

Unit: 40: Shakespeare Scholarship in India

Dr. Joseph Koyippally

Outside the English-speaking west, no country other than Germany has engaged with Shakespeare for so long and so consistently and as India has. Indian scholarly output on Shakespeare has been substantial. Even before Indian universities were established, Shakespeare had become a part of Indian education and he remains so even today. This unit looks at the place of Shakespeare in Indian universities, his early Indian appreciations, the early Shakespeare scholars in India, the postcolonial Shakespeare scholarship in India and the current state of Indian Shakespeare scholarship.

This unit consists of five topics:

1. Shakespeare in Indian Universities
2. Early Shakespeare Appreciation: Lamb's Tales
3. India's Shakespeare Scholarship
4. Shakespeare Scholarship in India Today
5. Postcolonial Shakespeare Scholars

Introduction

Fort William College records show that Charles Monkton, one of its early students, "has undertaken, and has been able to execute, a translation into Bengalee, of Shakespeare's tragedy of *The Tempest*" as part of his classroom exercise in 1809 (Wellesley 187). By 1920s, as many as 20 Indian universities were offering Shakespeare as part of their Honours and Master's programmes. Indian colleges had been offering "English Literature" degrees much before English universities did and Indian Shakespeare scholarship is older than anywhere else.

He was introduced in the degree programs after the western practice of offering classical Latin and Greek texts in degree programs. English education was introduced in India because of Charles Grant's Observations on Indian education, The Charter Act of 1813 which made it binding on the British East India Company to educate the natives and also permit missionaries to India, Macauley's Minutes of 1835, which preferred English education instead of Oriental education, and William Bentick's Resolution on 7 March 1835, which made the knowledge of English language and literature advantageous in job recruitment. Introduction and facilitation of English literature were determined by Imperial needs of the Empire (Viswanathan), and teaching of Shakespeare helped them introduce their 'superior' literature in colonized literary spaces through English classrooms.

Shakespeare had been the prerogative of the English people in India for long and they preserved him so. Indians who learned English and mastered Shakespeare and made him their own both in English original and in Indian versions through translations and adaptations. One may never be certain about Captain Keeling's story about Shakespeare performance on board of a ship bound to India in 1607. Chellappan notes that from the listing of a few copies of Shakespeare plays along with scriptural and theological works in the Library of Fort St. George, Madras, one can see that Shakespeare had been in India at least since 1719 (Shankar 149). The first recorded performance of Shakespeare in India was in 1755, much before he was introduced to the education system. Once introduced into education, he was performed regularly to showcase the English language proficiency of the students. The early teachers were Englishmen and their style of teaching Shakespeare and literature in general--learning by rote,

recitation, explication, and a bit of histrionics—set the pattern of teaching Shakespeare and English literature in India for long.

Apart from intending to entertain themselves, the English staged their plays in India to instruct and to reform Indians. Poonam Trivedi shows how in 1832, the *Asiatic Journal* demanded public theatres for native Indians in Calcutta to help them “acquire a taste after European luxury and advance rapidly into civilization” and in 1835, the native-run *The Reformer* remonstrated educated Indians to inform and instruct their mind, improve taste weaning themselves away from their indigenous performance forms (P. Trivedi, *Impudent Imperialist*). Such expressions of subaltern subjectivity of colonial Indian students affected Indian Shakespeare-scholarship significantly. That the colonial English were possessive about their Shakespeare is clear from Carlyle’s reply on 12 May 1840, on being asked to choose between Indian Empire and Shakespeare: “Indian Empire, or no Indian Empire; we cannot do without Shakespeare! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, someday; but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us; we cannot give-up our Shakespeare!” (Carlyle).

Although Shakespeare has been staged in India at least since 1755 when it was professionally staged at Calcutta and later at other parts of India during the colonial period, and in amateur mode at colleges and universities from the early days of English education to the present, Indian response to Shakespeare took a long time to come on its own. In contrast, Irish scholars (Edmund Malone and Edward Dryden) and writers (James Joyce, GB Shaw, WB Yates) have become known commentators on Shakespeare, although he was equally foreign and was introduced in Smoke Alley Theatre during the Restoration period, in the Crow Street Theatre in 1758, the New Theatre Royal in 19th century, and the Gate Theatre in the twentieth century.

