakespeare in India opens up a new opportunity for the western colonial dramatic form to mingle with Indian Culture and Indian dramatic forms. Shakespearean localizations incorporate various Indian folk dramatic traditions and cultural codes and beliefs into the original plays of Shakespeare.

The Indian theatrical interpretation of Shakespeare can be seen in an adaptation of *Hamlet* as *Raktaksi* by the Kannada director Kuvempu (K.V. Puttappa) that is grounded in local social and political issues. Basavaraj Naikar in his critical reading of the play entitled "*Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural Adaptation of Hamlet*" comments that Kuvempu undertook the adventurous task of cultural transplantation of *Hamlet* in spite of the vast cultural dissimilarity. Naikar's criticism of the adaptation emphasizes certain key concepts of Indian society and culture that are incorporated in *Raktaksi*. The cultural transplantation takes care to present the illegitimate sexual relation of Claudius and Gertrude in an Indian atmosphere. The criticism again illuminates the infusion of the religious, mythological and philosophical norms of India which marks the shifts in the indigenization. Besides, Naikar marks the replacement of the play within the play by the innovative use of public opinion as being a vital change in the adaptation. Naikar admires Kuvempu's use of a contemporary aspect to arouse guilt in the murderers.

Naikar observes that Kuvempu gave minor attention to the plot, characters, and situations and greater emphasis to adapting the foreign Shakespeare to the cultural codes of Indian culture. The critical work of Naikar highlights the re-contextualization by Kuvempu who uses the story of a Virasaiva royal family of Karnataka to draw the

historical equivalence of the play and also to resonate with the Indian socio- political situation.

Naikar finds that Kuvempu retains this core theme of *Hamlet* but makes minor changes in the characters to meet the cultural as well as technical requirements of the Kannada stage. The cultural theme of *Hamlet* is sexual and political which leads to the chief action in the play, caused by the murder of the king of Denmark by his younger brother Claudius followed by the usurpation of the throne by Claudius. Kuvempu uses one Sentinel instead of two, Bernardo and Francesco and totally eliminates the character of Laertes, the brother of Ophelia in order to achieve brevity or conciseness in the play. The striking alteration in Kuvempu's *Hamlet* is the title of the play itself, Raktaksi, meaning "the bloody eyed girl" (Naikar, 2000: 76) echoing the bloodshed and tragic atmosphere that the play is to uncover.

Kuvempu retains the political intrigues in the same manner as in the original play. In his transcultural adaptation he however changes the names of the characters - the murdered king of Denmark is named Basavappanayaka, Prince Hamlet is Prince Basavayya, and Ophelia is Rudrambe. Besides, other characters are also given new names to provide local colour King Claudius is named Captain Nimbayya and Queen Gertrude becomes Rani Cheluvambe.

Moreover, the critical essay stresses on the changes brought in to downplay the sexual overtones in the play in order to make it acceptable to Indian audiences. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Claudius occupied the position of both the king and the husband of

Gertrude. But in *Raktaksi*, Nimbayya is presented as the captain and not the king; he loves Rani Cheluvambe but is not married to her. Such alteration is intentionally made to legitimize the political and sexual power of captain Nimbayya and makes the situation acceptable within Indian culture. Kuvempu, therefore exhibits a Hindu culture and context to satisfy the socio-cultural attitudes and expectation of his audience. As such, the cultural adaptation of *Hamlet* as *Raktaksi*, helps evolve a new cultural identity for the original play marked by the social values of another culture (Indian culture).

As in *Hamlet*, in *Raktaksi* also the king Basavappanayak is murdered before the beginning of the play and the ghost appears before of Kunchanna (equivalent of Bernardo) who recounts the news of his encounter to Honnayya (equivalent of Horatio). Naikar notes that Kuvempu provided a free play of the supernatural element even in contemporary times as the Indian culture and mindset is in tune with such supernatural situation. Again the occasion of the melancholic mood of Prince Basavayya brought about by his mother's incestuous relationship is maintained unchanged by Kuvempu where Shakespeare shows deep philosophical brooding in Hamlet's speech Kuvempu brings in a Vedantic flavour. He also infuses the elements of secularism and universalism of Hamlet's philosophical speech into that of Prince Basavayya. The criticism of Naikar points out other cultural changes. Prince Basavayya calls his mother *Sani* (i.e the planet Saturn in Indian astronomy, believed as a shadow of the evil in Indian culture, symbolized by black colour), who was in another man's arms before the grass has grown on his father's grave)

As the melancholic Prince Basavayya suspects some sort of conspiracy surrounding his father's death, Somayyna, the son of Captain Nimbayya consoles him with the Vedantic lesson that birth and death are part of Maya and one should not talk about them. Here, Kuvempu draws on the foundation of many aspects of Indian culture in Vedantic sayings. At this point of time Prince Basavaya is perplexed and utters his famous soliloquy. The ambiguity and delay pertaining to Hamlet's suspicion in the original play is overcome by Kuvempu through dream and reality. Prince Basavayya dreams of his father and later meets his ghost at midnight in the forest. The encounter is not directly staged but the audience is informed about it when the Prince tells the minister Lingana about it. Indian adaptation thus leaves no room for doubt of Hamlet's desire for revenge his father's death. Kuvempu provides much clarity to Prince Basavayya in contrast to the original Hamlet. As a result there is a greater sense of urgency as Prince Basavayya shows a clearer sense of purpose and willingness to act.

Kuvempu brings a significant change as he completely eliminates the play-within the play. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, this play the *Mousetrap* was prepared by Hamlet himself in order to bring about an awakening of conscience in the murderers. But the absence of the entire scene in *Raktaksi* gives an altogether new dimension to the play. Kuvempu rejects the interesting scene of the stage play in order to free his adaptation from the psychological dimension of Hamlet.

Naikar points to the way Kuvempu brings in realistic and contemporary political elements to awaken the conscience of captain Nimbayya and Rani Cheluvambe. This happens when Kuvempu infuses into the play the role of public opinion – an unmistakable

democratic aspect of contemporary politics – for revelation of the guilt of the murderers. Rani Cheluvambe and captain Nimbayya are alarmed at the public favoring of Prince Basavayya and fear an imminent coronation. Their sexual relation and political power are threatened. As a result they decide to imprison the Prince & Minister Linganna and murder them.

But the public opinion molded by the well wishes of the Kingdom gained momentum in favor of Prince Basavayya. Kuvempu shows the conflict between the two groups and thereby pictures the conspiracies involved in common political condition of any kingdom. He shifts to the role of public consciousness in politics and shows the public rebellion after the Prince and the Minister were imprisoned. The rescue of the Prince is planned and executed through an external force- Hyderali of Mysore, who employs a spy to free the Prince.

Kuvempu, creates a new character Sivayya as the arch rival of Basavayya for the affections of Rudrambe (Ophelia) and makes him to kill Basavayya on his way to Mysore. In this adaptation, the death of the Prince is earlier than in the original one. But the play goes further to uncover various significant layers of culture and socio-political life. So, Naiker notices that such a cultural adaptation of Shakespeare in India creates a cultural connection between the two different cultures and helps to bring the alien poet close to the Indian audience. The transformation of the original performance with contemporary elements makes Shakespeare relevant in the Indian context and assigns a popular image of the Bard. Naikar's assessment of the play suggests that the atmosphere of morbidity and corruption in *Hamlet* is replaced by aspects from Hindu religion, myth,

superstition and philosophy dominant in *Raktaksi* (for instance *Sani's* adverse effects can result in corruption and death). He praises Kuvempu's creative ability to transcend the barriers of time, place and culture to make Shakespeare familiar on the Kannada stage.

Power

Shakespeare's creative works explore the relations of power in a given culture. The Elizabethan culture bears two faces of power, one constructive and the other destructive. Shakespearean plays deal with the role of power in issues of gender, race conflict, religion and sexuality. His plays make a vigorous attempt to challenge the power structure that dominates the socio-cultural scenario. He advocates the liberation of the social and political reality from the massive power structure prevalent in the times. But at the same time he also maintains a relation with the power structure of his age. In fact, it is evident in his plays that while on the one hand he challenges the authorities on the other he make his characters submit at the end. This aspect of Shakespearean dramaturgy appears to be true in the case of Desdemona in *Othello*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and many others.

In this section I explore the changes instituted in the treatment of power relations as plays are produced in an Indian cultural space. In keeping with the basic thrust of my argument, I examine this shift as it is recorded in the critical readings of a selected performance of *Macbeth*.

The play *Macbeth*, shows the disruption of order by evil and its eventual restoration. The play is steeped in contradiction and ambivalence that create an

atmosphere of uncertainty and there is a wavering between fantasy and reality that is presented through the supernatural element of the witches. The issue of the witches, their nature, power and existence has been the subject of many critical readings. Its relevance in the Indian context is found even today. Amitava Roy, in his *Presidential Address to the Conference* draws a parallel between Shakespearean plays and Indian society by pointing to significant linkages. He relates the witches in *Macbeth* to the superstitious beliefs of burning of brides for dowry and witch-hunting which are common in Indian villages.

Nicolas Tredell in his critical work *Shakespeare: Macbeth* (2000) gives an account of the view of Stephen Greenblatt regarding the use of witches in *Macbeth*. Greenblatt opines that “the significance and power” (Tredell, 2000: 143) of the witches in the play is deeply ambiguous as they are not essential for the action of the play. Yet Greenblatt considers that witchcraft provided Shakespeare with powerful theatrical energy and to create an atmosphere between fantasy and reality and a necessary air of uncertainty. Besides, witchcraft creates horror through its demonic agency in the play.

