Shakespeare Travels

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It is best to begin with stories. In 1942, when China was at war with Japan, a Chinese-language production of *Hamlet*, set in Denmark, was staged in a Confucian temple in Jiangan in southwestern China. The director, Jiao Juyin (1905–1975), wed the foreign setting to the allegorical space of the temple and the historical exigencies of the time. The balcony in front of the shrine of Confucius was used as a makeshift stage, and the audiences were seated in the courtyard—with a clear view of the shrine and the action on stage. The temple thus became both a fictive space of performance and a context for the reading of China and Hamlet's Denmark. This extraordinary moment has several implications. The meanings of this wartime *Hamlet* were complicated by the intruding presence of the Confucian shrine on the makeshift stage and the setting of the temple. Jiao insisted on the primacy of his locality, and the performance created a communal experience during the war intended to stir patriotic spirit in Confucian, moral terms. The production subscribed to a national agenda during a time that witnessed a deteriorating economy, in-

tensified conflicts between the Chinese Communist (CCP) and Nationalist (KMT) parties, and major setbacks in the Chinese resistance to Japanese invasion. While Laurence Olivier's similarly jingoistic *Henry V* (1944) has been considered as an example of what Walter Benjamin called "the aestheticizing of political life," (121) Jiao's *Hamlet* is an exercise in the politicization of art. Shakespeare has been absorbed into the political life during times of war.

While the temple *Hamlet* readily connected Shakespeare with the connotations of the local venue, other directors used allegory to reconfigure Shakespeare and Asian identity multinationally. In Ong Keng Sen's multilingual *LEAR* (1997), staged with English subtitles, actors from several Asian countries and their characters were poised for a search of cultural identities as the pan-Asian production played to full houses in Singapore, Tokyo, other parts of Asia, and Europe. The power-thirsty eldest daughter (performed cross-dressed), who spoke only Mandarin and employed *jingju* chanting and movements, confronted the Old Man (Lear), who spoke only Japanese and walked the stage in the solemn style of *noh*-performance. The subtitles defamiliarized the Shakespearean lines and decorporealized Asian performance practices at once. The sensual overload of the performance overwhelmed its international audiences, who, despite their best effort, would always miss something. While this uniquely multilingual performance recast the questions of race and nation in

a new light, its bold experiments of hybrid Asian styles were controversial. The performance physicalized, in linguistic and dramaturgical terms, the promise and perils of globalization and the uneasy coalition among participants of this transnational project.

Seen afar from the European perspective, the contrasts between the Asian languages and styles were flattened by their similarities. However, seen from an Asian perspective, the difference between Asian cultures was accentuated by the performance. The production highlighted the discrepancy between Asian languages and styles, and between Chinese and Japanese perspectives on World War II. Both Jiao's and Ong's intercultural productions stage contradictions and raise complex issues related to cultural politics and international touring. They register similar concerns about shifting localities[1].

But to make the story a bit more personal, I want to recount an occasion when I met the Prince of Denmark in Copenhagen. I had crossed the bridge from the side of the National Museum and gone up to the gate of the Christainsborg Palace when an aged man, a bit bedraggled, accosted me. "Is that a camera?" he asked. "well, yes," said I. "Can you take my photo?" I did.

> "Can you take a photo of us together?"
> "O no, I have no time."
> "I am Hamlet."

I walked on pretending not to hear.

> "'My creator, himself a great traveller, though he must have performed a grand tour of Europe since he has written so much about Europe and European characters and transplanted them on to English soil, he has now set us lose upon the world, to roam around freely and without the constraint of 'context'."

> "But you are transplanted in new contexts, political, social, cultural and linguistic, you are commodified, globalized, maimed, mutilated, quartered, do you enjoy it?"

> "This, what you call commodification, Boss does not find anything wrong with it, since his name is retained and he acquires new robes, though some are ill fitting, others are fine. But I have no time. I must be off to Elsinore."

I rubbed my eyes, I had been walking too long, and unlike Sweden here the midnight sun was weak. I re-traced my step back to the Metro station.