Shakespeare in Indian Universities

It was in India that Shakespeare was introduced into the academic sphere for the first time. Pedagogic Shakespeare, though less creative, has generated many critical discourses. Through translations and classrooms interpretations, Shakespeare could touch the core of Indian literary sensibility and engendered discourses based on Sanskrit, Tamil and other indigenous critical traditions. Indian engagement with the Bard varies with language and region, depending on their reception of English and Shakespeare. It is true that although Shakespeare had been fashionable in the colonial days, and remained ‘a matter of prestige’ among Indian academics till the 1990s, he is not treated so any more. However, this does not mean that Shakespeare has disappeared from Indian academic sphere, rather he remains very much part of it, and more serious engagements with him take place in literary, academic and critical spheres.

Macaulay’s *Minutes on Indian Education* (1835) and Hardinge’s resolution (1844) preferring Indians who distinguished themselves in European literature for government jobs encouraged middle-class Indians opt to study English literature. It became a strong impetus for studying and performing Shakespeare as Shakespeare proved to be key to success in British India. This made educated Indians perform, quote, recite, watch and promote Shakespeare across British India. English Literature focused on authentic pronunciation, correct intonation, and right rhetoric skills, felicity of expression, uses of idioms and quotations. In all these Shakespeare, despite his archaism was favoured as he was promoted as ‘classic’. Many learned his lines, scenes, and even entire plays by rote and showcased their ability in English by translating Shakespeare in local languages. The prestige attached to Shakespeare made teaching Shakespeare the prerogative of the senior-most faculty in English Departments in India.

Modern literary theory subjects Shakespeare to various kinds of readings by challenging liberalism, humanism, eternal truths and supremacy of classics. The new dimensions of Shakespeare studies give us a bird's eye view of the current status of English studies in India and elsewhere. Even as the crisis in literary study, as signified by the onslaught of literary theory has affected English Studies also. The Bard remains largely untouched as the last bastion of the existing dominant paradigm (Hawkes 2). That Shakespeare remains part of the dominant paradigm makes him appear in Special English, English Language and Literature programmes at postgraduate, undergraduate studies, and high school levels.

His archaic language and traditional critical material distance him from current English, and his essential textuality makes it even more difficult in the world of moving images and cyber-space. Absence of challenging and engaging study materials make Shakespeare fall short of students' expectations. These challenges even native speakers of English from appreciating the nuances of Shakespearean language even in literature courses. The push for teaching English courses as media for functional communication also affects Shakespeare studies in colleges and universities today, in India and elsewhere.

The curriculum of modern Indian literary studies with its emphasis on the cultural and social relevance of literature tend to favour Indian writings in English. Ideological affinity towards Third World and Postcolonial literature, the role of Special English courses in higher education, and the role of English in Indian society have deeply affected English literary studies in India. The current "crisis in English literary studies" has managed to dent Shakespeare's prominence in the syllabus.

The *Report of the Study Group on English* (1965), *The Teaching of English* (Banerjee) Report (1971), the UGC Report on *Syllabus Reform in English* (1977) etc. show that the ripples made by the omission of Shakespeare from Indian university syllabus have died down and that English programmes continue with, without, or despite Shakespeare. However, the vacuum created by his lack has forced many to rediscover the Bard lately. While the university departments which have been traditionally strong in Shakespeare studies continue to be so and as those who have ignored him deprive their students of the substantial Shakespeare corpus and unparalleled critical scholarship in literary studies.

Early Shakespeare Appreciation: Lamb's Tales

One can never be certain about Captain Keeling's men playing *Hamlet* or *Richard II* onboard their ship to India or whether they repeated their performance on a relaxed day on the Indian shore. A team of travelling actors certainly staged in Calcutta in 1775 even as Samuel Johnson's edition of Shakespeare and David Garrick's 'Shakespeare Festival' (1769) were promoting him in England. Later, he was staged in India by more travelling actors invited by the East India Company and also by many local acting companies.