On the basis of these views I discuss the criticism of the adapted version of *Macbeth* in India which engages with witches and power in an Indian context. Keval Arora in the article “Strange Version of *Macbeth*”, provides a critical assessment of the adaptation of *Macbeth* performed in 1993 by the Pandies’ Theatre in New Delhi. Arora records that the brochure of the play claimed to “appropriate, interpret and make English theatre relevant for ourselves” (Arora 1993: np). He finds the use of tantric dimension and the supernatural flavor to depict the significant representation of power struggle in

the play. Arora records that the performance opens with a group of disenfranchised female daily wagers who in order to escape the brutalities of life take to practice *jadu* and *tantric* rites. Arora in his critical treatment of the adaptation highlights the re-contextualization of the play in a contemporary situation. He observes that in order to cope with the brutalities of their existence the daily wagers chose the tantric dimension as the simplest and the easiest way to gain power. *Macbeth* is the story of a tussle for power and this performance too was meant to depict the “paradigms for the elusiveness for power” (Arora 1993: np).

The frenetic atmosphere of the scene with the witches in the original play is similar to the sufferings of the female wagers. The cross cultural adaptation draws a parallel between power and the Indian cultural ethos of the *Sakti* cult through the performance. This production inevitably provides a breeding ground for twentieth century re-makings and modifications of Shakespeare especially in the Indian cultural context. The novelty of such a performance leaves a wider scope for newer exploration of the Bard in India.

Sanjay Kumar, the director of the production situated the play in a post colonial space with the focused perspective of attempting relevance in the conception of the witches as “third world dregs” (Arora 1993: np). The performance connects to *Macbeth* by identifying the witches and the female wagers as deprived of power, often neglected and dispossessed in life. So, Pandies’ theatre strikingly addresses the thirst for power in a normal day to day situation of Indian society. It emphasizes the inevitable thirst for power in the lives of the downtrodden laymen who are always engaged in a struggle to meet their daily needs. Whether it is the royalty of sixteenth century or a contemporary

roadside scene of daily wagers the prevailing dominant power structure in the society is always threatened. The performance portrays all the characters of Pandies' theatre as "tainted by the desire for power" (Arora 1993: np). Arora comments that the forecasting of the strong willingness of the characters for attaining power differentiates the performance by entrusting it with the capability to transgress the moral order of *Macbeth*. Moreover, the adaptation becomes "the paradigm for the elusiveness of power", echoing the post colonial condition where "the denizens of the third world aspiring for more and more power and feeling that the first world has it in absolute terms", find "realization of the void within" (Arora 1993: np). Such interpretation creates the climate for defying the conventional cultural boundaries in order to accommodate an alternative cultural context. My concern here is to view how the alterations brought into the adaptation in terms of power in a particular socio- cultural condition in India facilitates to the generation of an alternative reading of Shakespeare. The Indian culture and beliefs provide the scope to introduce superstitious elements to support the theatrical enterprise and bring it into a comfortable zone of familiarity for the Indian audience.

Race

Race is an issue that continues to receive intense scrutiny from generations of critics. Shakespeare treats race in a paradoxical and ambiguous manner. The racial subjectivity in Shakespeare is misinterpreted and narrowly defined in several criticisms because of the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the word. Renaissance drama deals inevitably with the idea of racial difference and the plays of Shakespeare are not an exception in this regard. Criticisms of a play like *Othello* have focused on the issue of

race and difference. Early criticism of *Othello* considers the centrality of the racial difference as a theme in the play.

Western critics of Shakespeare ignore any kind of ideological underpinnings pertaining to the identity of Othello. They find it difficult to consider Othello's role as a tragic hero due to his blackness and this racial stereotyping of Othello completely undermines his heroic qualities and establishes him as "savage" and "barbaric". Othello's identity is seen by the racist European attitude only in terms of his blackness and he is marked as an "old black ram", "a Barbary horse" and "a thing...to fear, and not to delight" (Loomba 1989: 49).

Othello's 'otherness' dominates not only criticism but also performances. Western performance history records the white actors always playing Othello in blackface. (Singh 178) But the 'poisons' of racism in the play have been resisted in recent post colonial performances of Shakespeare. Recent critical work rejects the racial dichotomy between the civilized and the uncivilized through a dis-identification of Othello as a black man.

David Theo Goldberg writing on race asserts that "Race is fluid, transforming, historically specific concept parasitic on theoretical and social discourses for the meaning it assumes in any given moment" (in Hendricks, 2000: 19). This observation considers race as a fluid concept that transforms its meaning in particular socio-cultural contexts and in a given point of time. This account rejects specificities in a multicultural and cross cultural globalization in the post modern world. Indian culture bears prominent religious, ethnic and class tensions which provide the scope for interpretation of a play like *Othello*

through performance. In this section I shall investigate the theme of Othello's race and identity as highlighted in the critical discourses of Othello adaptations in India.

In his essay on "The Improvisation of Power" Stephen Greenblatt writes on Othello's self-fashioning:

his identity depends upon a constant performance, as we have seen, of his "story", a loss of his own origins, an embrace and perpetual reiteration of the norms of another culture (Greenblatt, 1980: 245).

Greenblatt makes this comment with reference to the situations in the original play. But it can be inferred in reading Othello's identity as reflected in the critical approaches to two adaptations of *Othello* in India.

The first of these is a challenging adaptation that erases the notion of Othello's difference and invests him with an altogether different identity. Sadanam Balakrishnan director and actor, adapted Shakespeare's *Othello* in the folk Indian dance-drama form of Kathakali entitled *Kathakali Othello* (1996). Ania Loomba in her essay on the play "Local manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows: Issues of race, hybridity and location in post colonial Shakespeares" notes that the unique aspect of the Kathakali mode of representation of Othello is "its total erasure of Othello difference" (Loomba 1998: 160). Loomba records a powerful alternative experience of Shakespeare achieved through experimentation and transplantation. The creative mingling of the Shakespeare play and the folk Indian form gives a new dimension to the original theme of race and identity in the play.

Loomba, in her essay uses several critics to locate hybridization as a position which avoids certain limitations. It advocates pluralism and tolerance instead of insisting on strict authenticity of any one culture and facilitates a peaceful collaboration of both the forms. But in this section I focus particularly on the cultural transformation of *Othello* to view the changes in the perspective of race in the play.

The *Kathakali Othello* is based on the dramatic principles of the *Natyashastra* of Bharata, the encyclopedia of Indian dramaturgy and theatrical techniques dating from between 200BC and AD 200. *Kathakali* is a highly formal style of theatre in India with heavy costumes, mask-like make-up and a complex gestural code or *mudras*, using over 500 facial, eye or hand gestures to 'speak' to the audience (Loomba, 1998: 153).

Kathakali in its scheme of abhinaya (histrionic art) has taken an extreme step by dropping speech (*vachik*) and emphasizing bodily movements (*angik*), costume and make-up (*aharya*) and psychic states (*sattvik*). Suresh Awasthi in his book *Performance Tradition in India* describes the form as:

This has led to the development of a whole scheme of symbolic hand gestures which express various ideas, actions and emotions. The entire dramatic text is recited and sung by two singers standing on the stage with the performers. One of the singers is the leader who coordinates the performance. Elaborate make-up is given according to the rules and conventions of the role type. (Awasthi 2001: 8)

The *Kathakali Othello* is crafted in five scenes without violating any significant codes of the original play. Loomba in her criticism emphasizes the shifts in the adaptation in terms

of the longstanding critical debate over Othello's blackness. The indigenized performance sidesteps the issue of Othello's difference. This mode of adapted performance refuses to situate Othello in any social context and surpasses the complex basis of racial conflict (which rests at the core of the Shakespearean play.) The *Kathakali Othello* goes beyond cultural stereotypes to give a new identity to Othello. Loomba argues that the *Kathakali Othello* fulfills the demands of representation in a different context through an alteration in costumes and make-up. Othello is identified with the figure of *pacca*, with green make up, giving him a typical quality of heroism (within the cultural codes of the form). Othello's hands are painted black but his blue dress signifies the skin colour of lord Krishna. As a result the cultural transmission of the play enables it to reject the racial prejudices against the backdrop of Indian myth and culture.

Moreover, Iago is presented in black costume. Iago's appearance thus reflects his "motiveless malignity" (Loomba 1998: 161) while Othello's costume and colour present him as dignified and almost divine. In contrast, western criticism and performances showed Othello diminished within the European prejudice over race and colour while Iago's motiveless malignity was seen as opaque.

The plays powerful racial underpinnings led Othello into a self-destructive internalization that undermines his identity in the original play as the "malignant and turbaned Turk" (Loomba 1998: 162). On the one hand, Othello was presented as un-Christian and un-civilized and on the other Iago compels Othello to internalize his own racial inferiority as "She did deceive her father, marrying you; if and when she seems to shake and fear your looks, she loved them most" (III. iii.210-212).

