THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

UGC Approved Peer-Reviewed
Multi-disciplinary International Journal
Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE List

Arts and Humanities Group I Journal
Vol. XX

Eds.
Subir Dhar, Bryan Reynolds, Sheila T. Cavanagh, Papia Mitra

A
Special Publication of
The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India

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Subir Kumar Dhar
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AVANTGARDE PRESS
ISSN NO: 2278-2036
THE SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY OF EASTERN INDIA

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL
UGC approved Bi-annual Journal No. 49202 in 2019 list, 400 in 2022 list, Currently Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST 2024, Sl. No. 436 under Arts and Humanities Group-I Journal

Published by
Avantgarde Press, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India.
6A, Maharaja Nanda Kumar Road, P.O. Sarat Bose Road, Kolkata 700029.
146, Sarat Bose Road, Subhas Nagar, Dum Dum Cantonment, Kolkata 700065.
Phone: (033) 2466 2688 / 98304 05624 / 9748726895.
E.mail: tapu_biswas@yahoo.com, drtapubiswas@gmail.com

Website Address : www.ssei.org.in

Web Link : http://www.ssei.org.in/TI/Vol-XX.pdf

In collaboration with Tagore Gandhi Institute for Culture Studies and Service Learning

Issue : June 2024, Published in July 2024

Cover design, Type & Page Setting : Tapu Biswas

Cover Illustration : Amitava Roy with Günter Grass in theatre workshop of SSEI.

Printed at:
Mahamaya Press & Binding
23, Madan Mitra Lane, Kolkata-700006,
Phone : 98305 32858, Email : mpkolkata06@gmail.com

Price: 2500.00 (Rupees Two Thousand Five Hundred) only
US $ 40
UK £ 25

TI Reg. No. B–1554/11 dt 23/3/11 || Book Registered under Act XXV of 1867 as modified upto the 1st March, 1970 under section 9, Govt. of West Bengal.
ISSN NO : 2278-2036 || *Theatre International*, Indexed in UGC-CARE LIST, Peer Reviewed Journal

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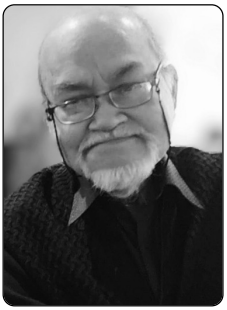
In Memoriam

Shakespeare Society of Eastern India & Tagore-Gandhi Institute

mourns the passing away of



Amitava Roy
(1947–2024)

Professor Emeritus, Bankura University,
Former Shakespeare Professor & Head, Department of English,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Former Director, Shakespeare Centre for Advanced Research,
Rabindra Bharati University,
Executive President, Shakespeare Society of Eastern India,
Globally Renowned Theatre Director and Actor.
You left thousands of students and admirers disconsolate
on 12th April, 2024
Farewell and Rest in Peace after your journey's end.

UGC Approved Journal 2017

Serial No. 49202

UGC Journal Details

Name of the Journal :	Theatre International
ISSN Number :	23782036
e-ISSN Number :	
Source :	UNV
Subject :	Multi-disciplinary Theatre Studies, English Literature
Publisher :	AVANTGARDE PRESS
Country of Publication :	India
Broad Subject Category :	Arts & Humanities; Multidisciplinary

UGC-CARE LIST SINCE 2019

≡ **UGC-CARE List**

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	Action
1	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

UGC Approved Arts and Humanities Group I Journals - 2024

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	UGC-CARE coverage year	Details
1	Aabru (print only)	Gurmukh Singh	2456-253X	NA	from April - 2020 to Present	View
2	Aadhunik Sahitya (print only)	Vishwa Hindi Sahitya Parishad	2277-7083	NA	from April - 2021 to Present	View
3	Aalochan Drishti (print only)	Aalochan Drishti Prakashan	2455-4219	NA	from April - 2021 to January - 2022	Discontinued from Jan. 2022
4	Aashwast	Bharati Dalit Sahitya Academy Madhyapradesh	2456-8856	NA	from July - 2021 to Present	View

436	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View
437	Think India Journal	Vichar Nyas Foundation	0971-1260	NA	from June - 2019 to January - 2020	Discontinued from Jan. 2020

Contents

From the Editors' Desk

This edition of *Theatre International* once again spans several ages and originary cultural locations in the evolving history of drama. Discussed in the pages of this volume are the works and the reception of playwrights as diverse as Shakespeare, Madhusudan Dutta, Ray Lawler, Habib Tanveer, Vijay Tendulkar, Tom Stoppard, Poile Sengupta and Budha Chinghtham. The tread that run through all these is social justice and gendered inequity. Examens of films have not been neglected either as films areanother variety of audiovisual performatives.

Professor Sheila T. Cavanagh in her contribution writes of how various Shakespeare related projects lead to community building. In particular, she studies the effect of performing Shakespeare's plays in prisons and on having discussions on their philosophy. This, a popular experiment in both UK and USA, also appears to have led to the moral and social rehabilitation of many prisoners. Even after release from prison the communities thus created remain a cherished part of their lives and memories.

Dr. Tapu Biswas studies Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* to bring out the dilemma over the so called Australian Dream. The male characters Roo and Barney in the play worked in the bush and they embody the notion of an idealized Australian hypermasculinity. But gradually, the growing modern urban environment made people like them redundant. Moreover as they grew older they came to lose their vitality. Thus they and the dream of the outback that they believed in became irrelevant in a changed society.

Professor Irom Gambhir Singh and **Dr. Chingtham Diana** Devi focus on the representation of marginalized women in Budha Chingtham's *Conflict Trilogy*. In all three plays the women belong to a subordinate class and are victims of violence by both insurgency and counter-

insurgency forces. Instead of focusing on men, the plays foreground women and how they are affected both physically and psychologically by violence. Singh and Devi point out that here the subaltern does speak out here – for all one has to do is to shift the perspective from the male to the female speaker.

Dr. Aparajita Hazra traces the history of the relationship between Bollywood films and the horror genre. In India, visual arts and story-telling has a long history beginning from the Rig Vedas, but it is a fact that the genre of film came into its own only in the modern age and that Hindi horror films reproduced several of the Gothic elements to be found in European literature. As Hazra discusses representative films from each phase in modern film history, she points out that though the first phase provided rational answers for supposedly mystical elements, in later phases the presentation of the supernatural and an accompanying religious tone provided an antidote for the secularism propagated by the government. Even to this day, the Gothic elements allow transgressions but also normalize the supernatural and religious iconography as only way of fighting evil.

Dr. Sacaria Joseph and **Anuradha Mazumder** focus on adaptation of *Macbeth* through two Malayali films, *Veeram* and *Joji*. *Veeram* is located in a medieval feudal society in Kerala utilising the well known historical story of a member of a royal family who betrayed his king for ambition and was killed later on. *Joji* is a more recent film, set in an isolated rubber plantation in rural Kerala haunted by the spectre of Covid. While the first film echoes Shakespeare's play, the latter has nothing plot-wise in common with Shakespeare though the makers declare it to be inspired by *Macbeth*. However Joseph and Mazumder regard both the film-texts as examples of hypertexts where the original text is transcreated and re-transcreated repeatedly.