Later, an Indian Vishnu Charan Addhya played *Othello* at Calcutta Theatre. Students performed scenes, as well as plays at Metropolitan Academy (1852), at David Hare Academy (1853), and Oriental Academy (1853, 1854 and 1855) and their repertoire, consisted of *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *1 Henry IV* etc. The early pieces of Indian Shakespeare criticism consist in the reviews of these performances as their prefaces to Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1808), which became part of the academic syllabus in full or in part and were translated into all major Indian languages.

The English education not only introduced Shakespeare into India, but also made him inspire the influential men like Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi

who decided the destiny of India. He is often compared with Kalidasa. While Bankim Chandra Chatterjee thought Kalidasa superior, Aurobindo Ghosh thought Shakespeare superior.

The English education introduced by the British in India also introduced Shakespeare into India. Prominent Indians like Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi who influenced the destiny of India were inspired by Shakespeare. Some of them even compared Shakespeare to the Sanskrit playwright Kalidasa. While Aurobindo regarded Shakespeare as superior, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who in his celebrated essay "Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona" (1876), had studied Macbeth as a paper in his BA at University of Calcutta and famously said, "Everyone has Shakespeare at home, everyone may open the original text and read it", thought Kalidasa was the superior of the two.

India's Shakespeare scholarship

Shakespeare was introduced as a compulsory subject in Bengal and Madras from 1835. In Mumbai, where Elphinstone championed Oriental Education, he was localized with Indian dexterity and adeptness. And most of the early Indian scholars on Shakespeare came from Calcutta and Madras provinces.

Shakespeare's movement from stage to the classroom was not easy. The Hindu College, founded at Calcutta by Ram Mohan Roy and David Hare in 1817, began a privately-run institution. As soon as it began receiving grants-in-aid from the government from 1824, its syllabus-preparation also began to be influenced by government policies. Even though the missionary-ran institutions in India did not find it suitable to have Shakespeare in the syllabus, Hindu College got hallmarked for its Shakespeare studies with teachers like Henry Derozio who played a major role in institutionalizing Shakespeare studies in India. His poems have many echoes from Shakespeare and have composed two poems, "Romeo and Juliet" and "Yorick's Skull" after having been inspired by the delicate emotional and philosophical problems addressed in Shakespeare's plays. "Romeo and Juliet" is rather a direct one, and "Yorick's Skull" seem to be mixing his sensitiveness within his proposed monologue for hapless Hamlet. 'Romeo and Juliet' is written as a sonnet.

"Oh, Love! what is it in this world of ours
Which makes it fatal to be loved?" -- *Don Juan*, Canto III

I thought upon their fate and wept; and then
Came to my mind the silent hour of night,
The hour which lovers love and long for, when
Their young impassioned souls feel that delight
Which Love's first dream bestows; - How Juliet's ear
Drank every soft word of her cavalier!

And how, when his departing hour drew nigh
She fondly called him back to her! -
Oh! Why did she then call him back? - that it is the same
With all whom love may dwell with, but the flame
Within their breasts was a consuming fire,
'Twas passion's essence; it was something higher
Than aught that life presents; it was above
All that we see - 'twas all we dream of love.

Shakespeare was introduced as a subject in Bengal and Madras from 1835. In the nineteenth century, Indian students of the English language were regarded as loyal servants of the crown in the making. In Mumbai, where Elphinstone championed Oriental Education, Indian dexterity and adeptness localized Shakespeare. Most early Indian Shakespeare scholars during the pre-Independence period came from Calcutta and Madras provinces where Anglicist education was followed, and where Shakespeare was not yet localized as freely as he was in the Orientalist areas. India had more than twenty universities by 1920. Even as the Anglicist and Orientalist education debate was going on, universities were established at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay between 1857 and 1860. By 1920, more than twenty universities came up in India. Shakespeare plays were part of the curriculum in them.