The *Kathakali Othello* owes its thematic concerns to a religious theatre which stages battles between good and evil. In terms of costumes and make up, the adapted performance puts Iago and Othello on the same plane as characters. But the traditions of moral concern echoing in *Kathakali* erase racial politics and elevate Othello as a heroic and divine personality and Iago as malicious and evil. Loomba further asserts that the *Kathakali Othello* is performed realistically to dismantle the primary focus of racism and elevate the love of Othello & Desdemona with the help of Indian myths. These promote the image of Othello to a transcendental level as his love is seen in terms of Shiva and Parvati. *Kathakali* as a folk dramatic tradition demonizes the evil (i.e.. image of Iago) – casting him as typical *Katti*, a black bearded, red-nosed, vicious character robed in black - thereby shifting blackness from Othello to Iago. Othello therefore gains a completely new, identity through the hybridized representation of the play in India.

In the light of the criticism of the adaptations it is evident that the representation of the idea of race takes on new meaning. The alternative reproduction of racial construct becomes possible due to the cultural contextualization across time and space. This localization of race through the folk performative code of *Kathakali* emerges as a powerful alternative to the kind of deep rooted racism that has been associated with many approaches to the figure of Othello. The complete erasure of Othello's difference on racial grounds can also be seen as offering an ideological dimension to the play - an approach to erase the existing social, class, ethnic differences in India

Another adaptation of Shakespeare that has generated much admiration and critical concern is *Othello* performed by the United Players Guild of New Delhi in 1999.

This production was entitled as '*William Shakespeare's Othello: A Play in Black and White*', directed by Roysten Abel. Lekha J. Shankar in her critical overview of this adaptation focuses on the theme of race as it is exploited in the context of contemporary India. I would assert the familiarity of Shakespeare in the Indian theatrical as well as cultural scenario in the light of certain observations recorded in *The Business and Political Observer*, New Delhi (July 18, 1999). The article titled *Indian Othello Steals The Show* praises the 'Fringe First' Award winning innovative Indian adaptation of *Othello* that was then on its way to the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This *Othello* is "a play within a play. It is about a group of actors rehearsing *Othello* and how their private lives get enmeshed in the plot" (Shankar 1999: np. *The Business & Political Observer*). The article also takes into account one of the reviews in *The Scotsman* commenting on the United Players Guild production of *Othello*, 'With cross-cultural tensions simmering between the actors in the production itself, the jealousies of the play fragment crystalline, creates images, multiply endlessly and distort, adding an original and transfixing dimension' (Shankar 1999: np. *The Economic times*. New Delhi).

Othello is played by Adil Hussain, a CWIT awardee whose performance was marked by *The Scotsman* "Bar none, the best acting I have seen in any Shakespearean play, including Peter Brook's *Tempest!*" (Shankar 1999: np. *The Economic Times*, New Delhi). Hussain's enactment of "the man who loved not wisely but too well (*Othello*) appears to be gripping in the passion, pain and power of his performance" (Shankar 1999: np. *The Economic Times*, New Delhi). Lekha J Shankar praises the unique adaptation of *Othello* in her review as *Native Othello Enthralls West*, noting that the production is all

about outsiders. The production is made to be a play within a play where a theatre group meets to rehearse *Othello*. The lead role was played by an actor from Assam, Adil Hussain who was an outsider to the Delhi based other actors of the play. The adaptation aims to portray the Indian racism and elitisms by casting Hussain on the lead role- both as Assamese and a Muslim. The critical evaluation of Shankar emphasizes the internal issues of difference prevalent in India. Hussain is marked as the tongue-tied individual, an actor who finds his tongue but loses his heart to the leading lady with the result that he experiences all the chaotic emotions that the Moor went through. Hussain with his long hair and regional accent, created one of the best interpretation of Othello, the Moor. His interpretation in essence was that of an outsider who genetically, socially and emotionally does not belong. Shankar further writes about the turmoil and mental suffering faced by Hussain:

the more he rises in his environment, the more he gets into a terrible dilemma and a deep suffering which explodes during his performance of the play. His native feelings, emotions and actions overpower him- he pulls his hair, writhes on the ground, howls like an animal and reflects every bit of a man at his primordial level and through that it becomes magnificently clear why Shakespeare made Othello a Moor. (Shankar 1999: np).

Shankar in her critical assessment of the plays notes that it is the story of a simple Easterner who can't adjust with the sentiments of central Indian. Shankar notes in "A stranger in their midst" records:

Hussain confesses that in many ways it was a real life role for him. He had undergone a lot of trauma on leaving verdant Assam and falling to the lure of the big city. And above all this, he invests a raw native style which makes for mesmeric theatre, translucent mime expressions, and astounding use of the body, total spontaneity and vigour. (Shankar 1999: np. The Economic Times. New Delhi)

This production has amazingly dealt with the basic level of Othello. As the character of Othello has undergone much critical debate regarding his position as an 'outsider', a Moor admitted into the civilized Venetian society, Hussain's performance is seen by Shankar as the best depiction of the agonies of the character of Othello. In fact, Hussain's acting in the native production has proven the performance dimension to be superior to the theoretical or the critical analysis in interpreting the great protagonist of Shakespeare. Therefore, this adapted version of *Othello* establishes my argument that the local adaptations of Shakespeare resonate more deeply in this location than the original play. In a situation like this one we can undoubtedly acknowledge the advantages of adaptation. Besides, the vibrant performances and the brilliant direction of the play help to build a popular image of Shakespeare in India; echoing as they do the emotions of the native soil. The Bard is portrayed in an entirely new perspective and a different atmosphere. The adaptation is one of the splendid experimentations of Shakespeare and went on to be invited to the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre.

Here it can be inferred that Shakespeare in Indian theatre is rather radically interpreted as the same play in its two different adaptations deals with the theme of race

from two opposite perspectives. The adaptation of *Othello* by the Delhi based group, United Players' Guild entitled *Othello: A Play in Black and White* (1999) directed by Roysten Abel deals with racism but in a completely different manner from the *Kathakali Othello*. The adaptation exposes Indian racism and elitism through Shakespeare. *Kathakali Othello* erases Othello's race by changing his colour and Abel casts Adil Hussian, an Assamese and a Muslim as Othello to display anti-tribal as well as anti-Muslim sentiments in India. So it is seen that *Kathakali Othello* makes every attempt to turn away from the question of Othello's difference while Abel's production searches for every possible marks of differentiation in contemporary India.

Conflict

Shakespearean plays engage with the theme of conflict in diverse ways. The notion of conflict in Shakespeare includes intrigues in the family, in matters of state, issues of religion, power, race and gender. Conflict becomes a primary motive in the plays as Shakespeare challenges the dominant norms of the socio-cultural scene. In this section I examine conflict as a theme that is asserted in the selected critical works on Shakespeare adaptations in India. The issue of conflict finds relevance in the Indian socio-political and cultural scenario. India witnesses religious, ethnic and political conflicts on a regular basis. Here, I analyze two Shakespeare adaptations in India which receive special emphasis on conflicts in their critical reviews.

An Indian adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Ananda Lal treats the theme of conflict in the play to draw its relevance to the Indian

context. This particular adaptation transformed the Christian- Jewish conflict of Shakespeare to a Hindu- Muslim one. Dennis Bartholomeusz in “Shylock’s Shoes: The Art of Localization” illuminates the theme of religious conflicts in the adaptation and says that:

Shylock’s gold turned-up *nagra* shoes were the first significant detail that released imagination in precisely the way the director must have desired. The elegant shoes recalled for me the still formidable presence of the Red Fort and the exquisite refinements of Fatehpur Sikri. The first note of the intention, of replacing “the Christian-Jewish conflict” with a Hindu-Muslim one was struck “without stating the obvious.”...There is no conflict between Christians and Jews in India...The flames of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, on the other hand, still burn in India (Bartholomeusz 2005: 207).

The localization of Shylock was achieved through gesture and costume as Shylock wore the long Islamic kaftan (a traditional ankle-length gown worn in Islamic countries). Besides, the gold *nagra* shoes, the black kaftan, the silver ornamentation and embroidery down its front, a red shawl round the shoulders gave the proper image of a Muslim sartorial style. This adaptation therefore provided an arresting substitute for the Shakespearean Jewish conception in order to Indianize the Bard. The production was considered by Bartholomeusz as a great achievement where the obstacles vanished and the limitations turned to strengths. He records Ananda Lal’s words as stated in a personal letter to him that “without indicating faith” the director was “trying to suggest Shylock’s minority position within our culture” (Bartholomeusz, 2005: 208).

Ananda Lal in his essay “Re-creating *The Merchant of Venice* on the Indian Stage: A Director’s Note” asserts relevance as the main aspect to identify Shakespeare in India. He says:

What matters most to an Indian Shakespeare is the business of relevance: is Shakespeare still our contemporary? ---all his plays are relevant in some form or the other--- *The Merchant of Venice* is one of these, particularly in post Babri Masjid destruction---Shylock is a Jew, there is no getting out of that...Yet it is possible to suggest our own context as well. (Lal, 2005: 199)

Dennis Bartholomeusz praises Ananda Lal’s production:

It was at its best, organically localized as well as inwardly contemporary, while using an English text within the terms of an Indian experience (Bartholomeusz, 2005: 213).

King Lear has become a seminal text for Indian performances of Shakespeare as the play deploys various aspects of reality in an Indian context. *King Lear* provides themes like banishment, exile, suffering and penance which resonate in folk tales and stories from the epics in India. The theme of generational conflict in the play is central to Indian traditional narratives and family sagas. As such the theme of conflict has always had a firm hold on the socio-cultural imagination of the Indians.

