

Unit: 31: Intercultural Shakespeare

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This unit introduces you to Shakespeare productions which use the performance codes of two or more cultures. We need to distinguish between terms multicultural, intercultural, and cross-cultural productions of Shakespeare because these are often used interchangeably. These terms differ according to how one culture perceives another and engages with them. It is about how much of a particular culture is used and integrated into a production that determines the difference between these. Many Shakespeare productions are made by using the performance codes of two or more cultures. This unit comprises of the five units like interculturalism, interculturalism and globalization, balancing local and foreign elements, mutual enrichment and intercultural Shakespeare productions.

Interculturalism

‘Multicultural’ refers to a situation in which several cultural groups live alongside without necessarily engaging with each other. It is like a metropolitan society in which people frequent different ethnic restaurants or grocery stores, without necessarily interacting with the people of those cultures in other walks of life. It is very much possible that a Punjabi living in Delhi to visit a Bengali sweets store and a Tibetan market in Delhi and remain immune to Bengali or the Tibetan cultures. In multicultural societies, cultures exist separately as distinct groups without bothering one another, and without being bothered by one another. This does not result in any individual or societal change as their contact zones are minimal. A multicultural Shakespeare performance is more accepted as a field of cultural exploration than as a natural outcome.

‘Cross-culturalism’ acknowledges different cultures that exist side-by-side and accepting mutual differences. This results in a change of perspective. But this change is limited and happens at discreet micro levels and not at the general or macro level. For society at large, one culture remains dominant. All other cultures are only compared and contrasted with it. Pandit Ravishankar’s fusion of Indian and Western music was a cross-cultural exercise. That was more than a mere exploration, but a meaningful integration. This happened at the level of Individual and did not influence the general musical practice either in India or in the west which have strong musical traditions. Cross-cultural Shakespeare performance happens when a performer of a local culture uses the codes of his culture to creatively engage with Shakespeare. Depending on the perspective, multicultural Shakespeare can be seen either as a Western play in a local format or as a local theatre in western format.

‘Interculturalism’ depends on a deep understanding and respect for other cultures. Intercultural performances focus on mutual exchange of performance codes and norms in equal and meaningful measure. Intercultural performances affect society at large as these contribute to the growth of each other. These performances are more organic than cross-cultural or multicultural performances. One may distinguish between two types of interculturalism: acculturation and transculturation. Transculturation genuinely tries to transcend and transform both the foreign and the indigenous traditions involved. It constructs and meaningfully transplants performance codes to a different history, society and culture. Acculturation acquires and acclimatizes foreign cultures or their aspects locally. It uses foreign performance codes into native performance structures. Shakespeare’s plays are

widely used in intercultural theatre. However, this field remains unexplored and remains rather neglected.

Interculturalism and Global Capitalism

The cross-cultural theatre uses Shakespeare to transport itself to the universal theatre by emphasizing Shakespeare's universality and by enhancing the local through his international edge. This practice of using Shakespeare as a universal crutch for regional theatre forms to walk on international forum sacrifices Shakespeare's Elizabethan specificity. This follows the universal capitalist logic of globalization. His canonical status rubs on to these eclectic regional forms his aura of high art. The logic that they depend on him than he depends on them is a cultural imperialist logic that forces the local to sacrifice more to blend into Shakespeare. This strategy is used by global capitalism to reach the remotest corners of the world.

The relationship between intercultural productions and global capitalism is very deep. Capitalism finds it easy to cash in on the canonized Shakespeare in the former colonies where English and Shakespeare have introduced at least two centuries ago as part of high culture. Whether the intercultural Shakespeare is based on cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, or whether it is a tool for cultural imperialism to enter through the backdoor is an interesting question.

