Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis titled “Performing Shakespeare in India: Adaptations and Appropriations” looks at various responses to Shakespeare productions in India which date back to the mid-18th century when British officers in India staged Shakespeare’s plays along with those of other English playwrights for entertainment. This was a part of a larger imperialistic design that was evolving during the later part of the 19th century to establish moral and cultural superiority over India through English education and literature. Shakespeare was used as a convenient ploy for achieving this aim. T.B. Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 recommended the inclusion of English language and literature in the syllabi of education institutions. As a result, Shakespeare acquired a prominent place in the Indian educational curriculum. The educated Indian regarded Shakespeare as the most revered writer of all ages. This compulsive love for Shakespeare, at least from young Indian students aspiring to become civil servants, led not only to reading of his plays but also performing them. However, India’s engagement with Shakespeare through these two hundred years has not been uniform throughout. From being ‘imitative’ during the first half of the 19th century to ‘popular’ during the later 19th and early 20th centuries to ‘urban-folkish’ in post-colonial India, the productions of Shakespeare’s plays have undergone remarkable transformations.

The subject of my study is Shakespeare productions in India which remains an under-researched area. Although Shakespeare has been translated, adapted and performed in India for more than two centuries, there is hardly any consolidated bibliography or cohesive history available on the subject. This is especially true for those Indian languages which have registered considerable influence of Shakespeare on
their drama and theatre let alone other languages and their theatre traditions. With so many languages and theatre traditions in India it is quite challenging to trace Shakespeare reception in the whole country. This would need several scholars from various Indian languages to compile such an encyclopedia of Shakespeare reception in India. I do not attempt such a bold step. For the purposes of this thesis, I have limited my area to a few regions with relatively greater theatre activities. I discuss Shakespeare in Bengali and Parsi theatre at length. Other theatre traditions like Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi which are equally rich and have registered considerable influence of Shakespeare could not be ignored. As a non-native speaker of most of these languages, I had to depend a great deal on available sources. This is the limitation faced by scholars in India working with Shakespeare performances in the Indian languages. I hope my efforts to trace various responses to Shakespeare evoked through the Indian productions would modestly extend the existing scholarship on Shakespeare by discussing new perspectives offered by these productions.

This thesis does not delve into the study of Western and Indian aesthetics of performance traditions per se yet some observations in this regard would be helpful in studying the fusion of the aesthetics of these two traditions in ‘modern’ Indian theatre. Many theatre scholars have argued that modern Indian theatre in its early years was characterized by imitating the Western theatre. Girish Ghosh, for instance, blended various traditions in his plays, taking elements from jatra, the Sanskrit tradition, the newly emerging social drama and the Western classics (Chatterjee 13). Poonam Trivedi argues, “Not just in politics and governance but in the arts too, and particularly in literature, the engagement with the West began with the imitation of Western forms” (100). The reasons for this imitation were many. Classical Sanskrit theatre had almost disappeared by the 11th century and theatre activity in India was sustained by sparse folk
and traditional performances, which too were on the decline by the 18th century due to the lack of patronage. There was a void as far as theatre activity was concerned. At this juncture, the decline of folk and traditional performances and the rise of English theatre paved the way for ‘modern’ Indian theatre. This was furthered by the quest of the Indian middle-class for a distinct cultural identity which the English theatre seemed to offer. The indigenous reform movements stemming from the colonial intervention into social practices also paved the way for the emergence of a modern sensibility and thereafter, ‘modern’ Indian theatre. Folk and traditional performances had already come under severe attack by the British for being ‘licentious’, ‘immoral’ and ‘degraded’. The educated Indian middle-class followed the colonial example and condemned these performances as ‘degenerate’ that needed cleansing to become ‘respectable’ viewing. Indologists suggested differentiating between the ‘great’ and the ‘little’ traditions. Thus emerged the difference between the margi and the desi which in turn influenced the treatment of all expressive forms. As regards theatre, the model provided by Western theatre was followed in terms of conventions, techniques and devices. Representing this ‘imitative’ theatre are the early productions of plays mostly in English by the educated Indians. Specially school and college students staged Shakespeare’s plays which I discuss at length in Chapter II. However, with the re-discovery of Sanskrit drama, especially after William Jones’s translation of Sakuntala (1789), Indian dramatists started looking towards their own classical dramatic tradition as well. This had a two-fold result. First, Indian writers started translating Sanskrit drama into regional languages. Prior to the colonial period there were hardly any translations of Sanskrit drama in any of the Indian languages. The second and the more important result was the syncretism of Western and Indian aesthetics, dramatic and theatrical conventions, techniques and devices that characterize the later years of Indian theatre. The focus on
‘syncretism’ also generates a more nuanced way of looking at modern Indian theatre which came about as result of a fusion between two theatre traditions, rather than a narrow argument which many have put forth, that the Western theatre destroyed the traditional performances of India. The fusion, in fact, created a new kind of theatre which while drawing upon Western aesthetics and conventions, indigenized them by incorporating aesthetics and conventions from classical and traditional performances. Poonam Trivedi rightly argues in this context that “the imitation of Western forms in India served not so much as a model of mimetic subordination but as an intercultural interaction, which created for itself ‘a margin of freedom’, a ‘self consciousness’, of the possibility of the new” (100).