A cultural adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* was done by the dynamic Indian director Amal Allana in 1989. The production was staged in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, providing a vast landscape surrounded by stark balconies with huge black

cauldrons looming in the background. The adaptation of the play was cast in the desert land of Rajasthan and Lear was named Maharaja Yashwant Rao in his famous and powerful kingdom.

Balwant Gargi in "Staging King Lear in India, 1989" emphasizes that the significance of this adaptation lies in the director's interpretation of the conflicts of generations in the play as "the struggle for power by ruthless individuals, the headlong fall of an impetuous, egocentric being in his search for love/truth" (Gargi, 1991: 94).

Gargi records that the intercultural reproduction deals with a visual pattern in the movements- from harmony and unquestioned monarchy to disorder. Lear is seen banishing Cordelia and then Kent in violent outburst in open court. The courtiers fly in different directions, "whispering like fragile pieces of glass, shatter into fragments (...) from static formality to shattered movement, splintering" (Gargi 95).

Gargi finds such an atmosphere echoing the scenario of the Mahabharata where too an old king helplessly "watches" the destruction. It can be argued that Shakespeare who infuses universally true and relevant issues in his plays and these resonate in Indian culture. The presence of "folly and wisdom," "creation and destruction," "power and powerlessness," "youth and age", (Gargi 1991: 95) in the play were replaced by a creative use of visual metaphors in an Indian setting in order to provide the cross-cultural interpretation. The critical record of the adaptation quotes Nissar Allana, who designed the set who says that "I was not so much concerned with locations and locales but with visual metaphors harmonizing with the surroundings" (Gargi 95). The stage area was

intentionally made larger so that the actors at times had to gallop to cover the distances which provided the required sense of energy and power in the play. The characters in the climactic scenes were charged with thundering drums when the frenzied Lear cursed his daughters as he ran madly in the wild space, roaring. . It is to be noted that the composer Gyan Shivpuri used six different types of tribal drums and once or twice a flute. Besides, the audience was surrounded by loudspeakers and during the storm all these together provided a thundering and raging atmosphere.

Interestingly, this performance located the audience in the centre and the actors surrounded them. It was done with the intention to constantly reverse the roles of the audience and the actors. This innovation breaks down the fourth wall and incorporates the traditional mode of open theatre, as in the Indian open-air folk dramatic performances, into a Shakespearean play. Therefore, the adaptation brings a cross- cultural exchange of performative devices to increase Shakespeare's popularity among the Indian masses.

Lear entered the first scene from a distance playing ball with his Fool - his courtiers clapping, cheering and fawning over him - as if playing a game with the whole country which he controlled like a ball. Manohar Singh's Lear moved through the spectators like a sleepwalker in fury, spouting curses, shedding tears, forewarning people of their fates, questioning, self-searching, multiplying his soul and image in flashbacks (Gargi 95).

Gargi makes an assessment in his critical overview of the adaptation of the father-daughter relationship. This relationship is very deep in the Indian society and therefore

very relevant in our cultural appropriation of the play. This relation bears its importance when Lear finally seeks solace with his daughter. In this performance Lear is seen breaking bit by bit, losing his mental balance, eyes glazing and finally going fully mad.. His misery engulfed everything, like a tornado leading to his self-destruction. His soul calmed finally when he met his daughter Cordelia, and ended up carrying her dead in his arms. This filial bond is a situation particularly relevant to the Indian context "When Goneril and Regan turn the old father out of their palace and he wanders under a turbulent sky, it breaks the heart of the Indian audience" (Gargi 96).

Balwant Gargi in his interview with the director of this adaptation of *King Lear*, Amal Allana puts forward certain issues of *King Lear*'s relevance to the Indian context. In the course of the talk Allana gives her causes for choosing this particular play for adaptation. She clarifies that she chose *Lear* for the adaptation because:

It deals with power struggle...tremendous egoism of the central character...a country run according to his wishes. His power of buying affection blurs his judgment and creates chaos and splinters the entire family and nation...the family becomes the nation...the main visual metaphor, which sums of the play for me, is the old Lear carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms...his beautiful and prized creation lies dead in his arms...the worst suffering...the creation is dead in the hands of the creator...reaching a kind of *shanti* (peace) of ultimate grief (in Gargi 96).

Moreover Amal Allana further admits that she made alterations to break sentences and introduce new rhythm:

I made the characters speak in prose, though it had a kind of rhythm and meter...to peak emotional points. The language used by the poet Neelabh in the adaptation is a mix of Urdu and Hindi...brought a primeval vocabulary, especially in the curses of Lear, which are reminiscent of the curses of Gandhari in the Mahabharata. Lear invoking the lightning "to strike flat the rotundity o'the world," reminded me of folk imagery still prevalent in India's rural areas. Lear beseeches the terrifying Goddess Kali/Mahachandi for the destruction of fertility of the earth and the womb. (Gargi 98)

The banishment theme echoes the exile of Rama and the Pandavas...from the Western viewpoint, an exiled king fall into the abyss of gloom. But in Indian traditions by abdicating, he leaves the material world and gains spiritual insight.

Thus it is seen that Shakespeare can be mostly related to Indian cultural ethos and the directors avail themselves of this opportunity to blend his plays with a local flavor. This in fact has brought about a familiarity with the Bard and attuned the indigenous audience to the new and localized current of Shakespearean dramaturgy. The critical commentary of both the adaptations foregrounds the theme of conflict in the process finding linkages between Shakespearean plays and the Indian culture.

This chapter engages with the analysis of the four distinct themes that are foregrounded in the critical literature of Shakespeare performances in India. The chapter has made an examination of the shifts in the adaptations of the plays in India and also identifies the themes that resonates the Indian contexts and cultural scene.

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CHAPTER-3

FOLK TRADITIONS IN PERFORMANCE

Shakespeare performances have been adapted, hybridized, and localized on the Indian stage. There exists a section of Indian Drama where Shakespeare adaptations occupy a dominant place. Today, Shakespeare in India does not any longer appear in the original form with Elizabethan setting and stagecraft but is seen in an altogether different and new incarnation as a result of trans cultural appropriations that have introduced Indian values, beliefs and cultures of being into Shakespearean dramaturgy. Shakespearean performances in India are modified and modulated to make the alien playwright more familiar and popular in India. The indigenization of Shakespeare has opened up myriad possibilities of encountering several critical discourses in postcolonial India.

Shakespeare has been translated into many languages worldwide. Yet theatre is something meant to be performed. Marvin Carlson in "*What is Performance*" states that the modern concept of performance is extremely wide encompassing a range of activities in arts, literature and social sciences. There exists a difference between doing and performing- we do things unthinkingly but when we think and do something with our consciousness about the act, it attains the quality of performance (Carlson 1996: 146) The experimentation of Shakespeare in folk traditional modes in India is a conscious attempt to transform the foreign or the *videshi* Shakespeare into a *desi* one.

This chapter intends to examine the various adaptations of Shakespeare in Indian folk dramatic traditions and forms. The chapter aims to view the adaptations as an alternative reading of Shakespeare in relevance to the socio-cultural context in India.

The relocation of Shakespeare performances on to an Indian cultural scene repositioned and refashioned Shakespeare in the post independence period as the plays were performed in Indian folk dramatic convention. Poonam Trivedi in her article, "*Folk Shakespeare: The Performance of Shakespeare in Traditional Theater Forms*", argues that the adaptation and n indigenization of Shakespeare in the post independence period are not polluting but pollinating Shakespeare performances. Trivedi finds that the cultural collusion in the Indian Shakespeare has infused new energy into "moribund performative traditions" and is thereby generating protean forms of Shakespeare (Trivedi, 2005: 153).

Shakespearean adaptation in India is not a recent occurrence as the earliest performances of Shakespeare began in November 1852 in Surat, with the performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, renamed as *Nathari Firangiz Thekani Avi* (A Bad Firangi Brought to Sense), where the shrew is a non-Indian or a *firangi*. Following this there were innumerable translations and performances of Shakespeare in several places in India. The earliest known inclusion of folk forms in India was in a script of *As You Like It* in the *yakshagana* style in 1860. Likewise, *The Tempest* was turned into a musical show in 1878 in the Marathi *sangeet-natak*; while *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were performed with a large repertoire of songs in Maharashtra. In 1880 *Cymbeline* and in 1906 *The Winter's Tale* were staged as musicals in Marathi. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entitled as *Vasantikaswapanam* in Malayalam as a full-fledged *sangeet-natak*

with a *sutradhar* and *nandi* was performed in 1906. A Malayalam *Merchant of Venice* was noted for its songs in 1909. Bengal's *Hamlet* as *Hariraja* (1897) became a success for its songs and musical scores (Trivedi, 2005: 153-154).