Such a mixture, which comes with a veneer of cross-culturalism, highlights the illusion of cultural pluralism and hides its cultural imperialist agenda. In intercultural productions, this hidden agenda is removed and requires equal participation in the spirit of giving and take. Shakespeare gains as much as local versions gain from Shakespeare. Although Interculturalism and globalization and are also closely related, and intercultural of Shakespeare gets wider mileage by using a cardinal figure in the Western Canon, Shakespeare also gets greater meaning through the intercultural codes used. Shakespearean tag acts as a guarantee for wider circulation in countries which are influenced by the English language and intercultural productions get advertised more as Shakespearean performances. Still, it is the local tag that markets such productions widely and adds meaning to Shakespeare. The exotic otherness and visually embellishing Eastern theatre forms not only provide added allure to the production but also add meaning to them.

Global capitalism is the chief promoter of intercultural Shakespeare. Intercultural Shakespeare is instantly recognized for their use of mythologized cultural icons for transcultural communication and large market (Brian Singleton, *The Sounds the Logic of Global Capitalism*, 629). However, the interculturality of production is determined by cultural equality and cultural authenticity. In most intercultural productions of Shakespeare, the non-western cultural elements are reduced to mere scenographic embellishments and visually spectacular exotic otherness. They are not integrated or treated culturally as significant, equal or authentic as much as the Shakespeare elements which signify western cultural elements.

Shakespeare's Elizabethan language and theatrical practices are parts of authentic Shakespeare. As contemporary theatres emphasize performance, Shakespearean elements become dominant in the intercultural productions and his language overpowers the non-western performance codes of local cultures. Indigenized Shakespeare productions which are high on equality in participation tends to lose the claims of Shakespearean authenticity. Although this is a difficult balancing act, many productions have successfully achieved it. Many have overcome this authenticity question by retaining the spirit of

his words at the cost of his language. International capital-backed global Shakespeare productions tend to ignore words and retain ideas to emphasize his universality.

Balancing Local and Foreign

When Shakespeare was introduced into Indian languages and theatre, he significantly affected local works of literature and theatre and introduced new literary and performance forms. He also got changed when he was brought into Indian works of literature and stages. This change was integral and was more than a cosmetic one. It is more natural although it might come across as spectacular. Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* which adapted Macbeth into Japanese culture appears meaningful in Japanese as it appears natural in Japanese culture. It articulates Shakespeare in Japanese language and cultural format. This may not be true in the case of Ariene Mnouchkine's straight theatre adaptation. Basing his judgement on how Shakespearean spirit is communicated to modern Japanese as well as Japanese spirit to the international audience, Jan Kott acknowledged Kurosawa's adaptations as authentic even as he denounced Mnouchkine's versions as "fake Japanese and fake Shakespeare" (Is Shakespeare Our Contemporary?, 1989, p. 15).

Intercultural Shakespeare refers to the production of Shakespeare in theatre formats with mixed heritage. Such productions pick and choose elements from their own identities and fuse them into a cultural format that is presented for a universal audience. Productions by such companies with fused identity use innovative means to produce Shakespeare. Such hyphenated Shakespeare productions by the people in the diaspora who themselves have hyphenated identities use of cultural signifiers from two or more cultural backgrounds innovatively produce Shakespeare.

Peter Brook's intercultural Shakespeare productions like *La Tempete* (1990) and *Hamlet* (2000) were often criticized for being a Western appropriation of non-western traditions. Mnouchkine's Shakespeare cycle (1982) *Richard II, 1 Henry IV, and Twelfth Night* are also criticized for their Orientalism. When local directors use intercultural formats to stage Shakespeare without adequate command over local traditions are severely criticised. The Japanese producer Yukio Ninagawa was criticized for his inauthentic use of traditional Japanese theatre style in his Shakespeare productions. The criticism was against his use of the local tradition and not for appropriating Shakespeare into the local tradition. On the other hand, Tadashi Suzuki's incorporation of Japanese Noh tradition into his Shakespeare productions are widely commended.