Classical theatre in India had been governed by the aesthetics laid down by Bharatamuni in *Natyasastra* written somewhere between 2nd century B. C. and 2nd century A. D. This is a comprehensive treatise on Sanskrit theatre, poetics, aesthetics, dance and music. Although Sanskrit theatre had lost its glory by the 11th century, various principles of the *Natyasastra* had percolated into the traditional theatres of India which sustained theatrical activity before ‘modern’ Indian theatre took shape. *Sutradhar*, for example, the chief character in the Sanskrit theatre, retained its role in *yakshagan as bhagvata* and in *raslila as swami*. *Natyasastra*, unlike Aristotle’s *Poetics* which deals with the literary aspects of a drama, is much wider in scope. It deals with various aspects of performance, the literary text being just one among these. A comparative study of the *Poetics* and *Natyasastra* is not the objective of my thesis. It is, however, necessary for the argumentative framework of my thesis to highlight the elements related to the dramatic text and performance in both the traditions which found a fusion in modern Indian theatre. For instance, in Western especially Aristotelan aesthetics, tragedy has been regarded as the highest literary form. The preference for a
tragic end in Aristotle *Poetics* leading to *catharsis* or the purgation of pity and fear in the spectator is considered the ultimate end of poetry. Theoreticians like Horace and Philip Sidney endorsed that the ideal combination of *arche* and *telos* would “move” the audience towards ethical and moral self-realization. All of Shakespeare’s tragedies have tragic ends. Such a concept of tragedy is absent in Sanskrit aesthetics as laid down by Bharata. The ultimate end of drama in Indian dramatic theory is the enjoyment and the realization of *rasa*. According to the *Natyasastra*, the play of *rasa* in the drama leads to *sthayibhava* after *phalprapti*, which means that the desire of the protagonist is attained in the end. In Kalidas’s *Shakuntala*, for instance, after the ordeals the protagonists have gone through, the drama ends with the union of Dushyanta and Shakuntala. While in Western aesthetics, there are well-defined categories of tragedy and comedy, classical Indian aesthetics does not have such definitive categories. On the contrary, the *rasa-siddhanta* in the *Natyasastra* does not subscribe to a performance which has only one *rasa*. This is probably the reason that one cannot find a pure tragedy in Indian dramatic tradition. Bharata insists that there be many *rasas* in a play (in fact, the more number of *rasas* the better the play is) but one of them has to be the principle *rasa*. The other *rasas* would be merely *suchnamatra*. However, as Shakespeare’s plays came to be translated and performed in India in the 19th century, the tragic end gradually came to be accepted by the Indian dramatists as well as the spectators. Shakespeare’s plays epitomize the inclusion of the tragic ending in the Indian dramatic tradition.