But there is a striking difference in pre-independence and post-independence Shakespeare performances in India. Trivedi records the difference in her essay:

If earlier the adaptive process was more a matter of freewheeling localization to make Shakespeare accessible to a broad-based audience, the contemporary postcolonial adaptations attempt to reinterpret Shakespeare by submitting the plays to the distinct conventions and performative codes of individual folk forms. Early adaptations, flush with the discovery of illusionism, had happily exploited the benefits of the proscenium stage to draw crowds with spectacular scenic and light effects. Now, the indigenization rejects the proscenium, explore a variety of performative spaces If earlier the tendency was to "use" and "exploit" Shakespeare, today the aim is to reread and transform him according to our own terms. (Trivedi, 2005: 154)

Poonam Trivedi further lays stress on the critical condition recognized by Shakespeare performance studies itself. Accordingly, Shakespeare performances in the western modern realistic theatrical traditions have been widening the gap between the Elizabethan play script and the modern interpreter. She quotes Alan C. Dessen who says that "to appreciate the full range of drama in the age of Shakespeare, we should make every effort to grasp the assets of an alternative dramatic logic that can give meanings to otherwise puzzling or inexplicable things. To travel too far down the road to "realism" is

to narrow the range of this great age of drama” (Trivedi 156). Trivedi finds this “alternative dramatic logic” through the words of Philip Brockbank who views Asian Shakespeares as “a revelatory discovery of the truth about Shakespeare’s art.” Again Min Tian also finds such performances of Shakespeare producing not “true recreations” but “reinventions,” of alternative performative conditions for transcultural and intercultural internationalization of Shakespeare. These critical investigations and opinions on Shakespeare performances in the non-European countries facilitate interesting reading of multiple experimentations of Shakespeare in India, especially in the folk dramatic conventions. Suresh Awasthi in his book *Performance Tradition in India* (2001) observes that most of the Indian directors rejected the proscenium theatre as they began to understand the importance of the new theatre. This new theatre aesthetics explores a variety of performance spaces through the folk dramatic convention. And the use of the new performance spaces have helped to establish a close relationship between the actors and the spectators and also provided a new perception of performance. Folk theatre was designed to break the monotony of frontal viewing in proscenium theatre providing instead a variety of stages.

In this chapter I read specific adaptations of Shakespeare in India with special focus on the performance spaces that have been used conforming to folk dramatic traditions and as such attempt to picture the popular image of the bard in the country. The performances chosen for discussion will see the spaces used the designs of costumes and make up and the use of music, dance and martial art forms. I have divided this chapter into sections on the various folk forms to examine how Shakespeare has been adapted to

various folk forms in India. India owes a rich tradition of folk performances which facilitates the creative experimentation of Shakespeare in Indian culture. Shakespeare in India is accommodated with several folk performance spaces which help to establish a close connection between Shakespeare and Indian audiences.

Performance spaces

Jatra

The beginning of folk Shakespeare in post independence India was heralded by Utpal Dutt's *Macbeth* (1954) in the space of the *jatra* in its Bengali translation by Jatindranath Sengupta.

Jatra is a folk dramatic form of West Bengal, that began in the 14th century as a religious procession with music and dance inspired by the Vaishnava movement. *Jatra* has kept growing to suit the taste of its audience, shifting from mythological and historical themes to social ones. Today, it is the most popular entertainment of the middle class, the neo-rich in the cities and the prospering rural masses. Performed on a high platform- stage, it has two ramps for musicians and a large number of instrumentalists. There is a gangway running from the stage erected on bamboo poles and ropes used for the actors' highly theatrical entries and exist. The speech delivery is highly melodramatic and declamatory; bodily movements are strong and stylized; but there is no specific method to it (Awasthi 2001: 35-36).

Macbeth, staged in the space of the *jatra*, the most popular folk form in Bengal became available to the common man, enabling the village people who were otherwise

ignorant about Shakespeare, to welcome the Bard warmly and making *Macbeth* a text of the people. Dutt performed the play in quasi-western costume with Shova Sen as Lady Macbeth. Although the performance space was that of the *jatra* yet Dutt did not use the ritualistic, declamatory and incantatory style of the form. Instead, he adopted a performative mode that was a blend of the dramatic and emotional structures of Shakespeare's play and a style familiar to the villagers and in presented in their own village arena. He brought about his own renovations to suit the modern day audience and also to retain the basic spirit of Shakespearean dramatic art so that the foreign play retained its original spirit even as it got infused with the folk elements in the performative space of the *jatra*. Dutt's innovation and mobilization was received with great enthusiasm and support.

Dutt narrates his intentions, experience and achievement:

Shakespeare must be done, but he must be done for the common people. We did *Macbeth* in Bengali, and in one season we did ninety-seven performances in the villages. The people took to Shakespeare enthusiastically. To them Shakespeare was in proper *jatra* style---the action, the violence, the robustness charmed them
 .(in Trivedi, 2005:158)

In another interview "*Taking Shakespeare to the Common Man*" he further states:

A play like *Macbeth* or *Othello* with its emotional emphasis is extremely popular with... people in the rural areas that possibly because of the *jatra*-background of the audiences. *Jatras* are full of blood and thunder and the high-

flown prose which make the *jatra* goers receptive to Shakespeare's plays. (in Trivedi, 159).

Rustom Bharucha comments on the folk staging of Shakespeare that Dutt's proscenium production of *Macbeth* was "one of Dutt's most pointless productions" lacking in any socio-political resonance but his success outside in the open air interactive space of the *jatra* was "closer to the guts of the Elizabethan theatre than most European revivals of Shakespeare's plays in recent years" (Trivedi 2005: 159). This time *Macbeth* became the text of the people Dutt states that his purpose was to "try to shake the audience out of its unthinking stupor by sensation, visual surprise, songs, dances, color on stage" (Singh, 1989: 454).

Therefore, it can be asserted that the adaptation of Shakespeare to the folk form of *jatra* infuses local elements to cater to the tastes of Indian audiences. Shakespeare in *jatra* form provided for the development of a familiar image among the masses in the country.

Nacha Theatre Tradition

Another folk adaptation of Shakespeare in India was Habib Tanveer's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* retitled as *Kaam Dev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*, (1993 revived in 1995) in his translation into a mixture of Hindi, Urdu, and Chhattisgarhi dialect. Habib Tanveer is an acclaimed Indian director who uses folk legends and myth in his plays to eliminate the division between modern-urban and folk-rural theatre. He has a group of excellent folk performers from Chhattisgarh having mastery over the

Nacha theatre tradition. Tanveer's dramaturgy is not restricted to a single theatre tradition but is a mixture of the North Indian folk traditions. The *Nacha* folk tradition is a combination of 'episodic structures, non illusionism, direct address and the choric use of song and dance'. He exploits the natural imagery in his adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with his folk performance style. As his actors belonged to rural India they could easily enact the scenes amidst the forest. Tanveer gave a local colour to the performance keeping intact Shakespeare's "love of nature and life in general" which included even "little creatures such as spiders, beetles, snails, blind-worms, snakes" (Trivedi 161). Tanveer has an international reputation for his mastery in integrating folk theater with a contemporary issue. In his own words, this adaptation was "a form that has both folk and musical elements, scope for dance and relate to everyman" (Trivedi 160) reflecting the communicative aspects of the folk form. In this performance, with the valorization of the forest the contemporary issue of man-nature confrontation comes to the forefront. Tanveer interfused the contemporary issue with Shakespeare's "love of nature and life in general". Shakespeare in folk Indian form could reach the masses easily. Tanveer maintains that "our interest is confined to the limits of our cultural surroundings---which build our thinking. As regards our creation of literature and fine arts performance, it is mostly based on our values -from our culture" (Naikar 15). Tanveer successfully used "the limits of our cultural surroundings" in recreating a Shakespearean performance with dances beautifully enacted in tribal style and rhythmic harmonization highlighting the darker undertones of the play. The performances began with a snake charmer playing his pipe.

Neelotpal Deka records in "Shakespeare Tribalised" about the performance of Tanveer's adapted version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entitled as *Kaam Dev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna* in Ramjas college auditorium by Naya Theatre Group of Delhi. The performance is described in the following way:

Act I, scene II opens with an eerie atmosphere with a man in the dark playing a big long wind instrument for about five minutes, then the lights were on and the man was seen wearing a dhoti and gendhai garlands around his arms and neck and also wearing an Assamese japi...Tanveer gave an altogether different outlook in the play with tribal actors and a different social background; retaining the place and character names same as the original play but the costumes were all in tribal style. The chorus in the play had a blending of several Indian musical elements; Titania's falling in love with Bottom and the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta were all done in tribalised form (Deka, *The Assam Tribune*. 10.11.2001).

Another performance of the adaptation is recorded in the *National Herald* on 27.02.1994. In this piece, titled *Shakespeare's Play in Folk Form* that the performance had been a commendable one with exclusive theatrical imagination, skill and style. There were reverberations of chorus songs and folk dances maintaining the quality of the play.

Tim Supple, who directed a multi-lingual version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in seven Indian languages with a bunch of Indian and Sinhalese performers says, "I have been very stuck by the inclusion of folk traditions in Indian theatre, the resourcefulness of the multi-faceted performers with diverse skills" ((Bhattacharyya

2006). Supple discovered that multi-tasking comes naturally to our stage actors because of the resource constraints. It amazes him: "It helps you become a richer, fuller human being." He further adds "Indian theatre is multi-lingual, and whatever else a Shakespeare production might do, it should seek to reflect the time and place in which it is made with vivid honesty." (Bhattacharyya 2006)

Another production of an Indian adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was done by Arundhati Raja and performed at the Artist Repertory Theatre in Chowdiah. The costumes were Indian with the ladies in *ghaghra-cholis* and *saris*; the gents in *kurta-pajamas* and *dhotis*. The original music score was by Tara Kini and choreography by Madhu Nataraja Heri were done in classical Indian dance style and with sets and lighting that echoed the Indian ethos. However, the dialogues were the same as the original play and the fairies and the star-crossed lovers were seen in Indian turbans, speaking English circa of 1600 AD. Most of the dialogues of the fairies were deleted and replaced by an amalgam of Kathak and modern dance forms. But the effortless dialogue delivery and the competent depiction of emotions made the performance funny and entertaining. It received praise as a mega team effort with the lovers in the enchanted forest conveying the spirit of romantic fantasy.