Is it a bane or a blessing? This business of "commodification?" Why should the word acquire a stigma, if one can accept the doubtful economics of 'globalisation' why not 'commodification'? I had once been part of a proposed project of the Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo. The project was titled 'Ibsen in Use'. Despite the aura of cul-

tural politics and cultural diplomacy the project opened the way to multifarious angles of inquiry into the relevance of the 19th century modernist dramatist in 'other' climes and cultures. So shall we classify it as an issue of "positive commodification"? If the materialistic approach is blameworthy then one may also question the profit motive of global capitalism, but then can culture thrive without capital? I should say, no, but then in India, since colonial times adaptation-translation of Shakespeare[2] may be seen as a nationalist weapon to deconstruct the colonizer's Book, that is Shakespeare. One may talk about Indian "appropriations" of Shakespeare and feel proud of our achievement, but then from the contemporary, post-post-colonial angle, I feel 'accommodation' would be a better word. It validates our own culture and de-thrones the 'culture of the First', or at least gives an equal status to the 'Culture of the Second.' Peter Brooke's epic work 'The Mahabharata,' perhaps paved the way for this equalization of cultures. But Brooke was still diffident to the source whereas contemporary adaptations-re-creations of Shakespeare in the Asian power bloc makes free with Shakespeare wily nilly. Some of the productions appear like a zoomed digital photograph with the bytes distended beyond recognition so that the photograph becomes full of 'noise'. I am not trying to assess the aesthetic merits of such productions but only trying to state a fact. Since space is limited, I have not the scope in this article to trace the evolution of an 'Indian modernity' to which adaptations of Shakespeare

fitted in, gelled into our culture, phase by phase. I have tried to do so in the context of my article on Utpal Dutt's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* (Gupta, "Proscenium", 157-177).

The evolution of an Indian modernity vis-à-vis colonial western cultural influences, postcoloniality, and the contemporary global and glocal flows can really be the material for more extensive research into the modalities of adapting translated western drama and its performance in India. One could study Indian adaptations of Shakespeare and examine how they reflect the basic parameters of an evolving Indian modernity. Such research might lead to a path breaking methodology to gauge adapted drama's relevance for any society and culture and could therefore be of value to theatre, translation and cultural studies in general.

In this article I will analyse the modalities of 'commodification' and 'accommodation' of Shakespeare in the culture of Bengal from different time frames, perspectives and socio-political angles.

First I am taking up the metaphysical issue of Evil and its manifestation in *Macbeth*. In colonial Bengal Shakespeare's world was felt to be so far dissociated from the middle class Bengali concerns that the need was felt to mould the bard into the mores of our society, not only by localizing names of persons and places but the ambience of popular culture and beliefs too. In Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal*

the weird sisters are represented as tantric *bhairabis*. The source culture acquired an indigenous look through transcreation. The politics of translation as an intercultural exercise paved the way towards decolonization of the bard. The path was being paved by which Shakespeare could be positively commodified and re-dressed as a local cultural artifact.

As mentioned above, the witches are depicted as practitioners of the Tantric cult. Tantrism forms the basis of the Shakti/Kali worship in Bengal and is held in disdain by the Vaishnavites (also a very popular Bhakti cult) who worship Krishna[3]. In *Rudrapal* the three 'bhairabis' (equivalences of Sahakespeare's witches) are worshippers of Chamunda Kali whom they address as 'karalbadani maa' (mother with a terrifying look) whom they have to worship on 'chaturthi' (fourth day from new moon) and 'amavashya' (new moon night).

In the mass psyche Tantric occult practices are regarded as nefarious, grotesque and harmful. The black magic is executed by ingredients as horrific as those in the witches' cauldron[4]. Here Hecate is Shabsadhak (one who practises his yoga using a dead body) the chief priest, and the witches correspond to the three 'bhairabis', his assistants, also practitioners of black magic. The cultural border crossing of the Elizabethan Evil lies in the repeated assertion that they are amoral, that they are neither good or evil, but 'yoginis' trying