An important difference between Western and Indian aesthetics of drama is that while Western aesthetics makes a difference between the character who represents action and articulates dialogue and the chorus which comments on the action and presents songs and dances. Or, in Nietzschean terms, there is a distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements as in the classical Greek drama. On the other
hand, dance and drama are integrated into and are inseparable in Indian aesthetics of performance. While in the Greek tragedies, it is generally the Apollonian element that dominates the Dionysian element, it is the Dionysian element represented by dance, music, song and stylization which is emphasized in the *Natyasastra*. Bharata’s preference for *natyadharma* to *lokadharma* makes this clear. In Marathi theatre, Vishnudas Bhave’s plays generally referred to as ‘*akhyans*’ had music and songs as an important element. Songs were formally composed while the speeches and dialogues were largely improvised by the actors and were impromptu. However, one finds that the contact with the English drama and theatre, which was governed largely by the Apollonian element with regard to dialogue and action, gave rise to a new kind of drama in the Indian languages in which the Apollonian element of dialogue and action became important without completely losing the Dionysian elements of song and dance. Parsi theatre would be a suitable example of this fusion. In Parsi theatre, dialogue and action occupy an important place, but equal importance is also accorded to the songs and dances. In fact, the fusion of the two aesthetic elements of dialogue and action and song and dance find its best manifestation in Parsi theatre.

Not only the aesthetics of drama but that of performance also saw a happy fusion in modern Indian theatre. Indian theatre, both classical and traditional, emphasized the capacity of imagination of the spectators. Hence, both kinds used empty space without décor. However, the advent of Western theatre brought the idea of representing nature on the stage. Painted scenes were hung at the back and/or rolled down for particular scenes. Although proscenium theatre became a vogue following the Western model, one finds that even the proscenium stage was not adopted indiscriminately. Unlike the levels in the Western proscenium stage, the proscenium stage in India was largely empty which enabled the actor to move freely either in a
realistic manner or in a stylized way. The empty stage also helped the actors particularly for the dance sequences which demanded free movement. For instance, although Parsi plays were staged in proscenium with box sets, painted curtains and transformation scenes, they incorporated folk forms like bhavai, yaksagana, or lavani and Urdu, Gujarati or Persian ghazals and thumris. The performance of Ek Bevapha Mitr (an adaptation of Othello) by “The Parsi Stage Players” opened with ishvar-stuti (praise of God) (Willmer 199). This mixing of conventions becomes clearer in the following account provided by R. K. Yajnik:

In the midst of the noise and bustle of the Urdu theatre, opened an hour before the performance, one hears three bells at short intervals and with the third bell a thundering gun shot is heard as the drop-curtian, gorgeously painted with mythological legends, goes up. The chorus girls sing a prayer or a “welcome” to the accompaniment of the harmonium and rhythmic drum beats. This song ends with an offering of flowers to the distinguished patrons and with garlanding the portraits of the pioneers of the respective company or of deities.

Then the action commences (112).

The above account clearly shows that even if Parsi theatre drew upon Western stage conventions they were adapted to suit the sensibility of the target culture. Rustom Bharucha refers to this fusion of the theatrical conventions of the two performance traditions in Parsi theatre which were,

[…]

mediated by the colonial machinery of the nineteenth-century theatre, the conventions and stage tricks derived from the pantomimes and historical extravaganzas of the English Victorian stage. However,
it should be emphasized that these derivations had been thoroughly
‘Indianized’ through music, song, colour, pathos, melodrama and the
histrionic delivery of lines that are intrinsically a part of the popular
theatrical tradition in India (1993, 193).

It is this fusion of aesthetics exemplified by Shakespeare performances in India that this
study hopes to illustrate.