Dr. Sujato Ghosh focuses on how Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* brings out the helplessness of man in the human universe. From beginning we know that these two characters are doomed to die and that they cannot change their fate. Even when they realize what is going to happen to them they cannot stop their

inevitable descent because they are unable to escape from the situation. For Ghosh, the play is about the absurdity of human situation, and the fate of the two main characters is also ours.

Dr. Arzuman Ara critically appraises Michael Madhusudan Dutta's satires *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron*. Both plays embody the impact of Western education and the often mindless imitation of Western manners in the Bengali society of the time. Ara argues that the purpose of both was to satirize social hypocrisy, and she traces out this theme to show how Dutta became the pioneer of a new genre of social critique in Bengali drama.

Dr. Ashutosh Singh delves into the fusion of folk performance and modern theatrical techniques to explore cultural identity in select plays of Habib Tanveer. Tanveer used his plays to carry out criticisms of injustice and exploitation found in society. Interestingly, he used elements of traditional folk performances to critique the norms of tradition. Singh successfully points out how Tanveer's use of stylistic elements at once interrogates cultural identities, communal harmony and social justice.

Dr. Bijender Singh scrutinizes the conflict between traditional and modern views of marriage in India as shown in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kanyadaan*. However the play also brings into light the broader conflict between older and newer value sets and the changing socio-political landscape of post-Independence India. The heroine Jyoti who is from a higher caste has married a Dalit man. But marriage here does not have a happy ending but results in a further peeling back of caste and gender violence found everywhere in India. Singh in particular points out that the hero, a Dalit, discriminates against his wife on account of her gender and high caste thus showing failure of love marriage as a consequence of personal frailties and societal expectations.

Ekta Verma and **Dr. Bijender Singh** explore how Poile Sengupta brings out the little heard voices of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni in her play. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are timeless repositories of Indian value systems but there are characters in the text who are clearly neglected. It is two such characters traditionally reviled as evil that the dramatist focuses on. The two characters interact at a modern airport.

The female character is portrayed as a woman who expresses her desire openly and thus is punished for challenging the patriarchal norms laid out for women. Shakuni vents his feelings about the injustices and humiliations suffered by his family at the hands of the more powerful Kurus kingdom. Verma and Singh points out that the play highlights the matrix of the oppressor and the oppressed in the modern world successfully while allowing the female to represent how love can triumph over the desire for revenge that is embodied by the male character.

Thounaojam Ruhichand Singh and **Dr. Sharmila Thingbaijam** through their study of the Umanglai Harao ritual of Manipur bring out the social, cultural and religious background of the Meiti people. The ritual represents a sense of communal harmony since both tribals and Hindus participate in the worship of the same deities. Singh and Thingbaijam focus in particular on the folk theatre performed during the festival which enacts the journey of human life and tells stories of creation.

Nagaraju Pejjai and **Siva Prasad Tumu** explore the impact that censorship had on Telegu art due to the banning of an adaptation of the landmark play *Chinthamani*. The original play dealt with social issues, especially prostitution, but one of its later adaptations incorporated objectionable scenes and was deemed as offensive to members of a particular community. The result was a ban declared by the government. Pejjai and Tumu discusse in detail the text of the play and reviews the impact this ban had on contemporary theatre. The original theme of social justice was lost as the debate now became one about obscenity, community representation and finally political intervention.

Dr. Gargi Bhattacharya envisions a dialogue between the postcolonial theatre of Africa and India since the slave trade by the British shares many features with the land struggle against the British in India. Ama Atta Aidoo's *Anowa* is about slave trade and the complicity of Africans in it. Bhattacharya imagines a similar story for India – set against the Narmada Bachao Andolon. The setting could be Indianised and similar songs as used in the original could also be employed here. This is a novel venture into the art of creating a drama.

Sobhana Laishram discusses the concept of the modern woman as shown in Arambam Samarendra's *Whiskey Bottle Ama*. Here Sanatombi the heroine has imbibed all traditional values of Meitie society and is an ordinary housewife. However she is forced to think about her identity and need for respect when her husband is unfaithful. She courageously breaks the marital bond and starts living her own life as a single mother despite facing many hardships. Laishram points out that this signifies a stepping out of patriarchal norms and the assertion of a self that would become modern.

Happy Reading

Subir Dhar & Papia Mitra

"Love and fear glued many friends together": Shakespearean Community Building[1]

Sheila T. Cavanagh

Abstract

Many of those involved in long-term, non-professional Shakespeare projects experience lives filled with particularized challenges. Some of those included here have encountered incarceration or military service, with lasting emotional effects. Others contend with complicated socioeconomic circumstances. Still others are practitioners or alumni associated with Shakespeare programs who hope to share the benefits possible from such initiatives with others. In many cases, these Shakespearean-related activities provide opportunities to form and develop communities supporting individuals going through significant, often difficult, periods of their lives. Shakespeare does not offer sure-fire successes in these circumstances, but the groups discussed herein often find that their Shakespearean endeavors and the communal ties they foster prove beneficial for many participants. Some people are drawn to the challenge of this dramatic or poetic material, others appreciate the opportunity to engage with common pursuits; still others participate, at least initially, with reluctance. Not everyone who begins such activities remains with them, but it is not uncommon that people joining these endeavors find spaces and companions that transform into welcome and supportive communities. The fear and love referenced in the title of this essay both abound, but regularly create the glue that keeps individuals committed to communal gains.

Keywords:

Community, Incarceration, Schools, Performance, Shakespeare

Many (though, of course, not all) of those involved in long-term, non-professional Shakespeare projects experience lives filled with particularized challenges.[2] Some of those included here have encountered incarceration or military service, with lasting emotional effects. Others contend with complicated socioeconomic circumstances. Still others are practitioners or alumni associated with Shakespeare programs who hope to share the benefits possible from such initiatives with others.[3]In many cases, these Shakespearean-related activities provide opportunities to form and develop communities supporting individuals going through significant, often difficult, periods of their lives. Shakespeare does not offer sure-fire successes in these circumstances, but the groups discussed below often find that their Shakespearean endeavors and the communal ties they foster prove beneficial for many participants. Some people are drawn to the challenge of this dramatic or poetic material, others appreciate the opportunity to engage with common pursuits; still others participate, at least initially, with reluctance. Not everyone who begins such activities remains with them, but it is not uncommon that people joining these endeavors find spaces and companions that transform into welcome and supportive communities. The fear and love referenced in the title of this essay both abound, but regularly create the glue that keeps individuals committed to communal gains.

Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB), for example, is a well-known program, thanks to the award-winning documentary detailing some of its activities,[4] its lengthy tenure in the United States and its significant outreach work. SBB has expanded its endeavors since its beginnings at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in Kentucky, however. During the pandemic, when meetings inside prisons were impossible, Shax BEYOND Bars was formed, a now thriving weekly gathering on Zoom, which works in conjunction with many in-person initiatives for those who have returned to the community outside of incarceration. Even more recently, Shakespeare Before Bars has been created by those participating in these other SBB projects. This newest initiative is intended to interfere with the notorious metaphoric "school-to-prison pipeline" that facilitates journeys from socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods into incarceration rather than creating spaces for young people to craft lives

where broad employment, educational, and personal opportunities can thrive. Shakespeare is central to all of these SBB endeavors and also serves key roles in the other communities considered in this essay. While strong and healthy communal ties can obviously be created and maintained in ways completely separate from Shakespearean drama, the range of communities discussed here demonstrates that the links formed through SBB and other Shakespearean endeavors, broadly classed as social justice initiatives, can be both long-lasting and beneficial in many aspects of their participants' lives.[5]

SBB's prison programs, which have been operating since 1995, offer trust in humans' inherent goodness as their founding principle:

> The Vision of Shakespeare Behind Bars is inspired by the belief that all human beings are born inherently good. Although some convicted criminals have committed heinous crimes against other human beings, the inherent goodness is not negated by their criminal deeds. It can be called forth by immersing participants in the sanctuary of a Circle of Truth and its creative process.[6]

While this belief may not be shared by everyone, it continues to undergird the efforts of this program that integrates Shakespearean dramatic performances and other activities, including broad-ranging discussions and personal writing. Racial diversity is the norm in these gatherings, but humanity remains its central characteristic.

Surrounded by a host of relevant Shakespearean quotes, including Caesar's admonition "Make not your thoughts your prison," (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.2), the SBB website also details numerous results that can be attributed to their program:

> Learning outcomes from building a Circle of Truth are allowing each participant the opportunity to 1) develop a lifelong passion for learning, especially those participants who are at high risk of not completing or continuing their education; 2) develop literacy skills (reading, writing, and oral communication), including those participants who identify or are classified as

> learning disabled and/or developmentally challenged; 3) develop decision making, problem solving, and creative thinking skills; 4) develop empathy, compassion, and trust; 5) nurture a desire to help others; 6) increase self esteem and develop a positive self image; 7) take responsibility for the crime/s committed; 8) become a responsible member of a group, community, and family; 9) develop tolerance and the skills for peaceful resolution of conflict; 10) relate the universal human themes alive in Shakespeare's works to their own past, present, and future life experiences; 11) develop trust and the courage to act despite the fears and the odds stacked against them; 12) inspire and support a belief in hope, transformation, redemption, forgiveness, and the possibility of returning to society as a contributing member.[7]

Many of those who participate in SBB projects are serving lengthy prison sentences that may or may not culminate in release back into society. Accordingly, numerous members of the troupe remain involved in institutional SBB activities for lengthy periods, although a variety of life and carceral circumstances may interfere. Many others, however, leave prison. Some complete their sentence; others receive parole. In either case, those leaving carceral spaces after lengthy terms inside face innumerable challenges on their paths to reestablishing lives outside. Recognizing these obstacles, SBB facilitators and alumni offer a range of support structures designed to make a return to prison less likely. According to SBB, such efforts within and outside of prison are commonly, though not always, successful. In contrast to the US national average of recidivism (68 per cent), for instance, only six percent of incarcerated SBB members return to prison after they have been released. The communities established on both sides of the carceral walls contribute greatly to this level of success, although reduced recidivism rates are not the only goal of such endeavors.

People exiting prisons in the United States face numerous obstacles as they endeavor to create viable new lives. This situation is likely exasperated since those incarcerated in the US are predominately racial minorities. Housing and employment are often difficult to acquire and

many of these individuals contend with the inherent risks associated with returning to the environments that helped lead them to prison. Sammie Byron, a founding member of SBB, who left prison after decades of incarceration, devotes considerable effort to helping fellow SBB alumni avoid typical post-carceral pitfalls through active mentoring both within and outside the structures of Shax BEYOND Bars. Byron was able to find employment when he left prison and worked with computers and in sales for several years. He subsequently took a pay cut in order to focus on a job where he can use the lessons he gained in prison — through SBB and other activities — in order to help others. Thus, he currently works as a Youth Training Facilitator for Goodwill Industries, engaging with at-risk youth from ages 16-24. In this role, he helps these young people build or sharpen the "soft skills" that help them create a beneficial environment for their lives. While he regularly includes Shakespearean texts and performance in their formal encounters, he also applies lessons that he learned while he was in prison. Knowing, for example, that some people are particularly vulnerable to influences from gang members and other risky associates, he sometimes helps facilitate relocation for those who could benefit from a new environment. He also shares his experience from participating in numerous "Circles of Truth" (formerly Circles of Trust) while a member of SBB. As indicated above, these circles enable those who gather to recognize and develop their values, their aspirations, and their challenges. As a non-judgmental group, those involved do not attempt to "fix" those sharing their circle but support their peers as they identify and address important aspects of their personal journeys. Byron reports that he feels privileged to use his own hard-earned life lessons in order to help create healthier pathways for this younger cohort. Learning and performing Shakespearean monologues is part of the process Byron offers to these young people where they are placed within a context highlighting personal "truths." Shakespeare is a tool, however, not a panacea.

Byron concurrently works on behalf of other SBB alumni who are released or potentially on the path to parole. Since he still lives in Kentucky, those leaving the Luckett Correctional Complex can readily cross paths with Byron and his wife Barbara, whom he remarried after

not being in communication during his incarceration. He is also able to keep in touch electronically with those who continue to reside within Luckett. Highly attuned to the needs of those leaving prison, Byron has offered temporary housing, transportation, and routes towards employment for those he once performed with in SBB. He has facilitated interviews for newly released SBB alumni at Goodwill Industries, for example, and guided them through the steps needed to establish entrepreneurial tracks with entities such as Door Dash. He also encourages them to engage with Shax BEYOND Bars as another means to stay in communication with those of similar backgrounds and with the benefits continued involvement with Shakespeare can offer such individuals. According to Tofteland, this weekly gathering held on Zoom currently welcomes individuals from several states and countries, serving those who have faced incarceration, with additional opportunities available for veterans contending with the trauma often associated with military service.[8] There are also plans in place to host a face-to-face retreat. A documentary in progress, created by the same team who made the documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, focuses on some SBB alumni as well as the SHAX Beyond Bars enterprise.[9]

The newest member of the SBB series is Shakespeare Before Bars, which intersects with Byron's mentoring work. This project endeavors, as noted, to interrupt the school to prison pipeline. Developed partly in conjunction with SBB's extensive history with the juvenile justice system, SBB here works to disrupt patterns that can lead young people into situations carrying serious penalties. It is also designed to expand SBB's commitment to diversity. SBB is creating a database of returned citizens from around the world who could communicate in person or via Zoom with vulnerable, young, populations, while modeling their own transition from individuals making troubled choices into people moving forward with intention and good will.[10]Tofteland envisions this group as an alternative to what are often perceived as "Caucasian saviors," namely, those coming from places of privilege in order to "fix" others. In contrast, these speakers come from diffuse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, sharing a passion to redirect the dangerous pathways encountering many young people by offering narratives about their own

mistakes and the insights that helped them change. Those participating undertake Shakespearean monologues and similar exercises while also writing related materials based on their own life experiences.