to acquire spiritual power or 'shakti'. The inter-cultural element remains however, linking them to the Source Text: the fact that they effect evil consequences since Rudrapal-Macbeth so desires. The theatricality of these Tantric rites performed in the darkness of the creamatorium, 'smasan' (not Shakespeare's heath) are as thrilling as Bankim-chandra Chattopdhyay's depiction of the tantric yogi in his novel *Kapalkundala*[5]. What is relevant for our discourse is the indigenization of the Celtic element of the Source Text, the paralleling of Elizabethan attitude towards, and belief in, black magic with similar popular and fearful notion of Tantric rites in Bengal, accommodating the coloniser's Book into our own cultural mores, the duality and ambivalence of Shakti/mother goddess worship in Bengal, while at the same time making Shakespeare recognizable in the text, though in the foreign garb of the Bengali language and 19th century popular culture. Within the text is inscribed the semiotics of 19th century cultural nationalism and subtle 19th century Hinduite patriotism – twice we are told that Macbeth has conquered the Muslims[6]. Here is commodification and a concretization of a remote culture within local folds. Yet we must not forget the dilemma of a 'dual culture' suffered by 19th century English educated Bengali intellectuals; the see-saw rhythm of attraction towards Shakespeare, the desire to maintain the basic flavour, and the simultaneous desire to re-dress a foreign traveller in Indian robes.

In Ujjwal Chattopadhyay's 21st century adaptation of the play, staged by Kaushik Sen, the problem of Evil acquires a stronger political-ontological colour. Freed from the need to decolonize an already de-colonised and globally commodified bard, Chattopadhyay and Sen overtly link the text to contemporary and universal politics, even using topical linguistic signs. Sifting through *Macbeth* (1605-6), and Rudrapal, Haralal Roy's 1874 adaptation of it in Bengali and Ujjal Chattopadyay's more radical Bengali adaptation of 2010-11 and witnessing Kaushik Sen's 2011 production of the last, one may assess the politico-social necessity of certain adaptive strategies that validate important issues regarding the flow of evil in different climes and cultures and the dramatists'/directors' political response to it in diverse cultural and economic contexts[7]. In the light of post-independence adaptations, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* becomes a more universal paradigm of metaphysical, existential, ontological, psychological and sociological apprehension of evil. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* the performance of evil and its influence was dependent on the individual who by himself need not be evil. This Renaissance vision was carried through in Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal* though the witches, by virtue of their transformation into agents of an Indian religious cult lose some of their mystery though they acquire a certain mystique in terms of social acceptance and popular superstition. In Sen's production Evil acquires an objective amorality and relentless inevitability typical of the

post-war, post 9/11 world psyche. The Shakespeare play functions as a catalyst not of cathartic regeneration but moral emasculation signifying an unredeemable future.

> We fear that the disease that plagued Scotland during Macbeth's tyrannical rule has also infected our land and our times, and the infection is so deep-rooted that the simple act of replacing one leader with another will not cure it. Our version of Macbeth though otherwise faithful to the master playwright's text does not believe in, nor accept,… the restoration of order at the end of it all, bur fears the future under yet another version of tyranny. (Sen, Brochure to the production)

The ending of Ujjal Chattopadhyay's text is not as pessimistic as Sen's production: Chattopadhyay's Chorus ends on an affirmative note though the objective situation is bleak. The modern text topicalizes while the 19th century text had sensationalized, sentimentalized and melodramatized *Macbeth* according to the tastes of the Bengali audience of the time. Both explore the semiotic layers of the Source Text in terms of the specific socio-historical climate of Bengal. And that is precisely what an adapted drama text is meant to do.

The famous 19th century poet Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay re-wrote *The Tempest* highlighting the romance of Miranda and Ferdinand, as Nolini and Basanta, in his *Nolini Basanta*. The source

culture acquired an indigenous look through transcreation. The politics of translation as an intercultural exercise paved the way towards decolonization of the bard. The accession of agency in a linguistic nationalism is the subtle appropriation of Shakespeare who was more precious to the British than the Empire. I would prefer to call it an act of 'accommodation'. What strikes me as most remarkable in this play (there is no record of its performance but to me it appears quite stageworthy) is the way Shakespearean humour has been moulded into the crucible of racy humorous urban slang of the 19th century. The Shakespeare text is thus used, shall we say 'commodified', to rub the gloss off a foreign texture and made to express popular humour, which guarantees its popular appeal for the Bengali reader/audience.