The last two decades have seen a shift of focus from text to performance in
Shakespeare studies. This is evident from the number of studies on Shakespeare
performance published through the last two decades. Although the domain of
Shakespeare studies has always accommodated new perspectives, Western scholarship
has tended to ignore Shakespeare productions in the non-Western countries. If non-
Western Shakespeare appears at all in Western scholarship, it is largely the
‘intercultural’ performances using non-Western traditional forms of performance that
figure. Productions like that of Annette Leday and David McRuvie’s kathakali King
Lear (1989), Tim Supple’s multilingual production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream
(2006) or productions of Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook that ‘appropriate’ non-
Western forms of performance get noticed in the Western discourse. But non-Western
Shakespeare productions have been largely ignored in the Western discourse on
Shakespeare performance, especially at a time when post-colonial theory has made
significant contributions and even changed the critical paradigms in understanding
Shakespeare’s text. Studies still tend to be Euro-centric with hardly any attention being
paid towards Shakespeare production and reception in non-European countries.

Recently some attempts have been made in the West to include non-English
Shakespeare productions in Shakespeare studies. Some of these works include Dennis
Kennedy’s (ed.), *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (CUP, 1993), James C. Bulamn, (ed.), *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance* (Routledge, 1996), Pascale Aebischer, et al (ed.), *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance across Media, Genres and Culture* (Palgrave, 2003), Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (eds.), *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (Blackwell, 2005) and Sonia Massai (ed.), *World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* (Routledge, 2005). However, the number of essays related to Shakespeare performance in Asia, in particular India, which probably has the longest history of Shakespeare performances outside England, is quite scant in all these volumes. The major portions are dedicated to the study of Western productions. Kennedy’s *Foreign Shakespeare* (1993) tries to broaden the scope of Shakespearean scholarship by taking into account non-English Shakespearean productions. Unfortunately, the work only accommodates Shakespeare productions from Germany, France and Central Europe. By leaving out Shakespearean productions from non-European countries, with the exception of one essay discussing Shakespearean performances in Japan, this work too remains largely Euro-centric.

There is no mention of Shakespeare productions in India. Bulman’s *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance* (1996) discusses various issues involved in Shakespeare performance ranging from actor’s body, gender, stagecraft and performance editions. Here too post-colonial Shakespeare finds place in only an essay by Dennis Salter on “Acting Shakespeare in Postcolonial Space” that discusses the problems faced by actors in enacting a colonial text in a postcolonial society. However, his analysis is limited to Shakespeare’s performances in Quebec. Aebischer’s *Remaking Shakespeare* (2003) expands the range of Shakespeare studies by including performances across media like biography, sign language and novel, in addition to films and theatre. There is, however, only one essay in the volume by Poonam Trivedi titled “Reading ‘Other Shakespeares’”
on non-Western Shakespeare. Hodgdon’s *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (2005) is the most comprehensive of all the works on Shakespeare performance containing 34 essays out of which only Ania Loomba’s “Shakespeare and the Possibilities of Postcolonial Performance” and Yong Li Lan’s “Shakespeare and the Fiction of the Intercultural” discuss Shakespeare performances in Asia. Rest of the volume is dedicated to Shakespeare performances in the West. Massai’s *World-wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* (2005) is a welcome attempt as it includes Shakespeare “world-wide”. As Massai herself admits, the book has “a genuinely international scope”, and includes various Shakespeare performances across the world including an essay on Shakespeare productions in India by Poonam Trivedi titled “‘It is the bloody business which informs thus …’: Local Politics and Performative Praxis”.

Having realized this eurocentrism in Shakespeare studies, scholars from post-colonial societies which still show considerable influence of Shakespeare in their literatures and theatres, have attempted to represent non-Western Shakespeares. Notable are two attempts on Shakespeare performances in India. The first is an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Parmita Kapadia (University of Massachusetts, 1999) on *Bastardizing the Bard: Appropriations of Shakespeare’s Plays in Post-Colonial India*. Although the dissertation takes into account the post-colonial appropriations of Shakespeare in India, it discusses only the English productions. The second is an edited anthology by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz titled *India’s Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance* (2005). The work is commendable for its scope and includes Shakespeare translation, interpretation and performance in India. However, the analyses of performances like Dutt’s *Macbeth*, Tanveer’s *Kamdeo ka Apna Vasant Ritu ka Sapna* or Karanth’s *Barnam Van* find just a page each of
discussion. Understandably, some important productions like Lokendra Arambam’s *Macbeth: Stage of Blood* which fuses the original text with the troubled history of Manipur are absent. Arambam’s production using elements from Meitei mythology, rituals, culture and performance traditions like *thang ta* is probably the best example of using Shakespeare to subvert specific agenda and express the political concerns and aspirations of a contemporary society.