Some people also criticize intercultural Shakespeare Theatre is a paradox. These are considered as products of cultural exchange or globalization. Traditional theatre practices and the subsequent discovery of similarity between Shakespeare and local theatre formats have also been studied. These also study Shakespeare as an international phenomenon. "Shakespeare and cultural exchange" in *Shakespeare Survey* 48, and "Welttheater" in *Shakespeare Jarbuch* (2002) treat Shakespeare as a specific cultural product and a universal performative force. This view of seeing Shakespeare performance as a swing of the pendulum from Shakespeare situated in his own culture to the local adaptations of Shakespeare in foreign cultures makes it extremely difficult to locate intercultural Shakespeare, except in the movement between the two extreme points. If one concentrates on the authenticity of the foreign cultural forms used in such performances one might overlook the bias towards Western theatre signifiers and the reduction of Eastern theatre signifiers as mere visual-treat and embellishment. Any unconditional acceptance of intercultural Shakespeare may beguile the innocent into thinking that the local has an equal footing with the Western hegemonic theatre, even as it masquerades Western cultural imperialism. The Shakespearean tag also may beguile one into thinking that Shakespeare is universal,

hence local. It is in this undefined void of possibilities that intercultural Shakespeare proliferates and clamours for cultural equality.

After his solo, Beijing Opera performance of *Li Er Zai Ci* (*Lear is Here*), the Taiwanese Shakespeare performer Wu Hsing-Kuo disarmingly answered a question from his Singapore audience “Why Shakespeare”, saying, “if this wasn’t *King Lear*, I wouldn’t be standing here in the Esplanade now”. His answer emphasised how Shakespeare helps a local theatre to become universal. Despite his presence in local theatre, Shakespeare’s appeal is alluring. Interestingly this Mandarin Chinese performance was even without translation.

Mutual Enrichment

The prefix ‘inter’ in interculturalism’ shows the two cultures involved are bound in an equal, and not hegemonic, relationship. It voluntarily or consciously draws upon the cultural forms and produces hybrid forms the elements that can be discerned from each. This can be mutually enriching. It leads to better understanding, exchange of ideas and cultural norms, and changes society through give and take. Intercultural performance is not an exotic presentation but an organic outcome of a long interaction.

Intercultural performance has been a controversial cultural practice in the last two centuries. It involves the sharing and mutual borrowing of theatre practices. The wide use and inadequate theorization confuse interculturalism with cultural imperialism and impose one reading on a culture. As other classics are read and reread across other cultures and within the same culture over time. Most of Italo Calvino’s fourteen definitions of ‘classic’ are applicable to Shakespeare. Look at his following definitions:

4. A classic is a book which with each rereading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading.
5. A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of rereading something we have read before.
6. A classic is a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers.
7. The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed. (Calvino, 1991).

As a classic, Shakespeare gives us a sense of discovery even as he conveys a feeling that we are re-reading an already read text which has newer interpretations even as old interpretations remain valid. Even in foreign language performances and translations, Shakespeare never fails to convey because of his ‘universality’, which gets localised through cultural adaptations. This makes intercultural Shakespeare performances popular.

However, cultural imperialism imposes the reading of the dominant culture on other cultures. This ambivalence results in the skewed practice of interculturalism. An example of this is the appropriation of non-western performance traditions and culture in of Western intercultural theatres. These freely use Oriental cultural expressions ranging from Kabuki to Kathakali but foreground their visual strangeness and exotic appeal instead of meaningfully integrating them. The works of Ariene Mnouchkine and Peter Brook, who explored Asian and African theatre traditions and myths to produce universal theatre, are often criticised in this light.

When the western elements in Shakespeare do not dominate the eastern theatre, it becomes intercultural. Here, the non-western theatre forms function as more than mere embellishments and present Shakespeare using local cultural codes without sacrificing Shakespeare or turning a blind eye towards western Shakespeare. Shakespeare comes in Western theatre format and therefore, an intercultural performance must present Shakespeare as an equal cultural encounter between the East and the West. India's *Kathakali Lear*, Chinese Kunju Opera Troupe's *Macbeth*, Africa's *Zulu Macbeth*, Japanese *Noh Hamlet* etc. reduce Shakespeare secondary to local theatre codes and transform even Shakespeare's language to gestures, movements, songs, dance, speech and even silence.