From the middle of the nineteenth century (1855) was being built up in Bengali literature, the exuberance of the tradition of picaresque adventurism, didacticism, farce and derision. Coarse stories, oral in nature, also formed part of the fabric of nineteenth century literary culture. So in Bengal the ground was already prepared for the reception of Shakespeare's fools and tolerant appreciation of the amoral as well as questionable ingredients of society. Jokes and pranks reveal the psyche of a nation and are embedded deep in local culture. The adventurous strain in Elizabethan culture, the deep seated nautical temperament, the sailor's loose conduct and generic songs are either omitted by

Hemchandra or transferred into something bawdily urban and smacking of the nineteenth century babu's excursions into brothels. The salty, sea-drenched ambience of The Tempest is transformed. Shakespeare's Stephano enters singing, "I shall no more to sea, to sea/Here shall I die ashore (II. ii, 43-44)". In *Nolini Basanta* Tilak sings: *"O amar adorini pran /Chalo jabe gangasnan/Hathkholate tomay amay khabo paka pan./Chalo adorini pran"*. (Bandyopadhyay)

Hemchandra's transliteration is in keeping with the cultural ambience in which he locates Shakespeare. The metaphoric, ribald implications of 'gangasnan' (literally taking a bath in the Ganges), taking paan together, and 'adorini pran' or 'O my heart's darling.' Let us now take Trinculo's speech in *The Tempest*: "If I were in England now … not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver… When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they would lay out ten to see a dead Indian (II. ii, 28-34)". The locale-specific recreations of the people of Shakespeare's own time is transferred into locale-specific reference to the space of the target text and satire against Hemchandra's urban contemporaries. Uday-Stephano says that the babus of Calcutta nowadays make merry ever so often; indulging in 'bibir nautch' (referring to what the white sahib would call 'nautch girls'), horse's dance, spirits' dance, motley clown's dance – they spend money on all this. Yet they do not give even a fistful of rice to a beggar. I find

here a discourse on re-historicized topicality.

There is intercultural fusion of the seventeenth century Shakespeare text with local nineteenth century colour. As Shakespeare was steeped in his own age, so also was Hemchandra's rendering of the Shakespeare text. Although the historical time and culture were so different, the culture overlaps between the source culture and target culture lead to embedding in the target text subaltern voices that are critical of their colonial betters. Specificities differ, but the genre remains the same. In this way the translation is made to create cultural equivalences. There is a lot of such criticism in Shakespeare's other plays, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* etc.

In the Bengali text, the Stephano-Trinculo-Caliban scenes are the most theatrical. Cultural and societal differences induce differences not only in the material of the jokes but also body language and interpersonal interactions, while the slang and colloquialism are quite untranslatable. Hence the target text can match the source text in temper, not in linguistic and referential equivalences. Yet Hemchandra is most free and spontaneous in these scenes in which translational hurdles induce freedom from the shackles of the Grand Narrative. Shakespeare travels into an-'other' culture and is happily received into the Indian indigenous. *Nolini Basanta* lends itself to a coherent discourse on post-colonial translation.

Hemchandra makes Prospero-Baijayanta the king of Konkan (in south west coast of India) and Alonso-Chitradwaj king of Gujarat (north western India), while he uses the language of Bengal for re-locating the bard in India. And is he trying to create a nationalistic idea of India by encapsulating, re-scripting a British book in an indigenous mode[8]? Does it foreground the idea of India as incredible, exotic, and vast? Is it a patriotic homage to its magic, through an idealistic veneration of the bard? Does it exhibit a nationalism shorn of malice towards the colonizer, patriotism eclectically open to Western literature? Here we have an example of adaptation of a Shakespeare play at a point in Indian history when in Bengal especially, intellectuals were enmeshed in what I have called 'dual culture'. Commodification is here modified by deference to the source culture.

In the post-independence phase actor-director- playwright Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) had engaged himself in Shakespeare performance almost throughout his long career. He also belonged to the intellectual domain of 'dual culture' and was initiated into Shakespeare performance in the travelling troupe of Geoffrey Kendal. In his own theatre group he began by performing Shakespeare in the original but he soon turned to performing in Bengali translation and also translated some of the plays himself, because he wanted to make Shakespeare a people's dramatist attuned to Bengali middle class concerns. As far as Dutt is concerned Shakespeare