This thesis is divided into six chapters along with an appendix of Shakespeare translations and adaptations available in various Indian languages. Following the *Introduction* which forms *Chapter I* of this thesis, *Chapter II* titled “Shakespeare in Calcutta” is divided into three sections. Section I on “English Theatre in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries in Calcutta” discusses English theatres in Calcutta opened by the British colonists that staged Shakespeare’s plays along with those of other English eminent playwrights for entertainment. The section also discusses the role played by the English in the opening of play-houses in Calcutta. Section II on the “Spread of English Education” discusses the role of English education through the introduction of Shakespeare into the curriculum to promote the colonial project. Section III on “Shakespeare Productions in Calcutta” discusses Shakespeare adaptations and translations in Calcutta starting with various school and college productions that were staged in Calcutta. The section then looks at the shift from English to Bengali productions with the passage of time.

An important point that one might miss when dealing with these early Shakespeare productions is that even during the colonial period Shakespeare reception in India did face some resistance which is not usually acknowledged by scholars. Kennedy observes,
[W]hereas in Europe the Shakespeare project embraced the translation and outright appropriation of the texts, in Asia the imperial mode tended to bring them in the original language as a demonstration of the linguistic and the cultural superiority of the conqueror. This was most notable in India, of course, where the insertion of the Shakespearean text into native life paralleled the insertion of the power of the master’s race (291).

Such an argument assumes that Shakespeare was received passively in colonial societies like India. However, this was not always the case. Resistance to Shakespeare can be registered in various ways. Scholars like Samarjit Dutta whose *Shakespeare’s Macbeth: An Oriental Study* (1921), *Shakespeare’s Othello: An Oriental Study* (1923) and *Shakespeare’s Hamlet: An Oriental Study* (1928) and Ranjee Shahni whose *Shakespeare Through Eastern Eyes* (1932) were trying to evoke Indian responses to Shakespeare’s work taking into account various factors like race, ethnicity and culture. Another kind of resistance can be seen in the comparisons made between Shakespeare and Kalidasa. Parmita Kapadia argues, “in their comparisons, Indian scholars seeking to promote Indian nationalism and pride would universalize Kalidasa and argue that Shakespeare was the more provincial writer” (4). Yet another instance is Jayavijay Narayan Singh Sharma’s “Introduction” to *Shakespeare Katha-gatha* (1912) where he turns the table on colonist condescension and writes that “Shakespeare is regarded as supreme in English literature and is described as the *Kalidasa of English*” (I; my emphasis).²