The early 'Indian' Shakespeare scholars were Englishmen who taught in colleges and universities. They include Capt. David Lester Richardson (1801-1865), Charles H. Tawney (1837-1922), Rev. J.C. Scrimgeour and James W. Holmes (University of Calcutta); John Mark Hunter (1865-1932), who taught at Coimbatore College and Presidency College, Madras, F.W. Kellett (Madras Christian College), William Miller (1828-1923) and Henry Stone (Madras); Walter Raleigh (Aligarh); R. Scott (Wilson College, Mumbai). British professors with experience of teaching Indians prepared these Indian editions and adapted them for Indian use. With Kellett as the general editor, some of them were involved in editing Shakespeare texts published by Srinivasa Varadachari Press, Chennai. The main editors were Mark Hunter (*Julius Caesar*), F.W. Kellett (*As You Like It*), R. Scott, (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) J.H. Stone (*The Merchant of Venice*). William Miller brought out an edition of Shakespeare stories, *Shakespeare's Chart of Life* (1900), which gave moral lessons. While Rev. J.C. Scrimgeour (*The Tragedy of Macbeth*, 1916), J.S. Armour of Patna added notes to Warwick Shakespeare, T. Cartwright added supplementary notes to it.

William Miller emphasized character building as the purpose of teaching Shakespeare. His lectures on Shakespearean tragedies appeared before Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* consisted of 'King Lear and Indian Politics', 'Macbeth and Ruin of Souls', 'Othello and the crash of Character' (all in 1901), 'Hamlet and the Waste of life' (1902) collected in *Shakespeare's Chart of Life* (1905) found in Shakespeare a moral yardstick followed.

From the European teachers, Indian with English names—Henry Derozio, and HHM Percival—took over and broke free of the annotative, and moralizing European style. Percival brought out annotated editions of *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The early Indian publications on Shakespeare were pieces of criticism, like the critical preface to Pandit Muktarama Vidyavagis's translation of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1852). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's comparative essay on 'Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona' (1873).

Later scholars from across India—Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Subodh Chandra Sengupta, Tarak Nath Sen, Sailendra Kumar Sen, Arun Kumar Dasgupta (Kolkata); VK Ayyappan Pillai, R. Krishnamurthy, KD Sethna, S Nagarajan and S Viswanathan (Chennai); Phiroze Dustoor, Sarup Singh, AN Kaul (Delhi); VY Kantak (Vadodara); and MV Rajadhyaksha, Homai Shroff and Kamal Wood (Mumbai)—surpassed and supplanted the first generation of Shakespeare scholars. Sengupta, who was then trying to apply Indian Theories, especially the Rasa-Dhvani theory, to Shakespeare, was awarded Padma Shri in recognition of his services to India's Shakespeare scholarship.

Twentieth century works include ; RV Subbarao's *Othello Unveiled* (1906) and *Hamlet Unveiled* (1909); Israel Gollancz's *The Book of Homage* (1916); R Saupin's 'Shakespeare and Outlines of Homer' (1919); Smarajit Dutt's *Shakespeare's Macbeth: An Oriental Study* (1921), *Shakespeare's Othello: An Oriental Study*

(1923), *Shakespeare's Hamlet: An Oriental Study* (1928); AA Narayanadasa compared Shakespeare with Kalidasa in his *Navarasataringini* (1924); C Narayanan Menon's *Shakespeare Today through Indian Eyes* and *Shakespeare Criticism: An Essay in Synthesis* (1930)¹; Ranjee G Shahani's *Shakespeare through Eastern Eyes* (1932)²; Mohinimohan Bhattacharya's *Courtesy in Shakespeare* (1940); SC Sengupta's five works: *Shakespearean Comedy* (1950), *The Whirlgig of Time: The Problem of Duration in Shakespeare's Plays* (1961), *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* (1964), *A Shakespeare Manual* (1977), and *Aspects of Shakespearean Tragedy* (1972); SK Sen's *Capell and Malone and Modern Critical Bibliography* (1960); HH Anniah Gowda's *Shakespeare Turned East* (1976) and *Style and Structure of Shakespeare* (1979); S Viswanathan's *The Shakespeare Play as Poem* (1980), and *On Shakespeare's Dramatology* (1993); Sukanta Chaudhuri's *Infirm Glory: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man* (Oxford, 1981); Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (1989); Rajiva Verma's *Myth, Ritual and Shakespeare* (1990); and Sudhakar Marathe's *TS Eliot's Shakespeare Criticism* (1991); Ania Loomba's *Postcolonial Shakespeares* (1998), and Sunita Paul's, *A Tribute to Shakespeare* (1989). The journal, *Hamlet Studies* edited by RW Desai since 1979 is also a significant contribution to Shakespeare studies.