traverses all the phases of Indian modernity, colonial, post-colonial and globalised. Shakespeare is made to do a time travel through the phases of modern Indian socio-cultural history. But unlike contemporary directors, Dutt, always enmeshed by the intellectual restrictions of the 'dual culture' was not in favour of making drastic changes to the original text. In his translations he aimed to make Shakespeare's blank verse accessible to the common, non-elitist public in actable, stageable Bengali dialogue in prose, as in his *Romeo-Juliet*. It is a creative and responsible accommodation of the source culture into a receptor culture; an equalization of status of the culture of the First and the culture of the Second[9]. Dutt also assumes the role of a creative commodifier, a cultural crusader with no intention of capitalistic gain, except in the realm of theatre and literature. He performed Shakespeare in villages, in unconventional 'one-wall' spaces in front of semi-literate audiences, in jatra style. As John Russell Brown realized while watching *jatra* plays in Orissa, as recorded in *New Sites for Shakespeare*, Shakespeare lends himself ideally to the *jatra* style. Dutt here demolishes the binary opposition between early modern England and early modern India. Scene by scene the first is transformed into the second, mainly through the acting style, space and audience composition. One may perceive here an instance of Dutt's conception of theatre dialectics as mentioned above. By bringing Shakespeare into the open air setting of backward Indian villages Dutt was not only dislocat-

ing the locale but also disclaiming the proscenium stage and Victorian realistic presentation which he so disapproved . He thereby harked back to the Elizabethan temper of staging and the work done by William Poel earlier in the century. This kind of open staging also linked him with the work of the mid- century travelling companies (of which his mentor Geoffrey Kendal's was one) which performed in pubs and halls and barns, meadows and trucks.

More important is Dutt's commodification of Shakespeare to establish his own political Marxist aim. Shakespeare who belonged to the Renaissance age of emergent capitalism, professionally in the service of the monarch, is made to reveal the underlying layer of subaltern concern. This is not done through any material change but through subtle inflexions in attitude. To him, Shakespeare, in spite of his courtly affiliation, was mainly a people's poet. Dutt once met a burly English labourer drinking beer in a Pimlico pub and asked him a few questions about drama. "As I see it, mate," growled the man, "This here Shakespeare did not wrote about kings , not half . He wrote about me." Then after a slight pause, he said with a sad smile, "So they tell me. How should I know?" ("British Theatre" 11). Dutt endeavoured to take Shakespeare close to the people, especially those belonging to a different environment. Dutt's later Shakespeare productions were also vehicles for representing his theory of dialectics of theatre.

Utpal Dutt's philosophy of the theatre and acting was based upon a firm belief in Marxian dialectics which he explained as "…a scientific principle which declares that nothing in this universe is static, everything is always changing. The idea is not new. One finds it in the philosophy of ancient Greece and in Buddhist philosophy. But what is unique in Marxian dialectics is the idea that the change is no ordinary change. At each moment everything is changing into its opposite. Within every object, every person, every thought, are two opposed principles which co-habit, yet clash with each other — amity and strife exist side by side. The result is that all objects, persons and thoughts, by changing continuously, become something different, even opposite, to what it was" (*Gadyasangraha* 205). On this logic Shakespearean drama is a constantly evolving concept; the audience's attitude to it is also changing all the time. Most significant is the fact that an actor-director has to be aware of this dialectical process. The actor should keep in mind that he is both himself and the person he impersonates and becomes He keeps in mind the Shakespearean ambience and its trans-cultural connotations when played to an audience separated from the milieu by oceans of time and space. Dutt was no advocate of change for change's sake (Dutt, "Taking Shakespeare" 19-20). He was deeply aware of what Italy and the Mediterranean meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In his intensely researched work *Shakespearer Samajchetana*, he cites primary sources to show the

ways in which trade in England was being affected by competition with the Mediterranean. The plight of the poor, the antagonism towards Italy and all things Italianate are discussed with the help of documentary evidence. Even though the cult of the Mediterranean was making deep inroads into society Shakespeare was one with the poor masses in looking back nostalgically towards the older times. Dutt projects Shakespeare as a sympathiser of the poor who were so rudely cut off from the traditional Roman Catholic religion with all its trappings and attendant superstition.

Shakespeare felt the pull of these opposing forces of Italian Roman Catholicism from which the people of England were forcefully sheared off and Protestantism was imposed on them. This is evident in his portrayal of Friar Lawrence in *Romeo & Juliet*. Also the emergent materialistic force of Renaissance capitalism was felt. Shakespeare's constant evocation of woods and forests, according to Dutt, suggests his alienation from his age and a harking back to old monastic and social ideals, though of course Shakespeare does criticise the clergy where criticism is due. In his discourse on *Timon of Athens* he goes into details over the Mammon-worshipping new civilization of Athens which fails to understand Timon in whom Dutt finds a Christ figure, an angry Christ though, to whom the forest is the better place. In Timon Shakespeare portrays a failed Christ. The bard has come to realize the irrelevance of Christianity and

the old Italian faith in the wake of the new Mediterranean utilitarianism (Dutt, *Somajchetona* 184-203).