This intersection between personal and Shakespearean narratives has a powerful history with these groups. Byron and Tofteland, for example, are involved with a related project that other SBB alumni are hoping to emulate. *Othello's Tribunal* is a one-person memoir show that integrates various narratives from *Othello* with many events from Byron's life history, including the murder that led to his lengthy incarceration. Byron presents monologues from many of the characters in *Othello*, interwoven with related incidents from his troubled past. This dramatic piece, which he continually revises as his awareness grows, provides an unvarnished account of the abuse he endured as a child and young man that then fueled the anger resulting in his transgressions. He also recounts the ways his own thought processes first kept him imprisoned in the realm of poor choices, then helped him emerge into an increasingly healthful and productive space. *Othello's Tribunal* has been shown to multiple audiences, including school and university groups and the Boys' and Girls' Clubs associated with Goodwill Industries in Kentucky. The production is offered in contexts where significant dialogue is possible. Having attended several of these performances and hosted Byron in numerous classrooms, I can readily attest that the conversations are open and compelling. In addition, Byron always offers further opportunities for discussion to those who request it. At least two other SBB members are hoping to create dramas coming from their own experiences in prison and with SBB that could be used in similar contexts. Such performances align with SBB's contention that the power of personal and Shakespearean narratives can support both those involved in these presentations and their audiences to assess their life choices and opinions. Everyone remains free, however, to draw their own conclusions from the production and following conversation. Tofteland notes, moreover, that it is not uncommon for university students to consider becoming involved with programs such as SBB after being introduced to the ideas and humanity presented in *Othello's Tribunal* and its associated programming.

Some combination of reading, rehearsing, performing, discussing and adapting Shakespeare remain central in all of these endeavors. At the same time, the building and fostering of community—in conjunction with the benefits of learning and presenting this drama—contribute significantly to the many positive results accruing from these diverse, yet associated, activities. Participants practice collaborative creation, mutual support, persistence, problem solving, and breaking out of unhealthy patterns throughout this work. They also often learn to trust themselves and others in ways that have previously eluded them. While Shakespeare Behind Bars, Shax BEYOND bars and Shakespeare Before Bars cater to disparate groups, they each offer ways for individuals to learn new skills, to examine their guiding principles, and to develop networks that can offer support during life's vicissitudes. Many of the bonds forged during these encounters become long-lasting and life-affirming. The complexity, breadth, and power of Shakespearean dialogues and performances helps facilitate the individual and collective positive changes that often result.

The kinds of long-term community building associated with SBB is replicated in a number of Shakespearean enterprises designed for carceral settings, veterans, and others who benefit from the theatrical engagement as well as from the supportive network resulting from these thoughtfully crafted communities. As I note elsewhere, for example, two long-standing prison drama programs in India (in Kolkata and Mysore) devote considerable time and attention to the welfare of the families associated with those incarcerated.[11] They also work closely with participants after they have been released in order to support employment opportunities and increased stability. Innumerable other programs in various locations facilitate similar endeavors. Many of those involved refer to each other in familial or other terms signaling tight and ongoing connections. Baltimore's Chesapeake Shakespeare Company's Olive Branch and Laurel Crown Ensemble, for example, which regularly presents scenes and devised pieces focusing on veterans in Shakespearean drama, welcomes veterans from conflicts spanning several decades.[12] The connections formed have been life-changing for many of those involved. Similarly, Blue Apple Theatre Company in Winchester, UK, includes actors of many ages with learning challenges.[13] Many of their members have been

involved for many years. Typically, such initiatives aim for long-term involvement with those participants who appreciate such links. For many of them, the Shakespearean aspects of the engagement are attractive, but the accompanying creation of community is also welcomed.

Kate Powers, who has worked with or established several prison programs, including the RTA (Rehabilitation Through the Arts) initiative featured in the recent feature film *Sing Sing*,[14] has recently begun a new program in Buffalo, New York, in collaboration with Charles Moore, formerly a Shakespearean at Sing Sing. She talks about the importance of the Shakespeare work occurring in such environments, but also emphasizes the ways that this community-building also helps support the families of those incarcerated since they are often included in events. She further comments upon the pathway towards trust that frequently occurs in the dramatic gatherings. In the Buffalo facility, there are two distinctive sections, where those living in either side have no contact with each other. Each self-contained group of Shakespeareans experienced noteworthy similarities, however. During the sessions, they regularly "check in" with one another before beginning theatrical exercises, scene sharing and other dramatic activities. As these groups of men (7 in one; 13 in the other) learn to know each other, they frequently begin to share more detailed personal stories and demonstrate more vulnerability in their fourth session. This presumably reflects the time it takes for them to begin to trust these experiences and each other in an environment where trust can readily prove dangerous. Many participants in these programs describe similar journeys towards trust, although individual timelines may shift. The communities formed provide important environments for those involved.

Recent changes at Detroit Public Theatre's Shakespeare in Prison program (SIP) may alter its alumni offerings significantly, but over the past several years, SIP has also built a vibrant network of engaged alumni -Shakespeare Reclaimed- who support each other in ongoing activities.[15] Dependent upon laws in different US states, people who have been incarcerated are not always allowed to keep in contact with others who have also been released. Such constraints have been loosened in Michigan (home to both SIP and some SBB branches), however, so

both groups can continue their activities. In addition, Zoom has made such gatherings increasingly possible. The benefits are readily calculable by participants. Jocelyn, for instance, recounts her long-term fear of public speaking that dissipated after she became involved with SIP and Shakespeare Reclaimed. Detailing the support offered by fellow actors and facilitators, such as Frannie Shepherd- Bates,[16] Jocelyn explains that sharing theatre led to opportunities to share personal stories and struggles with a growing community. Her fear of speaking publicly retreated as she gained increasing confidence through appearing on stage. SIP and Shakespeare Reclaimed provide safe environments where the actors can explore who they are, challenge their perceived limitations, and claim their individual authenticity. Like many comparable programs, Detroit's offerings for incarcerated and released citizens provide supportive spaces, occasional financial assistance, and a community dedicated to the betterment of its participants. In my in-person and electronic interactions with those engaged in these activities, I have heard consistently positive reports about the ways this environment has strengthened the members' abilities to engage with the world more productively.[17]

The current uncertainty surrounding the program, however, highlights a challenge such groups frequently confront. The founders and facilitators of such initiatives are often committed, charismatic leaders, who devote considerable time and personal energy to the creation and maintenance of these endeavors. When personnel changes, however, these transitions can weaken the connections previously formed. At Detroit, for instance, the Shakespeare Reclaimed group, which serves as an Advisory Body to the larger company, is currently unclear whether their voices are as welcomed as they were previously. They were dismayed, for instance, when they were not consulted prior to the development and dissemination of publicity materials for a recent production of Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's*[18]. While the image currently on the company website appears to have altered the representation which many of the Shakespeare Reclaimed members found objectionable,[19] it remains unclear how this group will proceed in the future. Shakespeare Reclaimed remains a vibrant gathering of people committed to each other's betterment, but their current concerns illustrate that the departure of beloved leadership can unsettle long-term patterns.