In 1964, pioneering studies about the presence of Shakespeare in India came out commemorating the quarter centenary of Shakespeare's birth. CD Narasimhaiah's *Shakespeare Came to India*, KR Srinivasa Iyengar's *Shakespeare: His World and His Art*, A Special edition of *Indian Literature*, the journal of India's Sahitya Akademi, and *Shakespeare in India: a Brochure* by the National Library, Calcutta. *Indian Literature* had sixteen articles on Shakespeare's impact on the major languages across India and an overview of Shakespeare's presence in India by KR Srinivasa Iyengar. The other articles were on his presence in Assamese (Navakanta Barua), Bengali literature (RK Das Gupta), Bengali theatre (SK Bhattacharyya), Gujarati stage (Chandravadan C Mehta), Hindi (Suresh Awasthi), Karnataka (AN Moorthy Rao), Malayalam (Kainikkara M Kumara Pillai), Marathi (MV Rajadhyaksha), Oriya (Mayadhar Mansinha), Punjabi (KS Duggal), Sanskrit (V Raghavan), Sindhi (MU Malkani), Tamil (Ka. Naa. Subramanyam), Telugu (PV Rajamannar), and Urdu (Mohammad Hasan).

Shakespeare Scholarship in India Today

Since 1964, Indian scholarship on Shakespeare is steadily improving with important works. The major works specific to Shakespeare scholarship in India since then include *Shakespeare in India* (S Nagarajan and S Viswanathan, 1987), *Shakespeare in Indian Languages* (DA Shankar, 1999), *Indian Response to Shakespeare* (Basava Raj Naikar), *Masala Shakespeare* (Jonathan Gil Harris 2019), *India's Shakespeares* (Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz. Eds.), *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas* (Poonam Trivedi and Paromita Chakravarti. Eds.), *Performing Shakespeare in India* (Shoromishta Panja and Moitra Saraf. Eds.); and *The Shakespearean International Yearbook Vol 12: Shakespeare in India* (Sukata Chaudhuri). These explore the presence of Shakespeare in Indian literature and theatre and gives significant impetus to the research on the impact of Shakespeare in Indian language, literature culture and cinema.

¹ TW Baldwin wrote a review on this work as follows:

Developing a Theory of Literary Criticism from mystical Indian philosophy, he applies it to pieces and patches of Shakespeare. He stresses the subjective reaction with his philosophic impressionisms as much as we without mechanistic view show objective fact which occasions the subjective reaction. He devotes about half as much space to compact notes and biblio—covering a great proportion of the outstanding and recent contributions on the subject as he does to the text. Works so founded may be philosophically impressionistic; but one who has been so thoroughly prepared is likely to be impressed very much like any other thorough scholar. Because Professor Menon is an Indian, his subjective impressions are interestingly different—which he ought to deny, no doubt.

² HG Wells refers to it in his *Crux Anstata* (1943:68-71).

Indian scholars' works are also highly recognized internationally. Apart from the ones mentioned above, works like *Shakespeare and Race* (Ania Loomba); *Essays on Shakespeare* (Hema Dahiya) and many articles are also published by Indian Shakespeare scholars have caught attention. Some Indian scholars have edited Shakespeare's works for reputed international publishers. S Nagarajan who edited *Measure for Measure* for Signet Classics (1964) and became involved with the Indian editions from Orient Longman, Sukanta Chaudhuri who edited *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017) for the Third Series Arden Shakespeare; and Ania Loomba who edited *Antony and Cleopatra* for Norton Edition of Shakespeare (2011) are widely recognized. Many of these scholars are teaching or taught in universities abroad as experts in Shakespeare.