An interesting feature of the politics of representation is Dutt's attitude to Friar Lawrence in *Romeo-Juliet* who is made to run away from the scene of discovery, in spite of the fact that Dutt considered him an important character. In his book on Shakespeare's social consciousness he had pointed out how Shakespeare's social consciousness is primarily a religious consciousness. Monks like the Friar are idealized by the bard in an effort to show the value of the old order as opposed to the utilitarian trend of the time. The Capulets and Montagues in all ages are the business rivals. They are possessive about their children and even their grief is garbed in the language of wealth . The Friar is aware of the true value of human emotions but by making him run away and not stay back to exonerate himself Dutt stresses his ordinariness and marginalization. According to Utpal Dutt Shakespeare had idealised him as a true representative of Christ; one who harks back to values that the new age had rejected. Dutt made him helpless against the forces of the nouveau riche and their retainers. He is a failed pastor unable to protect his proteges from an insensitive Establishment. Dutt made the character fit into his ideological framework but took his cue from Shakespeare.

Utpal Dutt's *Julius Caesar* was always played before an urban audience. He produced both English and Bengali versions in modern dress. It became what we today call an 'analogue play.' Dutt explored the political potentialities of the play. He knew nothing of Orson Welles's production when he produced both the original play and Jyotirindranath Tagore's (elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore) 1907 Bengali translation of it. Although it was a faithful literal translation some changes which dislocated the milieu did occur. Diehard Shakespeareans of mid-century Bengal found it difficult to digest Dutt's drastic metaphoric displacement in which Caesar's personality merges with Hitler's, in the garb of Chaplin's Dictator. The pre-Christian Mediterranean locale transforms into the modern and universal as Dutt played havoc with Shakespeare's Dramatis Personae. In a printed Programme Note to the English performance he describes Caesar and Antony as Fascists, Marcus Brutus as Socialist, Cassius and the other conspirators are all Communists. Paradoxically enough, Dutt who was always in sympathy with the poor and greatly in conformity with Shakespeare's understanding of mob psychology describes the Commoners as Fascist thugs! Dutt in his own political plays re-interpreted history in terms of the present, and in the present as well as in history he found material for a nation's mythology. The same mythmaking process he found in Shakespeare's play and this he bound into an imaginary framework dislocating Roman history, and contempo-

rary Elizabethan nuances in the Romans' conspiracy, but adhering to Shakespeare's basic design: the tragic failure of revolution, the human face of idealism, the difficulty of annihilating the idea of a superhero from people's minds, the transformation of a man into a hero and the hero into a man. And all of this through novel theatrical means: "We presented Brutus's and Anthony's Forum speeches as radio broadcasts. The Phillipi battlefield was shown as the ruins of a bombarded city… the last act was punctuated by the sound of machine guns and flying bombers" (Dutt, "Little Theatre" 47-48). Elsewhere he stated that "A modern interpretation of Shakespeare must typify Shakespeare's place, not in the past, but in the present life of the nation and of the world… Like his fellow artists the writer, the poet, the musician, the director has a social responsibility to discharge" (Dutt, "Shakespeare and the Modern Stage"). No Indian director before Dutt had thought this way nor did they have an interpretive approach. When produced in English in 1949 Dutt found the play answering the political needs of the predominantly Jewish cast that comprised The Amateur Shakespeareans. Zionists the world over were at that time campaigning against oppression. Director's meaning, actors' meaning, and audience's meaning did indeed give to Shakespeare's meaning a dialectical dimension! Dutt's theatre leads to similar interpretive productions of the future[10].