How transculturation can become interculturalism if the source culture elements get lost into "a new text or technique, which gains its own identity of form and content" (Weber 34) is a key question. Eastern intercultural productions like Kathakali, Noh, and Chinese opera Shakespeares do not meet the conceptual and ideational complexities of Shakespeare's texts and language (Barucha, "Foreign" 16) and transculturated Shakespeare can remain independent without the Shakespearean tag. After all, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is an independent one and does not evoke Saxo Grammaticus except in academic source studies in academia. Romans like Plautus and Terence adopted the Greek tradition within their social concern to produce Roman Comedy. Renaissance Italy adapted Roman theatre to their local culture, and Elizabethan England adapted Italian theatre. The Elizabethan theatre has significantly influenced the Indian and Japanese theatres since the colonial era.

Often intercultural productions find the issue of disharmony between the verbal and the visual. As Shakespeare's words enjoy the upper hand over the visual, critics tend to highlight the text/performance opposition adding to the complexity of authenticity in intercultural Shakespeare.

An intercultural performance is the story of Shakespeare's journey across cultures. It tells us how he affects non-western cultures of performances, and present us with a polemical Shakespeare. Intercultural Shakespeare gives access to other cultures. It acknowledges the languages and cultures which resist Shakespeare's universality, and their ability to present the west in their terms. intercultural Shakespeare reads and rereads him by belonging to culture as an insider and studies another culture as an outsider who is invited, insider.

Intercultural Shakespeare

Intercultural performances generally use one theatre style to engage with a text from another culture. In the case of Shakespeare, *Zulu Macbeth*, *Noh Hamlet Kathakali King Lear* (1989); the *Kunqu Macbeth* (1987); kyogen adaptations like *Hora Zamurai—a Kyogen Falstaff* (1991) and *Kyogen of Errors*, (2001); Wu Hsing Kuo's Beijing Opera adaptations (*The Kingdom of Desire [Macbeth]* (1986); *Li Er Zai Ci [King Lear]* (2002) are some examples. The Korean production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006) by Yohangza theatre company, also showcases this intercultural hybridity. However, these still privilege the western theatre by keeping western Shakespeare at the other end.

One strategy to counter this is to bring together diverse strands to the same performance and not privileging Shakespeare. Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen's intercultural Shakespeare trilogy—*Lear* (1997), *Desdemona [Othello]* (2000) and *Search: Hamlet* (2002)—which used Asian interculturality with Asian performers from diverse traditions, languages, and backgrounds is an example. He used artists from India, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Singapore and their performances and the theatre finds kudiyattam, Kathakali, Korean percussion, Myanmarese puppetry, Yogyaneese court dance, video, and installation art, theatre, dance, music, the visual arts, film, and ritual etc., privileging none of these and

Shakespeare alike. In his *Desdemona*, for example, he used a Singaporean artist of Chinese descent Claire Wong as Desdemona and Indian Koodiyattam artist Madhu Margi and Kathakali artist Maya Rao as Othello, discarding the Moor motif. Madhu as Othello who married to Desdemona, and Maya Rao as older Othello who in dreams is an ambiguously gendered person and also ambiguously playing Othello's mother, takes the discourse to a new level (Lan, 2004).

A similar attempt was Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which also played actors and acting styles from across the world. The Indian theatre artist PR Jijoy who acted as his Theseus says that Supple directed the artists to use their "thinking language" and their mother-tongue translations of the play, resulting in many languages and acting styles within the production—sometimes even by the same character. This underlines the rich diversity in theatres, languages and cultures. Some of these productions use actors from different cultural backgrounds representing the performance tradition of those cultures. Such productions interrogate traditional understanding of Shakespeare.