There was a time in the English Departments of Indian universities when very senior professors alone taught Shakespeare, denying the juniors this great privilege. Now, as universities, colleges and institutions move along with globalization and prefer language and literature departments to cater to more utilitarian communicative teaching of language, literature courses are increasingly displaced by communicative English courses. The neglect of literature had not affected English departments for long because of the international demand for English language and departments ran their literature courses on the back of the high demand. As Shakespeare's communicative value went down, because of his no-more-used language, he slowly got edged out of English programmes in Indian universities. At present, many universities have reduced the Shakespeare content in their courses and have reduced Shakespeare as an elective course.

Postcolonial Shakespeare Scholarship

In his preface to his Oriya translation of *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* titled *Shakspiyar Kahaanimaala* (1977), Basant K. Satpathy gives a picture of a future without Shakespeare: "These *Tales* will assume much greater significance when fanatic nationalists will drive out Shakespeare as they drove out the British and when the study of English literature will give way to the teaching of English as a language." He wonders whether teaching Shakespeare in translation might be a better option to teach Shakespeare and English and wishes if English teachers "would put their knowledge and love of English to good use if they place it at the service of their mother tongues and enrich them" (qtd in Nayak 2016: 170-71). This move would benefit the preservation of India's traditional bilingual and multilingual culture that fast gives in for English monolingualism.

The strenuous efforts of post-Independence Indian scholars resulted in a theoretical and ideological reorientation of both English and Shakespeare Studies in India.

One way is to follow is that of Indian Shakespeare performances which gave Shakespeare a local habitation and a name. Qualifying performances by indigenous language, culture and performance traditions certainly add to the value of Shakespeare and regional exponents. Indian English forces acknowledgement because of the sheer number of speakers' economic power. Similarly, appreciation of Shakespeare using Indian aesthetic and philosophical theories add meaning to Shakespeare. However, such approaches get branded as esoteric and get marginalized easily in the international academic arena. C. Narayana Menon's *Shakespeare Criticism* (OUP, 1938) which attempts to explain Shakespeare's appeal to Indians through a comparative analysis of the Shakespeare and Sanskrit classics and his article was denounced by TE Baldwin Our indignity at the neglect of local languages, literature and writers lead critics to level charges that Indians have long been "forced to drink deep at the fountainhead of a foreign literature", and that because of the "cruel neglect of Hindu Literature",

indigenous works of literature are being treated like “forbidden fruit” (Smarajith Singh, *Shakespeare’s Macbeth: An Oriental Study*, 1921: iii).

The other way is more difficult, but unchallengeable, one of mastering Shakespeare and the English language on its terms. Although many Indians have excelled in it braving all odds, they were still marginalised because it is easy to brand and marginalize them as esoteric and exceptional. Indian Shakespeare scholarship and Indian English are neither. With India running the world’s oldest English departments, and Indian scholars editing reputed international editions of Shakespeare—S Viswanathan (*Measure for Measure* for Cambridge Shakespeare, 1964), Ania Loomba (*Antony and Cleopatra* for Norton Shakespeare, 2013), Sukanta Chaudhuri (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Third Arden Shakespeare, 2016)—Indian scholarship is widely acknowledged in both fields.

Indian Shakespeare scholarship has come of age and is confident to be on its own feet. Just as Terence Hawkes took on the likes of AC Bradley and Dover Wilson in his *That Shakesperian Rag* (1986), and Malcolm Evans took on Frank Kermode and Marilyn Finch in his *Signifying Nothing* (1986) as part of a paradigm shift took place in Shakespeare studies, Indian scholar Ania Loomba made use of the opportunity to create a space of her own, without leaving contemporary quarrels on Shakespeare to western knowledge industry by challenging the very colonial assumptions of the western scholarship with the well-defined postcolonial position in Shakespeare studies. Other scholars like Jyotsna Singh, Sukanta Chaudhury and Poonam Trivedi are also well-recognised Indian scholars in the field of Shakespeare Studies today.