These challenges and others confronting virtually any similar project demonstrates the kind of needs that led to the creation of the Shakespeare in Prisons Network (SIPN) just over a decade ago. The ongoing learning, community building and facilitating access to the power associated with vulnerability that characterize many Shakespeare in Prison endeavors, as well as the challenges associated with changing circumstances, helped foster the development of SIPN. This organization was founded by Curt L. Tofteland, in conjunction with Notre Dame's Peter Holland (McMeel Family Chair in Shakespeare Studies) and Scott Jackson (Mary Irene Ryan Executive Artistic Director of Shakespeare at Notre Dame).[20] When SIPN was first envisioned, there was little communication between the many geographically far-flung practitioners involved with Shakespeare in Prison endeavors.[21] Many of those working in carceral environments lacked contact with others involved in similar initiatives. The initial goals of the first SIPN conference were modest, with a gathering planned for about 25-30 attendees. By the time that first event was held in 2013, however, participation had to be cut off at 66, so that the budget would stretch far enough. In subsequent iterations, the numbers have grown significantly, with the lengthy virtual conference during the pandemic welcoming 250 people,[22] although that figure would easily have been surpassed if the organizers had not restricted it in order to conserve room for conversation. These pandemic gatherings then continued monthly for 2.5 years as members met for intensive investigation and engagement with anti-racism strategies. The SIPN participants involved in these activities were dedicated to helping define a common language, to enhance their trauma-informed practices and to push through their blind spots with thoughtfulness and care. Drawing from their disparate, but related experiences, the people participating in the SIPC events have been crafting their diverse initiatives into a field able to support with integrity and vision those who are incarcerated, their families, practitioners, prison officials, and researchers. In the next iteration of the conference, organizers intend to emphasize the voices of alumni from a range of these international programs. Some prison Shakespeare alumni, such as Marin Shakespeare's Dameion Brown, have become professional actors after serving long sentences.[23] Such a transformation directly into artistic

employment is not imagined for all participants. Nevertheless, what Jackson terms "the gift of breath" and the ability to make Shakespeare their own regularly coalesce into an environment where these individuals face their fears while building their ability to explore and learn more about Shakespeare's texts and themselves. In Jackson's words, and in the experiences of many, this "vulnerability builds community." SIPN has not only provided a significant community for its members, however, it has also supported the building and maintenance of Shakespeare in Prison initiatives as a specialized field of practice and inquiry.

Distinct from carceral networks, however, numerous other Shakespearean programs are also crafting long-term, supportive relationships.[24] The Robinson Community Center in South Bend, Indiana (affiliated with Notre Dame University), for instance, began a series of Shakespearean activities in 2008 that has led to innumerable lengthy associations. The group represents a range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, in an environment that welcomes all. Students can participate in the Shakespeare ensemble from 3rd through 12th grade, with expanding opportunities emerging as the ensemble members grow in skills and ability.[25] Shakespeare Outreach Director Christy Burgess deservedly recently received the Indiana Governor's Arts Award, the state's highest honor for the arts, recognizing her contributions to youth in the South Bend area.[26] The students involved in these activities gain considerable facility with Shakespearean verse and drama, but they also have the opportunity to become tightly engaged with a caring and supportive community. Alumni of the program regularly visit their successors in the Robinson Shakespeare Company (RSC), even after they have departed for university. In 2024, moreover, most of the adult Americorps members working with the group are also alumni.[27] Tiana, for example, began her involvement with RSC in third grade. Upon graduating from Northeastern University in Massachusetts, she came back to Indiana to re-engage with this group who were so central to her development. She has thus been part of this community from age 9 to 24.

Regular participants engage with multiple dramatic activities, including weekly classes during the academic year, performances, an annual 24-

hour Shakespeare marathon (for the older students) and occasional involvement in special events such as the English Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition and a 2017 trip to the United Kingdom where they performed and rehearsed at the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe. The students thrive because they feel safe in this environment. Like SBB's Circles of Truth, which establish spaces where acceptance, self-awareness, and mutual support are emphasized, the Robinson Shakespeareans work hard to establish and sustain their community. While many of the participants encounter harsh conditions at school or home, they learn to recognize and honor each other's strengths, growing points, and vulnerabilities. In the summer program, where multiple ages work together, outsiders often ask how this cohort can work with such a wide age-range. Invariably, however, the older students step up to mentor those who are younger. They also take on leadership roles. The camaraderie formed enables these students to trust each other and encourage everyone to face their fears both in life and with the Shakespeare they are encountering. Burgess is a talented leader for this ensemble. She invites the participants to engage in varied activities, regardless of their perceived talents or liabilities. From her perspective, the only prerequisite is a desire to be there. She takes her role as someone creating and maintaining community very seriously. She believes resolutely in the importance of consistency during any engagement with these students and will always attend events students and families invite her to, unless there is an overwhelming conflict. The students learn that they "play the character," not that figure's gender, race, age, or other potentially distancing feature. Young girls, therefore, who are often flooded with comments about their physical appearance in other environments, are given swords and cast in dominant roles as warriors or kings. Tiana, for instance, played Richard III when she was a young girl, not knowing that this role was offered in order to give her the chance to experience and develop her personal strength. For related reasons, the Shakespeare is never "dumbed down." Although they work with truncated versions of the text, they hold searching discussions about the language they encounter, especially when some of the words, such as "slave," raise difficult issues in today's environment.

The artistic result of the careful nurturing and challenging of these actors tends to be thought-provoking Shakespeare. Over the years, the group has presented over thirty of Shakespeare's plays, most recently *Henry VI, part one*. The discussions associated with the various plays chosen or skipped over contribute significantly to the success of the ensemble's long-term efforts. When students initially balked at an unknown history play like *Henry VI*, for instance, the group discussed the likelihood that no one in their family would ever have seen this play before, making the students' rendition the first exposure their audience would ever have. They took this responsibility very seriously and created a well-received drama. After fruitlessly requesting *Titus Andronicus* for many years, on the other hand, the students read the play aloud during their annual 24-hour Shakespeare marathon and realized why many parents would be distressed to have their child involved in a show featuring sexual assault, mutilation, and cannibalism. During the pandemic, they created a weekly series of recordings presenting successive acts of *As You Like It*, with each segment featuring different actors and a distinctive concept, including a *Star Wars*-inflected adaptation, a 1990's sitcom version, a summer camp horror film sequence, a noir piece and a reality show-based rendition. Each week, students' families would help with the filming, then would gather on Fridays to watch that week's episode together. Despite the lack of any budget for this production, its creation strengthened the already powerful ties between everyone involved directly—or through family ties—with the play.