**Chapter III** titled “**Appropriating Shakespeare in Parsi Theatre**” studies Shakespeare’s plays as adapted by Parsi theatre, one of the major theatre movements in the history of modern Indian theatre. The most important factor, probably, in
popularizing Shakespeare in India was Parsi theatre. Adapting Shakespeare’s plays was a common feature especially during the early years of its inception. Shakespeare and Parsi theatre worked well for each other. While Shakespeare helped Parsi theatre to establish itself, Parsi theatre helped in popularizing Shakespeare in India by taking theatre away from the confines of the educated elite to the masses of the mofussil. The chapter is divided into five sections. Section I on “Some Research-Related Problems” discusses various problems involved in dealing with Shakespeare in Parsi theatre. Section II on “Parsis and the Public Sphere” discusses the emergence of public sphere in Bombay and the role played by the Parsis. It is my contention that Parsi theatre emerged as a part of Parsi philanthropy that regarded theatre as a civic and cultured activity. The failure to locate Parsi theatre in this context has led many theatre scholars to argue that Parsi theatre from its very inception was ‘commercial’, with profit as its sole motive. I argue that this aspect holds true for the later Parsi theatre and not in the beginning. Only in the 1870s did Parsi theatre become thoroughly professional and ‘commercial’. Section III on “Locating Parsi Theatre” defines Parsi theatre and provides a short history of its emergence and development. Section IV on “Parsi Theatre and Shakespeare Productions” deals with various productions of Shakespeare in Parsi theatre which were largely free adaptations. In adapting Shakespeare’s plays, plots, characters, locales and situations were Indianised sometimes to such an extent that the productions hardly resembled the originals. Section V on “Parsi Theatre and the (Post-) Colonial ‘Hybridity’” discusses the problems involved in locating Parsi theatre within the discourse of postcolonial “hybridity”. The eclectic nature of Parsi theatre and its free borrowings from various sources might make it appear “hybrid” in the sense of Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity”; but a close study of Parsi theatre reveals that there was no desire to ‘mimic’ European theatre in order to “become like that” which is so central
to Bhabha’s definition of the term. It was more, as Rajiva Verma argues, “a matter of […] one professional playwright borrowing plots and situations and other tricks of the trade from another” (243). Parsi theatre enjoyed its heyday from 1870s to 1920s. By the 1930s, in the wake of high nationalism, Shakespeare performances started declining and gave way to social and political theatre that IPTA promoted. Another factor that led to the decline of Parsi theatre was the advent of the talkies. Parsi theatre might have disappeared now, but its legacy of song and dance continues in the Indian film industry.

Chapter IV titled “Shakespeare in Some Other Theatre Traditions of India” is divided into four sections dealing with Shakespeare in Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi theatre traditions. Marathi and Kannada theatre are similar in their approach to Shakespeare. Since both these traditions had professional theatre companies, Shakespeare was a popular choice for adaption for performance. Marathi playwrights had two models in front of them: Shakespeare and the Sanskrit model. The first gave rise to ‘prose’ plays unfamiliar to Marathi theatre which had been dominated by the musicals. The second gave rise to sangeet natak (dance-drama). Shakespeare, however, was common to both kinds. While the English educated adapters tried to remain close to Shakespeare’s text and either wrote prose plays or translated Shakespeare in prose, sangeet natak moulded Shakespeare into musicals and took liberties with their plot and structure, following Parsi theatre. Similarly, Shakespeare reception in Kannada represents two sensibilities as T. S. Satyanath suggests: the literary and the stage tradition. One is led by love for Shakespeare and the other by love for the stage. While the first translated Shakespeare ‘faithfully’, the second – the company theatre, like the Parsi theatres of Bombay, freely adapted Shakespeare. Malayalam and Hindi theatres registered lesser influence of Shakespeare as far as theatrical performances were concerned. The absence of play-houses modeled on the English theatres, the presence of
already available strong performance traditions like *teyyam, tullal* and *kathakali*, and more emphasis on prose farce during the first decade of the 20th century might have prevented the staging of Shakespeare’s plays in Kerala. This is not to say that there were no translations or adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays in Malayalam. Although there were translations or adaptations of the Bard’s plays, these early adaptations unlike those in Karnataka and Maharashtra, were not done with an eye on the stage. It is in the post-Independence Malayalam theatre that Shakespeare plays received more attention by various theatre groups of Kerala. There have been attempts at producing at least three plays of Shakespeare in *kathakali* viz. *King Lear, Othello* and *Julius Caesar*. Among other notable Malayalam productions are *Othello* in *kathaprasangam* by V. Sambasivam, K. N. Panikkar’s *Kodumkattu* (*The Tempest, 2000*), Chandradasan’s *Chatthankattu* (*The Tempest, 1995*) and *Macbeth* (2002) and M. G. Jyotish’s *Macbeth* (2009). Unlike Marathi, Bengali and Kannada theatres, Hindi did not have professional theatres. Hindustani was employed by Parsi theatre for its performances, but Hindi theatre right from beginning distanced itself from Parsi theatre for its ‘vulgarity’, ‘crudity’ and ‘commercialism’. In the absence of such theatres most of the Shakespeare translations in Hindi prior to Independence were done as literary exercises rather than for the stage. This is probably the reason that many of these translations were ‘faithful’ to the original unlike in Parsi theatre. Some of the Hindi translators of various plays of Shakespeare during this period were Lala Sitaram, Ganga Prasad, Kashinath Khattri, Jai Vijay Narain Singh Sharma, Seth Govind Das, Mathura Prasad Chaudhari and Govind Prasad Ghidiyal. Most of these translations remained close to the original texts. It is only in post-Independence India that one finds Hindi translations of Shakespeare done for the stage though translations by Rangeya Raghava, who translated 15 plays of Shakespeare during the 1957-58, *Mano na Mano* (*As You Like It, 1960*) and *Athens ka
Raja Timon (Timon of Athens, 1960) by Dharam Pal Shastri, Barehvin Raat (Twelfth Night, 1961) by Kuldeep Kapur, Barehvin Raat (Twelfth Night, 1962) by Shyam Sunder Suman, Othello (1962) by Vidyarthi Diwakar Prasad and Hamlet (1988) by Amrit Rai are mainly literary exercises that have not found favour on the Hindi stage. Two translators stand out during this period -- Harivanshrai Bachchan and Raghuvir Sahay. Both being poets in Hindi were able to translate Shakespeare’s plays into verse, a rare feat achieved in Hindi translations of Shakespeare. The success of the translations by the two is evident from the fact that they have been successfully staged.