Therough humour of the mechanicals was effectively conveyed by Bottom and his friends Quince, Flute, Snout, Starveling and Snug. The audience clapped and laughed along as the climax was reached with the hilarious play within the play "Pyramus and Thisbe"; the moments with the histrionics of Bottom who hands over the sword after lying dead will always be cherished by the audience. That

was Arundhati Raja's Shakespeare...uproariously funny, mocking and yet humane. (Bhatia : 1999)

It is seen that Shakespeare's plays have been modified and redesigned in order to make his plays suitable for the Indian audience by infusing multiple performance elements. This intercultural mingling of two different cultures provides for the possibility of creative assimilation. This kind of performance has, in the long run, nativized Shakespeare and inserted his plays into the Indian socio-cultural consciousness making it possible to generate a familiar image of the playwright.

Bishohara

Bishohara is a major folk-theatrical mode of North Bengal which is basically narrative in method. *Bishohara* is a theatrical recital of the folk-epic of Padmapuran narrated by the narrator actor. During the narration the narrator impersonates the characters and if there is more than one narrator the scene immediately becomes a scene based on dialogue, presented in the form of direct speech and action. Generally a group of narrators recite the epic text or report an event. In *Bishohara* the individual plays the role of the narrator-actor and the narrator- actor plays the role of a character. So there are two levels of transformation of identity as there is a continuous shift from narration to action to narration. The narrator-actor sometimes directly addresses the audience, comments or analyses any scene or character that reminds of the chorus of European tragedy. In the course of these short digressions they take up a contemporary issue, speak of their own lives, and even point their identification with the characters they impersonate. (Basu 2001:480-481)

A theatrical experimentation of certain sections of Shakespearean texts was done in the *Bishohara* mode by Saibal Basu in Bengal. Basu believes that the meta-dramatic devices of the Shakespearean texts become more direct and explicit while performed in the *Bishohara* mode. Basu favours the *Bishohara* mode of performance for Shakespearean texts because while performing in *Bishohara* an actor can easily detach himself from the text he recites, from the character he impersonates and directly speak to the audience about his own life. And such a detachment in the actor who plays in Shakespearean drama can allow him to provide an interesting psychographic expression of the character that he impersonates. Thus, Basu experiments with a new mode of Shakespeare performance where the narrator describes, say the state of Hamlet's mind in third person (the narrator speaks of Hamlet and maintains a distance while narrating) The narrator speaks out his feelings for Hamlet in this way:

'Ah! The poor Prince, you see, born in this rotten state can't set right the cursed spirit. He finds no meaning in life. He contemplates suicide.' In this way the narrator can create a peculiar type of 'empathy,' not by direct impersonation of character, but speaking about him. The narrator may continue in this way- 'Hamlet is at the cross roads. What shall he do? He says- "To be or not to be, that is the question." Which is nobler in mind, ladies and gentlemen, to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them...?' In such a performance the identity of an individual merges into the identity of an actor, while the identity of the actor dissolves into the identity of the character. (Basu, 2001: 482)

In his analysis Basu singles out another significant connection to support his experimentation of Shakespeare in the *Bishohara* mode of performance. *Bishohara* mode operates with the use of numerous “ritualistic devices like the mimetic representation of death and rebirth, the invocation to death, the antithesis of death and life, sleep and wakefulness, appearance and reality” (Basu 483) which is undoubtedly found in Shakespearean dramaturgy. Hence, Basu believes in the possibility of a much more effective indigenization of Shakespeare through the *Bishohara* mode. Elizabethan literature inevitably deals with death and sleep, evident in the character of Lady Macbeth, Hamlet and Lear. In Shakespeare’s *King Lear* Cordelia never comes back to life, like in the Indian myths...so the cycle of myth remains incomplete but the cycle of identity flows on (Basu 483). This flow of identity is the innovation of Basu achieved through his experimentation of imposing the folk mode of *Bishohara* onto Shakespearean play-text.

In the *Bishohara* mode of performance the illusion becomes reality through acting where Behulawali (who in real life is a married woman) is the girl who represents Behula. She plays the character of Behula, shows how Behula weeps but maintains a distance; soon she breaks away from her immersion in the character, becomes Behulawali coming back to her real life identity. Such distancing becomes clearer with a real instance of performance in *Bishohara*. During a particular performance when Behula becomes a widow and her ornaments are being taken away, the weeping narrator who plays Behulawali suddenly screams “Do not take away my *sankha*, I have got my husband at home.” (Basu 2001:480) Here, the illusion is broken and the audience comes back to reality. The actor breaks down the fourth wall as she expresses her complete awareness of

the presence of the audience and her real life outside the play where the symbols of her married life include the *sankha*, or white bangles

Yakshagana

Yakshagana is a folk performance tradition of Karnataka based on the two epics of fighting and ritual killing known as *vadham* and dying known as *maranam*. In this form the Bhagavata acts as the director, recites and sings the entire text and guides the performance. In *Yakshagana* the actors put up elaborate and complex make up with jewellery and head-gear which varies according to their roles. The most interesting part of *Yakshagana* performance is the actor's stylized dance movements, stylized gait, specific kinds of entries and exits, valour and challenge, conventional dances with specific steps for travelling and fighting. The most common patterns are circles, circles within circles, complete semi-circles, zig-zags, figure-eights, and straight lines in various directions. The form again contains leaps and jumps, pirouettes, and a particular type of pirouetting of the knees heightening the heroic sentiments of the traditional plays. Thematically the plays deal with conflict of good and evil (Awasthi 2001: 98).

The most successful instance of the fusion of Eastern and Western performance codes through *Yakshagana* was seen in B.V. Karanth's *Barnam Vana* (1979), a staging of *Macbeth* in Hindi, and this performance interprets the play from the perspective of Indian dramatic theory and Indian philosophy in the conventional form of *Yakshagana*. Karanth's *Macbeth* was shown as "overflowing with rasas like valour, wrath, terror and wonder" (Trivedi 2005:163) and the jungle was used to depict the nature of the world of

Macbeth. He entitled the play as *Barnam Vana* (Birnam Wood) where the jungle/forest of the title, was used as a metaphor for the nature of the world of *Macbeth*. This he concretized on the open-air stage by spotlighting a living *pipal* tree, the branches of which cast a shadowy web onstage, representing a maze of illusion or a *maya-jaal*, as the illusionary world of *Macbeth*. Karanth infuses Vedantic philosophy which believes that the cause of human suffering is man's inability to look beyond this mutable physical world, which is an illusion, and his failure to come to terms with his own innate "human kindness," that is, his dharma or law of being. And hence in this performance the witches, creations of Macbeth's mind, are the imagined creatures of the forest, emerging from the entrails of the tree, covered with drapes painted over with emblematic branchlike shapes, Nature, man, and supernatural are integrated into one world.

The production applies the devices of the *Yakshagana* to extend this reinterpretation and is marked by an innovative use of the curtain, transforming a folk convention into a stage metaphor for the curtains of the mind, which concealed the "fair" from the "foul", allowing the witches to wrap themselves up in it. In the sleep-walking scene, the patt became a literal manifestation of the fragile divide between dream and reality against which the hallucinating Lady Macbeth was painfully straining. In the banquet scene the handheld curtain was extended into a long red drape that trailed behind Banquo's ghost, entangling Macbeth and materializing vividly, onstage, as the illusions of the mind, which led him into a trail of blood. The primary movements of the *Yakshagana*, the leaps were interpolated within the indigenous gestural language of exorcism rituals. In 1980, the National School of Drama Company performed a Hindi

adaptation of *Macbeth* entitled *Barnam Vana* in Calcutta. The adaptation was directed by B.K. Karanth largely cast in the Yakshagana mode. Karanth recounted in an interview about his *Yakshagana Macbeth* that 'Any drama... should create its meta language. I had used many such (*Yakshagana*) gestures in *Macbeth*. This play by Shakespeare cannot be completely transformed into a *Yakshagana* because it is not *Yakshagana*. But I used the *Yakshagana* mode to suggest some other meaning.'

In another interview Karanth asserted: 'I came to use *Yakshagana* only because I could sense a connection between the vigorous movements of *Yakshagana* and the wild ambition of *Macbeth* himself.' In this performance, not only was Shakespeare deprived of his language, but even his theatrical codes have been largely substituted by those that belonged to a different culture. This ensured a more complete 'hybridization' and a more radical cultural appropriation, instead of a mere linguistic transposition.

Chitra Subramaniam and Suresh Awasthi record in the *India Today*, Thursday, 6th February 2014, that '*Barnam Vana: Hindi verse translation of Shakespeare's Macbeth staged in New Delhi*' is a great creation by Karanth:

The form is eastern and the content is western; the two meet and merge in B.V. Karanth's latest *Barnam Vana*, a Hindi verse translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, staged recently in New Delhi. He uses *Yakshagana*, the traditional theatre of Karnataka and establishes a relationship between the Bard and Bhagwat , the vocalist in *Yakshagana*.