Othello seems to have been to Dutt the most challenging of Shakespeare's plays, for ever since Kendal first initiated him to it, he produced it on and off, in the original and in his own translation (the script is lost, unfortunately). As stated in the preface to his version of *Romeo and Juliet*, Dutt analyses character against the socio-cultural background. Othello and Iago are both part of the commercial world of the Mediterranean and are, in a sense complementary. Iago is conscious of colour differences and is enraptured by the spectacle of coins dropping in the satchel (Dutt, *Towards* 8). Othello is tarnished by the cruelty of a harsh possessive world and submits to its evil. He is a tragic character but also an embodiment of evil, the evil generated by Mediterranean Renaissance cupidity. In Utpal Dutt's own acting there was both involvement and detachment no matter what role he performed. The audience felt that Dutt became the character he portrayed but was also critically analysing it all the time and conveying his own impression. He became a pitiable Othello, a love-sick man, a great hero, but also cruelty incarnate. Yet these dialectical oppositions and changes did not rob the play of its Shakespearean quality. Realizing the tremendous mass appeal of the play he produced it before village audiences in *jatra* style and noticed how greatly the audiences were swayed by the traditional emotions of pity and fear. Shakespeare was de-colonized, the Mediterranean world rebuilt in a new way in the villages of Bengal.

Dutt, attempted a faithful translation, his own, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play in which he saw immense audience appeal. The free verse he substitutes for Shakespeare's blank verse is stiff but racy if spoken with accents in the right places. Athens represents the Establishment, the utilitarian world that seeks to regulate the emotions through rules and norms. Even the 'rude mechanicals' cannot find a proper place in Athens to rehearse their play. Only by escaping into the forest can identity be established but there too magic and the irrational forces take over: Puck creates havoc. The wood becomes the symbol of the human sub-conscious where the fears of childhood take the shape of strange creatures and human beings are threatened with metamorphosis. As Dutt explained, "While Bottom literally turns into a donkey in the forest the long process of men turning into donkeys has been continuing in the minds of men for a long time. Bottom's appearance as half donkey and half man is the ultimate image of the social alienation of man. Bottom was the model for Ionesco's man turning into rhinoceros" (Dutt, Director's Note to *Chaitali Rater Swapno*, n.p.). Reviewers faulted Dutt's stage setting because the fairies danced behind a jungle of polythene. But wasn't this the visual equivalence of the sub-conscious world behind a translucent veil? (See Gupta, "Shakespeare, the Mediteranean").

I have discussed Utpal Dutt's work on Shakespeare in such detail since I feel that no other transla-

tor-director has made such consistent research oriented efforts to re-instate Shakespeasre on the modern Bengali stage without distorting the basic Shakespearean theatre ambience. His attitude of creative commodification gives a novel dimension to the world wide travels of Shakespeare.

The contemporary stage is free from bardolatry and to my mind Dutt has a hand in it. Today we are also free from the need to de-colonise the bard hence in Calcutta one witnesses *King Lear* and *Hamlet* done in more or less literal translation. There are more experimental or avant garde productions which are doing the rounds though the aesthetic merits are not to be assessed within the ambit of this single article.

However, I shall mention a few: Abanti Chakraborty in her solo performance, *Lady Macbeth* (2015) keeps to the original Shakespeare lines and angle of approach but creates an entirely novel space often with psychological and metaphysical implications by intelligent light design. The story telling technique connects with age-old pre-modern dramatised narrative but on the proscenium it connects with the creative solo performances of her peers. She is a visionary director who has utilised symbolism, expressionism and surrealist practices in her theater design of Lady Macbeth. Particularly relevant are the gestures using a heap of sand and a knife as an allegory for the power building process and murder for attaining that. Sudden changes

of light also served to ensure the emergence of a different space which enriched the performance. Her avant garde style of communication, in defiance of popular melodramatic modes, effectively communicated the turbulence experienced by the character to the audience.

My second example is *Macbeth Badya*, which recently toured Europe. Director Manish Mitra in a 50 minutes performance recreates through different Indian dance forms, the concept of *Macbeth*. It tells the story of a modern man and his strivings for power. The performance is based on traditional Indian ragas, accompanied by the pakhawaj. And narration is the fusion of various forms of traditional Indian dance such as kathakali, bharanatyam, kathak, and traditional theatre forms — kutiyattam and yakashagana. *Macbeth Badya* is a performance in which poetry of movement and music resonates with the semiotics of Shakespeare's tragedy. The merging of traditional dance theatre through a medley of dance forms yoked to a worldwide attempt at re-planting Shakespeare in modern times and in modern and indigenous art forms. *Macbeth Badya* carries the travels of Shakespeare and his commodification to an extreme postmodernist realm, creating a form that hybridizes both oriental and occidental worlds.