The groups explored within this essay represent a small number of the ensembles established throughout the world which have crafted valuable communities engaged, at least in part, with Shakespearean enterprises. While their specific practices often vary, their guiding principles generally correspond with each other. They typically see Shakespeare as a theatrical and literary corpus facilitating growth, self-reflection, and a kind of camaraderie that translates into supportive engagement with each other's vulnerabilities. The participants sometimes share related backgrounds, such as incarceration or similar racial and socioeconomic disparities, but their individuality is invariably recognized and nurtured. Some of the groups perform full productions, others craft

monologues, abridged versions, or pieces that intersperse personal narratives with Shakespearean dialogue. Each ensemble responds to the needs of its particular constituency. The development of the Shakespeare in Prisons Network, moreover, which also engages with the Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA), an international gathering of organizations that produce live Shakespeare, demonstrates that there are enough of these groups to warrant a gathering specific to their challenges and needs. While these ensembles generally recognize the tangled cultural history of Shakespearean study and performance in much of the world, they also respect the power associated with offering complex, insightful texts to people who face significant challenges in their daily lives. While some ensembles focus exclusively on Shakespeare, others incorporate other texts and writings as appropriate. They all, however, include practices that facilitate the formation of communities that help their participants expand their confidence and abilities. Few of these individuals will become artistic professionals, but many of them will become more facile in their abilities to create beneficial pathways for their future endeavors. Other kinds of groups can serve similar functions, but those involved in these initiatives often maintain that Shakespeare is particularly evocative for them and that the communities they create from these endeavors remain cherished parts of their lives. The love and fear they experience while expanding their confidence and self-awareness thus becomes a kind of glue that supports them through diverse, often difficult, aspects of their lives.

Endnotes

1. This essay is dedicated, with gratitude, to the late Professor Amitava Roy, who was expert in creating communities through Shakespeare. I am also grateful to the many people who shared their experiences with me during the writing of this essay. I have enormous respect for their achievements and appreciate their willingness to share them.
2. I call such groups “specialized” rather than marginalized in an effort to avoid value judgements.
3. There are many Shakespearean communities not included In this essay. I discuss some of the others in *Multisensory Shakespeare and Specialized Communities* (Arden Shakespeare 2024).

4. https://shakespearebehindbars.org/.
5. In addition to the SBB website and site visits, information about SBB and its programs come from innumerable in-person and electronic conversations with Curt L. Tofteland, Sammie Byron and others. Both men have spoken with public and classroom audiences at Emory. Sammie and his wife Barbara join class sessions there regularly.
6. https://shakespearebehindbars.org/about/mission/.
7. https://shakespearebehindbars.org/about/mission/,
8. Those who work with Shakespeare and Prison and/or Shakespeare and Veterans initiatives often collaborate and practitioners from both realms participate in the Shakespeare in Prisons Network (SIPN).
9. https://shakespearebehindbars.org/programs/shakespeare-beyond-bars/shakespeare-beyond-bars-thedocumentary/#:~:text=Shakespeare%20Behind%20Bars%20was%20documented,film%20festivals%20winning%2011%20awards.
10. "Returned citizens" is a phrase many use to designate people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system, but who have returned to society. The term focuses on such individuals' status as citizens in contrast to phrases such as "formerly incarcerated," which places an emphasis on people's carceral experiences rather than their humanity more broadly.
11. Sheila T. Cavanagh. 2021. " 'In India': Shakespeare and Prison in Kolkata and Mysore." *Shakespeare Survey*. Volume 74. 98-110.
12. https://www.chesapeakeshakespeare.com/education-community/for-veterans/.
13. https://blueappletheatre.com/.
14. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt28479262/.
15. https://www.detroitpublictheatre.org/shakespeareinprison#:~:text=Shakespeare%20in%20Prison%20 empowers%20incarcerated, and%20positively%20impact%20their%20communities.
16. After a lengthy successful tenure at SIP, Bates has now transitioned elsewhere.

17. I visited Shakespeare Reclaimed in 2022 and spoke with participants electronically in 2022 and 2024.

18. https://www.detroitpublictheatre.org/season-nine.

19. This play includes actors playing formerly incarcerated individuals working in a restaurant. At least one version of the poster apparently included an image of an African-American woman's hand that distressed many Shakespeare Reclaimed members, who wished that their input had been sought.

20. The information included about SIPN comes from numerous site visits and conversations with SIPN leadership, as well as the recent podcast they created, which is available through the Shakespeare at Notre Dame website (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bQ52555AKo). SIPN refers to the group; SIPC designates the conference, with 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. differentiating between gatherings.

21. These programs are often referred to as examples of Applied Shakespeare.

22. SIPC 4 was going to take place in person in the Fall of 2020 until the pandemic intervened. Instead, it met virtually most weeks between mid-November 2020 and mid-April 2021. The recordings from those sessions are available at https://shakespeare.nd.edu/service/shakespeare-in-prisons/sipc4/.

23. Brown discusses his trajectory from prison to professional drama in this TED talk, "Shakespeare and Prison Reform": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fO0I9x-Jr4.

24. I discuss many of these other communities in *Multisensory Shakespeare and Specialized Communities*.

25. The information in this section comes from site visits, as well as many in-person and Zoom conversations with Christy Burgess.

26. https://shakespeare.nd.edu/about/news/christy-burgess-receives-indianas-highest-honor-in-the-arts/.

27. AmeriCorps is a US government program that supports service in numerous areas, including education: https://americorps.gov/about

The Great Australian Dream and Dilemma: A Study of Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

Tapu Biswas

Abstract

While the beginning of White Australian settlement was an outcome of a European endeavour to make the newly discovered antipodean land a convenient dump-yard for convicts, the emergence of Australia as a White nation was the result of a severe rebellion against authority. This rebellion was preceded by a dream — a romantic and optimistic vision of an ethos which was comprised of images of freedom and nationhood and of a non-conformist rebel hero located in the vast outback and his epic struggle against a hostile environment.

The dream however changed its shape as Australia gradually became a developed nation. Rapid urbanisation created metrosexual populations for whom the dream translated into acquiring a piece of land and owning a shelter.

The post-war Australian found himself in a wrenching dilemma, torn between nostalgia for the past, for the Australian Eden of a natural life of adventure, individualism, epic achievement and freedom, and the urban pull toward a routinized, conformist, prosperous and anonymous middle class existence. This conflict between these opposed lifestyles and attitudes ultimately boiled down to a question of national identity.