In her "Folk Shakespeare" which examined the performance of Shakespeare in traditional Indian theatre forms, Poonam Trivedi recognizes how "within the broader stream of Shakespeare performance world-wide, this *desi* Shakespeare is positioned as the marginalized "other", the unacknowledged reverse of the better-known phenomenon of a *videshi* or "foreign" Shakespeare, represented by Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook which freely appropriated and dislocated Indian theatre modes" (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 153). The absence of any comprehensive and accepted theory of cultural exchange in theatre performance and affects our understanding of the models and taxonomies of intercultural exchange. This affects the perception of Shakespeare in other cultures. The few models available are Mervin Carlson's seven-fold classification of cross-cultural influence, Erica Fisher-Lichte's Productive reception model, Patrice Pavis's hour-glass model filtering grains of culture, and Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's dialogic (two-way) flow model. Lo, and Gilbert model recognizes that both cultures are "partners" in a "collaborative/negotiated" exchange in which "both undergo a series of transformations and challenges... A similar process of filtration and hybridisation, however differently experienced" that the additional flexibility and emerges that becomes enabling in understanding Indian 'folk Shakespeares'" (Trivedi in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz: 155).

The first localized performance of Shakespeare in India was that of the adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Nathari Firangiz thekani Avi* [A Bad Foreign Woman Brought to Sense] (1852) at Surat. It subtly suggests that only a foreign woman, not an Indian, can be shrewish. Since then many Shakespeare plays were brought to Indian theatre, balancing the foreign and the local. *The Comedy of Errors* had many local translations in the nineteenth century itself and many of these were intercultural productions

Guajarati	1865	NR Ranina	<i>Jodiya Bhaiyo</i>
Malayalam	1866	Kalloor Oommen Philipose	<i>Aalmarattam</i>
Kannada	1871	Channabasappa	<i>Nagadavarannu Nagisuva Kathe</i>
Marathi	1875	Vinayaka Patakar	<i>Bhurala athava Isvarakrita Lapandava</i>
Sanskrit	1877	Shaila Dikshitar	<i>Bhranti Vilasam</i>
Hindi	1979	Ratnachandra	<i>Bhramjalaka</i>
Telugu	1880	Kandukuri Veersalingam	<i>Chamatkara Ratnawali</i>
Bengali	1884	Vidyasagar	<i>Bhrantivilas</i>
Assamese	1888	Lakshminath Bezbarua	<i>Bhrama Ranga</i>
Udu	1896	Firoz Shah Khan	<i>Bhul Bhulaiyan</i>

There is little evidence for white and Indian actors playing Shakespeare together in India in the nineteenth century, but for the Othello performance by Baishnab Charan Addhya opposite to Desdemona played by Mrs Anderson, daughter of Mrs Esther Leach, at Sans Souci Theatre in Calcutta on 17 August 1848. That performance did not go down well with the white audience.

Conventional modern realist theatre often fails to capture Shakespeare fully. The logic of realism does not allow for gaps in which imagination thrives and narrows his range. The imaginative richness of Asian theatres helps here. A Kathakali Shakespeare can suspend one's disbelief about and liberate the reading of Shakespeare from European provincialism.

There are many approaches to intercultural Shakespeare. He can be understood and evaluated by comparing the contexts of production and reception. Historical surveys of intercultural Shakespeare concentrate on the intercultural strategies of the Shakespeare productions by reflecting the socio-cultural movements arising out of political developments in local cultures. Comparison between Shakespeare's theatre and Asian theatres like Kabuki, Kathakali etc. can highlight the similarities in their plots, aesthetics, and conventions. Their multilingual productions, ideologies and assumptions, aesthetic theories etc. can also be compared. Intercultural Shakespeare productions are hybridized, transnational and transcultural transpositions of Shakespeare across the borders of both cultures.