In fact a separate direction of research could be flagged off from this point. In the eastern power block today a lot of such experimentation is on

to accommodate the bard in other traditional art forms lending an added edge to extra-linguistic translation. The story with which this article begins is representative of translation of political space. We must also consider translation into different aesthetic spaces: Shakespearean plays in the form of Chinese opera, Japanese *kabuki* and also puppetry, a Korean *Midsummer Nights' Dream* based on the magical performances of Korean supernatural beings. Examples could be multiplied (See Chaudhuri and Lim; Trivedi and Ryuta; Kennedy and Lan etc.).

I have quite compulsively confined myself to regional production since first hand acquaintance is needed for convincing theatre research. Lastly my focus has been on Shakespeare in the theatre for to the bard, "the play's the thing". Finally one reason behind the world-wide utilization/commodification of Shakespeare is that through Shakespeare local artistes could be made part of the world's cultural dialogue. Carmen Romano, founder of the Santiago-based Fundación Teatro a Mil said in an interview taken by Olga Garay-English, "…The arts … promote social cohesion through building community—but also by asking provocative and reflective questions. We don't take things for granted; we're committed to creating common space where folks can gather and become engaged through the arts" ("Where Art Leads the Way"). Shakespeare scholars, actors, translators and directors create an international platform on which

varieties of Shakespeare products transmit an aesthetic force to bind world cultures by gelling into one personality, Shakespeare. The Hamlet I met in Copenhagen was right. 'Commodification' is not a bad word.

Finally it is interesting to note that the process of translating, re-costuming, re-configuring Shakespeare has also led to a de-iconization of Shakespeare. To be made into an icon to me appears like being chilled into stagnation, living in a freezer. Life involves change, re-thinking, re-conceptualizing as well as remembering and re-membering. Brexit may be an insular movement, but Shakespeare roams around freely transmigrating into other cultures even making them his own. Shakespeare is theirs and ours, yours and mine. Shakespeare the catalyst lends himself to all imaginations without losing his identity.

Notes

1. See Alexander Huang's Chinese Shakespeare: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange for more details.

2. I use this term since every translation of a play meant for the stage becomes an adaptation.

3. The Tantrics were then in the popular imagination the social and religious other, although tantrism was at the base of Sakti worship . The bhakti cult was more innocent and aesthetic. Tantriism was associated with sensuality, sexual licentiousness, gory and grotesque rites.

4. But the ingredients required by the head priest, Shabsadhak ,are related to Hindu religious practice, eg. a lock of Shiva's hair when he was dancing in frenzy angered at Sati's death, the lock is available in a deep snow covered crevice the blood of the buffalo freshly sacrificed to the Devi Chhinna masta, the mud from the funeral pyre of Ravana which is still burning. This detail is anachronistic but symbolical of the destruction of evil. Shakespeare is indigenized and ethnicised by allusion to Indian mythology and religion. There are references to the great heroes of the Mahabharata, e.g. Bhim and Judhishtir.

5. Numerous stories were associated with this occult practice which was not always for doing evil But tantra in the popular imagination was stigmatized by a shadow of witchcraft. Adaptation of drama justifiably seasons the source text with the local.

6. Duncan's Norwegian enemy becomes 'Yavan' and Muslim in Rudrapal.

7. Ujjal Chattopadhyay in a brief four sentence introduction to the play stresses that he is not always very faithful to the original. His interest lay in focusing on the greed and lust of rulers as expressed in the speeches and attitude of the ordinary people.

8. Although Hemchandra was a noted Nationalist and his epic Brittasanghar bear witness to this fact, in some of his shorter poems he unabashedly praises the British. His poem written on the occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee and the one extolling the Prince of Wales on his visit to India are cases in point. In other poems he describes the sorry plight of his motherland and suppli-

cates the British rulers to look after their poor children and be merciful. In yet other poems he strongly condemns India's state of bondage and advocates freedom. This intriguing duality in his approach to colonialism, the ambiguity, if not vacillation, in his nationalistic zeal perhaps explains why he does not highlight the rebelliousness of Caliban-Barbat in his Bengali adaptation of Shakespeare's The Tempest.

9. I use the terms 'First' and 'Second' for convenience and there is no right wing motivation.

10. One may cite David Tucker's 'promenade' production at Stratford 1992-93 session where Caesar was a mixture of Yeltsin and Ceaucescu , and Calpurnia , Raisa Gorbachov . The battle scenes were analogues of civil war in Bosnia.

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