The present paper is an attempt to show how this national dilemma became the new mark of Australianness, and how new generation of Australians came to live with it. However, instead of making a general approach to this issue, this paper makes a probe into one of the most

celebrated of all contemporary Australian plays, viz. Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll.*

Keywords: Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll,* Australian Dream, Bush Debate, Dilemma

Introduction

At the commencement of the settlement era in Australia, the Australian Dream implied a romantic and optimistic vision of an ethos which consisted of images of freedom, nationhood and the non-conformist rebel located in the vast outback and the epic struggle of the sturdy people of Australia against a hostile environment. The Australian Dream grew out of an epic geography peopled by an epic cast of characters. The 'Australian' legend turned its back on the urban scene and harked back to the past, to the wilderness, the bush and the outback as the proper arena for actualising the Australian Dream. This dream which was one of the taming of the wilderness and the creation of a new and noble world civilisation, found expression in a host of Australian literary works.

The Australian Dream, however, acquired an altered significance in the 1950s in particular. It suffered a devaluation and realism gradually came to replace romantic idealism. Modernist doubts and disillusionment started eroding traditional hope and confidence, reducing the dream to be a mere hope to own a piece of Australian land and to build a shelter there. The post-war Australian increasingly found himself in a wrenching dilemma – torn between nostalgia for the past, for the Australian Eden of the natural life of adventure, individualism, epic achievement and freedom on the one hand, and the urban pull towards a routinized, conformist, prosperous, comfortable and anonymous middle class existence on the other. This conflict between opposed lifestyles and attitudes ultimately devolved to becoming a question of national identity. The present paper attempts to make a probe into this dilemma that had become a part and parcel of Australian identity with reference to Ray Lawler's play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* – which is the first in Lawler's "Doll Trilogy."

***Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*: Context**

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll premiered on 28th November 1955 at the Russell Street Theatre in Melbourne. Prior to the 1950s, productions of indigenous Australian plays on Australian stages had been few and far between. Hence *The Doll* was not only a personal achievement for Lawler, but also a landmark for White Australian theatre too. A part of the success of the play was due to its providing to the audiences unmistakably Australian characters located in a familiar setting, speaking with their own accents, and telling their own stories.

May-Brit Akerholt, in her article on the play argues that the impact "The Doll" had on its first audiences was:

> …partly due to the fact that they were listening to the actors using their own language, not the British-accent stage language actors were trained to speak and audiences were used to hearing. Here was a play in which actors spoke the vernacular in their real voices. (28).

Akerholt suggests also that Lawler had created a:

> …'stage language'; that explored the Australian convention of using irony and vivid jargon to replace communication and emotions. From beneath a surface of a laconic and dry, yet colourful vernacular emerges an imaginative and poetic dramatic dialogue. The unexplored possibilities of language, and the perils of ignoring them, become virtually another "character" in *The Doll* (30).

The Doll – as the play came to be called in short, came to be seen by audiences also as a refreshingly new experience in theatre watching. *The Argus* reported:

> …[Lawler] has written a play so superbly true to Australian thought and the Australian scene that theatrical conventions disappear.
>
> – Barney!, – Roo , – Pearl , and – Emma are real people. We know their faces, their voices -- we share their dreams, we understand their failures. (6)

Australian Dream and Dilemma in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll gathers together some of the principal Australian myths and dreams and subjects them to a profound revaluation in terms of the radically altered context of post-war Australia. The play is remarkable as it delineates and exposes, with passion and compassion, the raw nerve of the Australian experience. It powerfully projects the divided Australian consciousness, the dichotomy present in the heart of Australian culture and the Australian way of life with reference to the middle class White Australians.

The playwright's focus is on the dichotomy and polar tensions that lie seething under the surface promise of a country of unlimited opportunities and vast potential. The play shows what happens when the two main characters of the outback, Roo and Barney, come into contact and with the city. As a result, a conflict is generated between the outback's ideals with the city's lifestyle -- a conflict that had been at the centre of the celebrated Bush debate between Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson which was published in *The Bulletin*.

On one hand, there is in the play the locale of the outback, the frontier of untamed but fertile nature which must submit to man's conquest; on the other, the powerful pull of the city and civilisation asserts itself. The city stands for a middle class tendency towards conformity and social anonymity and it offers security and an end to wandering and the comforts of the luxuries and amenities provided by advanced technology and social organisation even as it emasculates the great Australian Dream of the Individualist Hero triumphing in the glorious outback.

In Roo and Barney, the vital and dynamic cane-cutters from the North Queensland and cane belt, Lawler embodies and dramatizes this dream and myth of the individualist hero in the vast outback. Roo and Barney are workers who earn their living up county and in the open air in the traditional Australian way. They draw an almost superhuman vigour and richness from the soil, the cane-tree and the wilds, which

are parts of their lives. Their epic strength and grandeur spring from the intimate relationship of man with the earth, and of man with man. They are comparatively primitive; they do not possess extraordinary qualities of mind; they are of the common stock whose toil made Australia. They represent the survival of the primitive in the civilised world; embody a wild natural force uncontaminated by civilisation.

Olive, Roo's girlfriend likens Roo and Barney to 'two eagles flying' down out of the sun. Roo and Barney are misfits in the confines of urban Melbourne, but misfits who are the celebrated for turning their backs on urban metrosexuality and for endorsing the nostalgic pride in living difficult and trying lives in the open cane fields:

> OLIVE: …These are men – not the sort we see go rolling home to their wives every night, but men.
>
> PEARL: I know, you keep tellin' me. I never knew there was any difference.
>
> OLIVE: You never knew! [There is a pause, and then she speaks in a voice of defiant pride] Nancy used to say it was how they'd walk into the pub as if they owned it – even just in the way they walked you could spot it. All round would be the regulars – soft city blokes having their drinks and their little arguments, and then in would come Roo and Barney. They wouldn't say anything – they didn't have to – there'd just be the two of them walkin' in, then a kind of wait for a second or two, and quiet. After that, without a word, the regulars'd stand aside to let 'em through, just as if they was a – a coupla kings. She always reckoned they made the rest of the mob look like a bunch of skinned rabbits. [Act I, Scene I]

The two cane-cutters come to the suburbs of Melbourne for five months in a year during the 'lay-off' season to live temporarily with their girlfriends and then return to the wilderness.

The seventeenth summer that Roo and Barney spends with their girlfriends is markedly different from the sixteen previous summers. Roo and Barney are now past their physical prime. Roo has been challenged by a new young and strong cane-cutter named Johnnie Dowd. The latter has usurped Roo's mantle of leadership, leaving Roo not merely broken financially, but having become a broken man too. It is their age which is now forcing both of them to play the second fiddle. Roo loses his epic strength and valour, Barney his legendary virility. The Australian outback is no country for old or middle-aged men. Time, disillusionment and the city sap their thrust, their dynamism and optimism.