Chapter V titled “Performing Shakespeare in Post-Independence India” is divided into two sections. Section I “Decolonizing Indian Theatre” discusses the issues involved in the post-colonial Indian theatre and the subsequent rise of “theatre of roots” movement. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin in Post-Colonial Shakespeares observe, “history does not just provide a background to the study of texts, but forms an essential part of textual meaning; conversely, texts or representations are seen as fundamental to the creation of history and culture” (3). For this reason I try to locate Shakespeare productions in post-Independence India in the discourse on the decolonization of Indian theatre which gained significance during the first three decades after Independence. The discourse on post-colonial Indian theatre does not only present a context for these productions but also a co-text that has to be read along with the productions. Only then can one understand the complex Shakespeare productions in post-Independence Indian theatre. Section II “Shakespeare Performances in ‘Urban-Folk’ Theatre” discusses several Shakespeare productions that incorporate elements from folk and traditional performances in post-Independence Indian theatre. Christy Desmet in Shakespeare and Appropriation describes the process of adapting Shakespeare by post-colonial societies as one “in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of imperial culture …
that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities” (19).

In the post-Independence Indian theatre, Shakespeare productions like Utpal Dutt’s *Macbeth* (1954) and *Bhuli Nai Priya (Romeo Juliet, 1970)*, B. V. Karanth’s *Barnam Van (Macbeth, 1989)*, Habib Tanveer’s *Vasantritu ka Sapna Kamdev ka Apna (A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, 1993)*, Lokendra Arambam’s *Macbeth: Stage of Blood (1997)* and M. K. Raina’s *Badshah Pather (King Lear, 2010)* illustrate the practical application of this process. Although these productions cannot claim to be truly ‘folk’, they represent the use of indigenous elements from traditional forms typical to Indian performance traditions.

**Chapter VI** presents my concluding arguments that Shakespeare productions in India have been governed by their own aesthetics. Right from the mid-19th century when Shakespeare’s plays moved out of schools and colleges, Shakespearean texts have been 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 by subjecting it to the conventions of indigenous folk and traditional performances. The conclusion also suggests further research investigations into Shakespeare productions in India.
Notes

1 I use the term “urban-folk” theatre as used by Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker in *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947*, New Delhi: OUP (2006), 322. She makes the distinction between folk and urban folk drama as follows:

[...] in radical distinction from folk theatre itself, urban folk drama is a transportable entity: while folk theatre always belongs to a specific region, language, ecological cycle, and participating community, the urban folk drama can be detached from all these particularities and performed (in the original language or translation) anywhere an audience is available.

2 This is a repartee to the British way of referring to Kalidasa as ‘the Shakespeare of India’!
Works Cited

Books:


