Chapter VI

Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to identify various responses to Shakespeare evoked by Indian productions of his plays at different points of time and what governed these responses. This dissertation did not aim to provide a comprehensive history of Shakespeare productions in India which would be a vast project requiring collaboration of a number of scholars working in various language sectors. The thesis tries traces the advent of Shakespeare in India, the colonial ‘agenda’ in promoting Shakespeare and India’s efforts in making Shakespeare its own which in turn led to greater theatre activity and most significantly the development of ‘modern’ Indian theatre. The thesis tries in a humble way to fill the lacuna in Shakespeare studies by discussing the responses evoked by Indian productions of Shakespeare. The thesis has also dealt with major issues in post-Independence theatre that need to be emphasized when dealing with post-Independence Shakespeare productions to appreciate the complex aims and achievements of these productions.

The finding of this thesis is that Shakespeare productions in India have been governed by their own aesthetics. When Shakespeare’s plays moved out of schools and colleges in the 19th century, they were quickly adapted to suit the general Indian milieu and audience taste. Shakespeare may have served the British colonists’ agenda academically but theatrically Shakespeare productions in India refused to be overwhelmed by the master’s text and in fact appropriated the text itself. The three prominent trends in Shakespeare productions in India can be identified as ‘imitative’, ‘popular’ and ‘urban-folkish’. The earliest productions of Shakespeare in India by the educated elite tried to ‘imitate’ the way Shakespeare’s plays were produced by the
British colonists and followed the conventions of English theatre. There was also a gradual and noticeable assimilation into the indigenous theatrical activities. By the 1870s, with the emergence of Parsi theatre, Shakespeare was out of the elite circle and was transformed into ‘popular’ modes. An important achievement of Parsi theatre was founding a theatre for the masses, beyond the private theatre of the elite. In the 1920s with the growing momentum of nationalism, the once-revered Shakespeare was noticeable in its absence. Shakespeare’s plays regained favour on the stage albeit with a difference in the post-Independence decades. Utpal Dutt employed elements from jatra in producing Shakespeare; later theatre directors like Karanth, Tanvir, Arambam and Raina followed suit.

The thesis also proposes that categorising Indian productions of Shakespeare as ‘colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’ would not be appropriate as all the productions of the colonial period cannot be called ‘colonial’ in an ideological sense. As has been explained, even during the colonial period Shakespeare’s plays were changed to suit the audience sensibility. Similarly, not every production in post-colonial India can be called ‘post-colonial’. One may still find ‘colonial’ Shakespeare in post-colonial India as is evident in the following account:

_Twelfth Night_, first produced in 1928 by the Shakespeare Society of St. Stephen’s, was the most frequently performed of all Shakespeare’s plays, being revived in 1948, 1963, 1987, and 1993. When _As You Like It_ was stage in modern English dress, a reviewer observed that the production demonstrated the truth of the assertion that Indians, and especially Stephanians, were “the last Englishmen left on the earth” (cited in Bartholomeusz 213).
Post-colonial appropriations of a canon are generally considered counter-discursive and resistant to canonical ‘authority’. Such a narrow view would not explain the complexity of Shakespeare productions in India. Many of these productions do not necessarily create counter-discourse to subvert the canon. In fact, Shakespeare can evoke at least three kinds of responses in post-colonial societies like India: one, of rejection as a representative of colonialism; two, of value as a ‘universal’ writer and a ‘touchstone’ of greatness; and three, of appropriation to suit local socio-political-cultural purposes. The last attitude has been the most productive in terms of Indian productions of Shakespeare. For instance, productions like Bhuli Nai Priya, Barnam Van, Kamdeo ka Apna, Macbeth: Stage of Blood, or Badshah Pather may not create a counter-discourse by subverting the English canon as Derek Walcott and Aimé Césaire have done with The Tempest, but they illustrate the appropriation of the master texts in their own ways. This is particularly true of the productions which present a “syncretic combination of indigenous and colonial forms in the post-colonial world”. (Gilbert & Tompkins 294). Arambam, for instance, has appropriated Shakespeare’s Macbeth to express the social and political turmoil in present-day Manipur. Dutt, Karanth, Tanvir and Raina have appropriated Shakespeare to develop theatrical styles by blending elements of traditional and folk forms, Sanskrit theatre and ‘modern’ theatre. Thus, such productions go beyond the fixed categories of the colonial and the postcolonial and open up the possibility of a more nuanced discourse on theatrical expressivity. In this regard Parmita Kapadia observes,

Through their emphasis on the postcolonial, interculturalist, and intraculturalist Indian identity, contemporary Shakespeare appropriations simultaneously reify and subvert the East-West, colonizer-colonized binary in much the same way as their predecessors
did; however, their stress on the intraculturalism of Indian identity complicates the binaryism [sic.] of conventional counterdiscourse (92).

Once the boundary between the colonial and the postcolonial is blurred, one realizes that these categories can not be fixed but become hybrid conditions. Ania Loomba argues that “every culture can be said to be hybrid – in fact even ‘authentic’ identities are the result of ongoing processes of selection, cutting and mixing of cultural vocabularies. In practice, hybridity and authenticity are rarely either/or positions” (146-7). In such a hybrid world it is difficult and pointless to identify ‘authentic’ Shakespeare. Loomba raises an important question:

[...] does the idea of “authentic” or “inauthentic” Shakespeare have any meaning in a world where the entire Shakespeare trade is fueled by a frank acknowledgement of the legitimacy of inauthenticity? For even the New Globe is, as Dennis Kennedy has put it, “a form of staged authenticity”, combining aspects of the shrine with those of the amusement park. In this situation, the inauthenticity of the “foreign” or indeed any other devotee should matter less than it once did, just as the authenticity of Shakespeare himself is less important to both audiences and vendors (123).

The concept of ‘authentic’ itself, says Richard Handler, is “a cultural construct of the modern Western world” (2). There cannot be an ‘authentic’ Shakespeare. How is one to believe that the Shakespeare text that has come down to the modern readers is ‘authentic’? Shakespeare himself was a reviser of scripts. Moreover, Shakespeare texts have been mediated by numerous editors, compositors and scribes. Even the most trusted Quartos and Folios vary from each other. For instance, “about 200 lines of
"Hamlet" in the First Quarto version (Q1, 1603) do not appear in the First Folio version (F1, 1623), while about 85 lines found in F1 are not featured in Q1” (Rauen 123). Such multiplicity of Shakespeare texts makes it impossible to claim a version as the ‘authentic’ text of Shakespeare. Lurie E. Osborne notes that:

> All Shakespearean editions are copies; there is no recoverable original, even for those plays like *All’s Well that Ends Well* for which bibliographers suggest that the edited text was taken from Shakespeare’s foul papers. In fact the more vigorously textual bibliographers search for some singular, original authorizing text, the more obvious it becomes that there is no original to be found (169).

Such views make efforts to discover ‘authentic’ Shakespeare fruitless endeavour. Consequently, no production can claim to be an ‘authentic’ Shakespeare production. Apart from the text itself, present-day performance conditions are very different from the Elizabethan times. In this sense, any attempt at producing an ‘authentic’ Shakespeare play would invariably be ‘inauthentic’. In fact, this ‘inauthenticity’ makes any Shakespeare productions different from another and must be valorized.

The thesis suggests further research investigations into Shakespeare productions and their reception in India in different theatre traditions and language sectors not covered in this study like Tamil, Telugu, Oriya, Gujarati and Punjabi theatre, among others, which have lively theatre history. Also, scholars more familiar with the languages represented here like Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi, can take up more nuanced and detailed investigations into the Shakespeare productions in these languages to trace the possibility of subliminal evocations.
On the whole, working on this thesis has been a rewarding experience. The insights into the Indian productions of Shakespeare provided me the opportunity to visit Utrecht University, The Netherlands to carry out a short-term research project on a comparative study of Shakespeare reception in India and the Netherlands. This has broadened my vision regarding Shakespeare productions outside India. Also, the collaborations that were formed during this project with Shakespeare experts around the world especially Prof. Ton Hoenselaars, Prof. Paul Franssen and Prof. Ann Thompson have been particularly helpful in providing insights into the study of Shakespeare productions. I sincerely hope that this study adds to the existing scholarship in Shakespeare studies in a modest way.
Works Cited


Rauen, Margarida Gandara. “Moving Away From The ‘Centre’: Theory, Drama and Performance”. Shakespeare Without English: The Reception of Shakespeare in