But Karanth does not put *Macbeth* into the traditional mould. Instead, he uses elements which are adaptations and variations of Yakshagana in the form of certain stylized movements. Gongs, bells and wooden clappers, as used in Kabuki, coupled with chants and alap deepen the nightmarish character of the tragedy, conferring on the sense of suspense and high drama, a realistic quality. The scene with the dim light on the trees casting shadows while Macbeth stands surrounded by soldiers, is the most effective moment of the performance symbolizing the director's interpretation and justifying the title of the play. The Hindi verse translation by the reputed poet Raghbir Sahay succeeds of the original. While translating, he worked in close liaison with the directors and the actors and evolved a pattern of speech and rhythm which harmonizes with the movements. The austere set with dull black tones and the effective costumes all contribute gloriously to the total effect of the macabre. (Subramaniam & Awasthi: 2014)

Puppetry

Puppetry as a folk form is said to have possibly originated of in India. Puppetry as a cultural form may be traced to antiquity and the traditional culture . There are metaphorical references to the puppets in the two epics; *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. There is also a mention of puppets in early Buddhist texts. The two epics, Buddhist texts and early works like *Kamasutra* and *Arthshastra* are full of terms denoting puppets, and there are metaphorical references to puppets. Performers, epic story-tellers, clowns and, above all puppeteers, combining the skill of all of them became increasingly popular with the emergence of popular theatre from the 10th century onward after the breakdown of the classical tradition. Medieval poetic works referring to the popular

entertainments of their times invariably mention puppets, and denounce the fact that there was always larger audience for a puppet show than for a religious discourse. Metaphorical use of puppets is generally the first reference to the puppets in all traditions. “God as puppeteer and man as puppet” is the most common metaphor to explain man’s destiny in this world (Awasthi 2001:39).

String puppets of Karnataka called *Yakshagan* puppets have the facial colour, headdress costume and jewellery as *Yakshagana* actors. In Karnataka, various traditional attributes , symbols and hand props for gods, heroes, nobles and social characters also distinguish the puppets characters, and suggest their social status vocation . Karnataka figures express rich emotional contents which are depicted through colours, line, cutting and incising. The string puppet tradition of Karnataka is called Gombatta who look like *Yakshagana* live actors with headdress, facial make-up and costume.

Laxmi Chandrashekar in “A sea change into something rich and strange: Ekbal Ahmed’s *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*” focuses on the use of puppetry in the Shakesperean plays. She notes on Ekbal’s emphasis on physical gesture and visual aspects of theatre. to create his images through body language and colors. Ahmed believes in the limitation of language in exploiting human emotions and therefore he seeks to reveal meanings through the physical gestures.

Ahmed clarified his view regarding his adaptation of *Macbeth*: “Through *Macbeth* I want to show how greed destroys a person. It is a common enough notion in

our own stories.” (Chandrashekar, 2005: 174). He perceives the witches as the key characters in the play. He allowed the supernatural powers to decide the courses of action in the play. The witches can be seen as puppeteers who hold the strings and get the puppets to tell their story. They may kill a person or bring him to life, and stop the story when they wish to. This reading of the play gave him the idea of turning the play into a puppet show. He treated not only the witches as human beings and converted the rest of the characters into puppets. The children’s play *Gombe Macbeth* (gombe in Kannada means a toy) was framed by Ahmed in the modes of puppetry to make it familiar and understandable to children..

Vaidehi, the translator incorporates commentary and as Lady Macbeth utters her famous line: “all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (5.1.147-48, Arden edition, ed. Kenneth Muir), the witches say, in an aside: “Tell her there is no need for all this play-acting. A bit of soda and lime should do it” (Chandrashekar 2005: 175). Ekbal considers Lady Macbeth as the fourth witch who is responsible for all the evil in Macbeth. According to him, “She is consciously unconscious and well aware of what she has done” (Chandrashekar 2005: 175). Lady Macbeth’s role in Duncan’s murder is given importance by Ahmed. Macbeth is made like a puppet by Ahmed who is totally controlled by the witches.

She straightens his neck, puts his limbs back in action, places a sword in his hand, and pushes him in the direction of Duncan’s chamber after twirling him around. Macbeth trots off like a mechanical toy, stabs Duncan, and returns with the same movement as if she commits the murder through his hands. Puppetry

thus becomes more than mere technique, an integral part of the play.

(Chandrashekar 2005: 176).

Ahmed combined the forms of Yakshagana and puppetry to provide an alienation effect to the play. The characters wore colorful, puppet like masks and glide along to the sing-song music of the play a mythical, ritualistic dimension. The carpet (a more sophisticated version of the handled curtain used in Yakshagana to usher in a new character) substituted for all sets and lights, giving an illusion of depth and creating the illusion of different levels filling the empty stage into a forest, a fort, or a castle. Ekbal provided for scene changes and the appearance and disappearance of actors without a blackout, by getting two of his actors to hold the two ends of the curtain and turn to a certain rhythm. When they finished half a circle, the next composition, which was ready behind the curtain, moved to the front, while actors who were finished went behind and disappeared into the wings- the concept of a revolving stage in its elemental simplicity, handled with consummate skill and working magically. After ushering in a scene, the two actors dropped the curtain to the floor, and stood by. When the stage was littered with dead bodies, they picked up the curtain again, moved backward and forward again to a particular tune. When the curtain dropped to the floor, the bodies were gone, as if swept away, while the audience watched the curtain and listened to the music (Chandrashekar 2005: 177).

Chandrasekhar in her article further shows the use of the curtain as very significant puppetry device used by the director. This happens as :

When one of the puppeteers held the curtain down in the center with her feet, it became a door to let in Lady Macduff and her son. When straightened, it turned into the wall, which separated mother and son. The killing took place behind the curtain. In banquet scene, the guests appeared to go down the stairs and behind the curtain. As the guests lowered themselves with each step, the curtain rose, creating the illusion of a staircase behind it. Since there were only seven actors playing a large number of roles, the same actor ran behind the curtain and came around to enter again as another guest, wearing another mask. The most effective use of the curtain however, was in the sleepwalking scene, when Lady Macbeth rose from behind it muttering "out, damned spot!..." (5.1.33). AS the curtain was lowered in the center, at first one saw only a pair hands wearing red gloves. The red screen made it look as if she was rising out of a sea of blood. What a marvelous way to visualize "the multitudinous seas incarnadine turning the green one red" (2.2.61). Chandrashekar 2005: 177).

B.V. Karanth, admired Ekbal's production and said that, he had "to admit that his pupil had outdoor him. Having himself used the yakshagana techniques, including the hand outdoor in *Barnam Vana*-his version of *Macbeth*-he exclaimed, "I never knew a curtain could speak so much!" (Chandrasekhar, 2005: 174).

Many of the visual effects, rich in suggestion in *Gombe Macbeth*, have their inspiration in yakshagana. A particular instance of this was the remarkable bit of visualization of Macbeth's guilt after Duncan's murder. When Macbeth returned after the murder, there was a bunch of red wool stuck to the end of his dagger. He tried desperately to get rid of it-rubbed it on the ground, tried to pull it out with his hands, to shake it free-but all in

vain. While he stood exasperated, after going through a range of emotions, Lady Macbeth entered and removed it from the sword with a simple gesture.

Antaranga's production of *Hamlet* designed Ekbal and Bhageerathi arrive at the venue in an auto-rickshaw with all they needed for the play, set the stage, do their own makeup and get on with the play.

They would fix a 5'x5' black curtain at the back, and place two halogen lamps in front. Behind the curtain was a table, on which were spread all the props and costumes they needed—a couple of crowns, veils and caps, a few masks for the player king and queen, a spade and a skull for the gravedigger, and other odds and ends. The duo would perform the longest, most complex play of Shakespeare, which, with its full text, has over twenty-five characters and needs a minimum of three hours to perform, in eighty-five minutes, on a 15'x20 platform.

(Chandrasekhar, 2005: 175)

Ekbal played the prince throughout and Bhageerathi shifted from role to role, playing all the other characters, both male and female. This vision of roles, done more as a matter of convenience, turned out to be a beautiful concept. As such Hamlet alone remained the central character assigning minimal role to the others. This therefore reflected Hamlet's perception of reality as the main focus of the play.

The various experimentations and innovations of Shakespeare performances in India provides a new incarnation to the foreign poet. He is domesticated through several folk performative devices in India. In the process the Bard is transformed to a culturally rich site for the rest of the world. The effects of cross-cultural transgression relate him to

Indian culture and contexts. The localizations have tuned Shakespeare to the masses in the country. In the long run Shakespeare has the potential to be reformed in new modes of performances facilitated by the Indian performative aesthetics.

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CONCLUSION

In this research project an attempt was made to examine the themes that prominently figure in the critical evaluations of adapted Shakespeare performances in India. The critical discourses highlight certain themes such as gender, race, power, conflicts and socio-political aspects that are brought out in Shakespeare performances in India. A reading of the performance criticism reveals that these themes make a connection between the Shakespearean plays and Indian socio-cultural conditions. This work also tried to show that in the process of relating the themes to the Indian context, the themes generated new dimensions that presented the original plays in new ways. The cultural transplantation of the Shakespearean plays in India brings about reformation and reconsideration of Shakespeare and gives greater currency to the plays.

This work has looked at the potential of Shakespeare performances in India based on the critical reviews of the adaptations made by critics who were part of audiences or/and interacted with directors. It focuses on the central aspect of the themes that emerge out of the critical works. In fact, the significance of the themes lie in their ability to recontextualize Shakespeare performances in India. The adaptations of the plays are grounded in the rich performance tradition of India as well as in the backdrop of India's society and politics. Shakespeare adaptations employ the folk forms of *jatra*, *nacha*, *bishohara*, *yakshagana*, *nautanki* and various other forms as well.

The longstanding relation between Shakespeare and India begins from the coming of Shakespeare as an instrument for imparting colonial education in India. The current of

Shakespeare became stronger through the early performances of his plays in Calcutta which were meant for the entertainment of the English officials. Subsequent engagements with the Bard show his lasting impact on the Indian cultural scene.

In the three core chapters of this dissertation I have studied the ways in which issues of gender, power, conflict, race and socio-political aspects are illuminated in the critical literature of adapted Shakespeare performances in India.

I have attempted to investigate the theme of gender through the plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* and their critical assessments of the adaptations in Shormistha Panja's "An Indian (Mid)summer: *Bagro Basant Hai*", Kamala Ramchandani's "A Majestic Tragedy" and Basavaraj Naikar's "Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural Adaptation of *Hamlet*" respectively which include the alterations in representation of gender in an Indian context. In all the adaptations the directors provide an active, vibrant and courageous image to the female characters. The theme of gender is to be found in many of the original plays of Shakespeare. But as discussed in this work the Indian adaptations provide an alternative image of the female characters of the plays. The current debates in India in terms of gender facilitate the refashioning of gender in Shakespeare. It can be argued that the Indian directors, through reconsideration of gender have taken an important step to address the issue of women empowerment. Besides, the treatment of gender through performance becomes significant in the Indian society which has a tradition to worship women as goddess and at the same time ill-treats women even in contemporary times.

Again I examined the theme of power in an Indian context through the adaptation of *Macbeth* as highlighted in the critical review by Keval Arora in "A Strange Version of *Macbeth*". I aimed to read the aspect of conflict through the plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* in the adaptations as it emerges in the critical evaluations of Dennis Bartholomeusz's "Shylock's Shoes: The Art of Localization" and Balwant Gargi's "Staging *King Lear* in India, 1989". Moreover, the theme of race was explored through two adapted versions of *Othello* in India as reflected in the critical discourse of the adaptations in Ania Loomba's "Local-manufacture made- in-India *Othello* fellows: Issues of race, hybridity and location in post-colonial Shakespeares" and Lekha J Shankar's critical observations in "Indian *Othello* Steals the Show", "Native *Othello* Entralls West" and "A stranger in their midst". The critical assessment of Basavaraj Naikar's "Raktaksi: An Example of a Cultural Adaptation of Hamlet" is used to read both the themes of gender and the socio-political aspect in relevance to Indian culture. The effort of the adaptations therefore, transforms Shakespeare both in folk and modern aspect to interpret the socio-cultural dimension and the current problems in India. Shakespeare appears particularly hospitable to the Indian adaptations and absolutely takes a local colour. Shakespeare's influence and adaptations echo similarities and dissimilarities to relate to the Indian situations. The works of Shakespeare have been enabling and not threatening their adaptations in India. The themes that come out in this work have affected the transformation and localization of Shakespeare to retain a continued interest in his plays and to formulate his ideas in a more appropriate Indian context. I assert that a critical literature emerged in the wake of the Shakespeare

performances in India which brought about certain changes into the original Shakespearean texts and also to certain themes that they encounter with. The critical discourse built around the performances reflects and echoes the cultural collaboration of Shakespeare in India.

Critical studies in the field of cultural performances comment that the performances in cultural contexts aim to illuminate the cultural dynamics and the tensions of the particular culture. By the middle of 1980's performances served as an agency of identity formation in respect of gender, ethnicity, race and class in relation to distinct cultural notions about these issues in India. The growing inter-cultural performances in recent times blur the boundaries between the original text and the adapted one to dismantle the dominance of anyone. The post-colonial appropriations of Shakespeare in India are not only challenges to the colonial authority and mimic their culture but they also serve to elevate Shakespeare into a rich site for cultural interaction. The cross-culturation and indigenization have transformed Shakespeare into an Indian cultural icon.

Shakespeare had maximum impact upon the literary and cultural consciousness of India. He was received warmly among the masses in India through the adaptations and appropriations which were able to transform the alien poet into a household name. Shakespeare has now come to be rooted deep in India's cultural ground and has become our contemporary as his plays in their new guises now grapple and explore Indian concerns. Moreover Shakespeare's universal appeal is enhanced through such indigenization. Shakespeare becomes an essential aspect of Indian culture and an idea of

his far-reaching popularity can be obtained from various responses in the Indian newspapers as follows.

The influence of Shakespeare in India crosses all disciplinary boundaries. An article in the *The Statesman* dated 5 December 2000, reveals that the National Institute, Calcutta uses Shakespeare to teach today's corporate executives- "The people who run today's multinational corporations face the same dilemmas and responsibilities as the kings and dukes of 1600" (Sikdar, 2001: 470).

The Statesman further records in another article "Shakespeare Then and Now" the inspiring attempts to popularize and preserve Shakespeare in India through Shakespeare Rhapsody, a series of audio cassettes on Shakespeare produced in India.

Ania Loomba explains why Shakespeare is "timeless" even in the upheavals of the postcolonial world. She asserts that "the transcendental status of a literary text continued to be useful in containing the tensions of a society..." (Singh 1989: 458). Shakespearean texts help contain the tensions of the society and the Indian localizations provides for experimentation in the context of Indian society. So, the relationship between India and Shakespeare appears to be a lasting one.

An important account of Shakespeare's presence in India and the enthusiastic responses from a widespread audience was that of the travelling troupe *Shakespeareana*. Geoffrey Kendal, its director, toured with it in India from the 1940s to the 1960s. Kendal comments on his own endeavour:

we were ahead of our time...we would use local musicians and the songs of Elizabethan England seemed to harmonized perfectly with an Indian flute of sitar. I costumed some of the productions in local dress, which had the effect of bringing the two cultures together. And from this a wonderful understanding between actor and audience developed. (Kendal, 1986: 77)

Kendal used native music and costumes to provide local colour to his otherwise foreign Shakespeare in India in order to make him popular among the masses. In the same way the themes highlighted by the critical writings on Shakespeare appropriations in India draws on the relevance of the Bard in India.

Rustom Bharucha who has written *The Theatre and the World, Performance and the Politics of Culture* (1990) substantiates what the critical literature has accumulated around Shakespeare performances in India demonstrate. He believes that:

India has provided interculturalists with a wide range of techniques, including Yoga, the *mudras* and eye-exercise of Kathakali, and more recently, the martial arts technique of Kalaripayettu. (Bharucha 1990: 4)

India engages with multiple experimentations of Shakespeare plays. The use of Shakespeare in Indian theatre has often facilitated radical interpretation of the same play from two opposite dimensions. The adaptation of *Othello* by the Delhi based group, United Players' Guild entitled *Othello: A Play in Black and White* (1999) directed by Roysten Abel deals with racism but in a completely different manner than in the *Kathakali Othello*. The adaptation exposes Indian racism and elitism through Shakespeare. *Kathakali Othello* erases *Othello's* race by changing his colour and Abel

casts Adil Hussian, an Assamese and a Muslim to display anti-tribal as well as anti-Muslim sentiments in India. So it is seen that *Kathakali Othello* makes every attempt to turn away from the question of Othello's difference while Abel's production searches for every possible marks of differentiation in contemporary India.

To consider the further possibilities of research in this field of Shakespeare performances in India which leads to the development of a canon of Shakespeare performance criticism in India, it is required to consider the opinion of the noted critic C. D. Narasimhaiah who marks "but the imperishable Empire of Shakespeare will always be with us. And that is something to be grateful for" (Narasimhaiah, 1964: v). Shakespearean plays and the Indian performance aesthetics have facilitated a rigorous exchange between the two cultures to produce a creative assimilation. A close reading of the critical work on the adapted performances and the departures and deviations that they note reveal that it is impossible and perhaps undesirable to maintain an authenticity with regard to either of the two cultures involved. The cross-cultural transfusions promote the emergence of hybrid form and play that draws on both the cultures. Although the pre-independence hybridizations made the original Shakespearean plays lose their sublimity but the post-independence appropriations related the plays to the Indian context maintaining the balance between the two. The English critic C. J. Sisson marks that the indigenized Shakespeare performances in India came closer to the form and spirit of the original performances of Shakespeare than any production on the English or Westernized Indian stages of his day (Sisson 1926). So, the indigenization of Shakespeare in India does not seem to have done any harm to the original text or to the foreign culture.

The criticism of Shakespeare performances in India which are a source for the way many Indian interests and issues have gained currency and circulation contain many possibilities for further research. However it is to be noted that the criticism in this area is limited and the available ones are often to be found in a scattered manner in newspaper articles and certain journals. In this project I have looked at a narrow aspect of Shakespeare performances in India emphasizing a culture and context oriented reading of the critical discourses of the individual performances. I propose that this area offers ample scope for further research from various other angles of Indian culture, performance traditions, folk culture, actual Shakespeare performance and pedagogy in India (especially the utility of performances in teaching Shakespeare in the Indian classroom). This dissertation, given the constraints of time and the availability of its primary material – the writings on performances of Shakespeare plays – has had to confine itself and limit its exploration to just a few performances and selected critical work on these. However the area that has opened up as a result of my research appears to have potential that might yield interesting result with further more intensive research.

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