The seventeenth summer brings into focus the troubled profile of the mid–twentieth century Australian national experience. Pictures of Australian manhood in the first half of the 20th century were built around notions of distinctiveness, self–assurance, physical power and mateship. Such qualities were often related in the popular imagination to the physical landscape of Australia, and with images of the Australian outback. But life in the late 50s in Australia was different. Morven Brown observes that mid–20th century Australia witnessed a sea change in the way that Australian men presented themselves:

> The mature Australian man [is] a person who finds most of his satisfactions within the home circle. His great ambition is typically to marry, to have a family, to purchase a house, to own a car and then to settle down to enjoy life. (Brown, quoted in John Murphy p.35)

Between the natural wilderness (the bush, the outback, the cane belt and the civilised world of the city and the suburbs of Melbourne, Roo, Barney and Olive make an attempt to build a 'Doll's house' or an oasis. The Australian Dream of the raw outback had become no longer appropriate to a fast growing prosperous, industrial, technological and urban society. It had been reduced to the hope of settling down in a cosy household shared with a married partner. But the life of the city was also insipid in comparison to the robust–world represented by the outback and the bush. The outback and the city are mutually exclusive. And though an ideal marriage between the two ways of life could

liberate the potential of man, everywhere it is a utopian dream. Roo and Barney cling to their dream of the outback but ultimately have to come to terms with the realities of the historical moment even as they try to create an insulated world of romantic illusion with their long-time girlfriends in their 'lay-off' season.

For sixteen long years Roo, Barney, Olive and Nance had lived a day dream. Now, in the seventeenth summer, Nance leaves their Eden to marry a bookworm from the city, Pearl, the new entrant into their haven, rejects the myth as merely make–believe and packs her bags. Bubba, shaken by Dowd, becomes critical of her naïve hero–worship of the ageing duo, Roo and Barney. Roo temporarily knuckles under the onslaught of time, takes a hated job in a paint factory, wishes to marry and gives up his pride and independence. Barney fails to be a virile legendary hero. They prove themselves misfits both in the outback and the city. Time, the conflict between generations and the city exercise their disintegrating influences over these heroes-in-eclipse. In Act III of the play, Roo and Barney reach the high point of frustration and baffled decrepitude as they look on the high promise of the Australian Dream and what history has made of it. It is too late to even hang a wife, a house, and a job around their necks. On the extreme edge of despair and self-destructive rage Roo and Barney smash the Dolls, the butterflies and tinsel trinkets that they had given in the past to Olive and Bubba as loving tokens of their romantic heroic life styles. Like Nora's *A Doll's House* in Ibsen and Laura's 'glass menagerie' (in Tennessee William's play) the dolls are smashed to pieces as illusions and reveries are dashed to the ground.

Conclusion

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll is a play remarkable for its depiction of an evanescent slice of life shown against the backdrop of a shifting social and cultural value system. Lawler forged a tragic drama of waste, disenchantment and human heroism shining even in defeat. It is a tragic but exhilarating mirror reflecting an image of a universal human condition.

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Foregrounding the Subaltern Women in Budha Chingtham's *Conflict Trilogy*

Irom Gambhir Singh & Chingtham Diana Devi

Abstract

The unique geography, cultures and linguistic lineage of the north eastern part of India make it different from the other regions of the country. It is a region that has witnessed violence and resistance for decades. Budha Chingtham's *Conflict Trilogy* consists of *A Far Cry … A Reminder*, *The Priestess* and *Mythical Surrender* and the plays invoke a feeling of eerie as the three plays unfold the excesses of the armed forces in the counter insurgency movement in the north eastern part of India. The common people are sandwiched between the insurgency and counter insurgency movements and the women folks in these states are at the receiving ends or in the terms of Gayatri Spivak (1988), they are more deeply in the shadow. The subaltern state of a female in a post colonial world is not a new thing. She is not the subject but the one subjected who has no voice of her own. However, it would be wrong to claim that the women protagonists of the three mentioned plays have no voice of their own or they do not resist. Each female character resists the onslaught of violence by patriarchy in her own way which may be in contrast to the dominating patriarchal discourse. The paper attempts to highlight how the conflict trilogy delineates different female victims of counter insurgency measures in Manipur. The different roles of a woman is highlighted by the three main protagonists of the trilogy. Kusum in *A Far Cry* is a mad woman who has witnessed the killings of many innocents under the guise of counter insurgency measures and the play traces how she loses her brother and her father in an encounter with the armed forces. Similar theme resonates in *The Priestess* and one can find how a female body becomes a site for violence to be inflicted

to assert domination and to induce fear in a community. Leihao, a Maibi bears humiliation to her body when she attempts to save her husband and her son from the armed men which is symbolised as fireballs in the play. Shanarei in *Mythical Surrender* loses her husband to the serpents (symbolising the armed forces) and gives birth to her rapist's son. When her son turns out to be the same as the rapists, she reaffirms the contamination of her womb and she asserts her right to her body and her womb by dismantling the creature that she created. Though the roles of women in a society are always backgrounded as posited by Plumwood (1993), the three subaltern women in the trilogy are in the foreground narrating their story, lending voice to their selves and claiming their identity.

Keywords: Female body, Resistance, Subaltern, Violence, Counter Insurgency measures

Introduction

The northeastern part of India is known for its vibrant culture and mode of life which is diverse from the mainland India. It has natural resources, rich flora and fauna, natural habitats and mountains. This region is also home to a wide range of ethnic tribes whose history and cultures are in stark contrast to the other sections of the country. It is a landlocked and a marginalised area where the ethno nationalists movement arose and that led to the militarisation of this region. Thus, it has witnessed political struggle, violence, conflicts, trauma and resistance. As it is known that literature reflects the prevailing social environment, writers from north east India will no doubt paint the picture of unrest that has afflicted their states. Tilottama Misra has rightly said (2013, pxxi) "violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be a never ending one in this region and yet people have not learned 'to live with it', as they are expected to do by the distant centres of powers."

Subaltern women in Budha Chingtham's trilogy

Budha Chingtham's conflict trilogy which comprises *A Far Cry… A Reminder*, *The Priestess* and *Mythical Surrender* is published as a part

of his collection of plays called *Conflict Tetralogy*. The three plays are women centered plays where he delineates women from different sections of the society but mostly those who are at the lower strata of the society. While describing the women protagonists of Budha Chingtham's trilogy, the term 'subaltern' is used. The term 'subaltern' means 'of inferior rank' and it indicates subordination based on class, caste, gender, race, language and culture. In short, a subaltern is denied access to 'hegemonic power'. Budha Chingtham's women protagonists are all from the periphery of the state and are victims of excessive military exercise. They are denied right to a peaceful existence and their cries for justice are kept in denial. By virtue of their gender, they are twice in the shadow. So, it is apt to term them as subaltern women. How the women protagonists can be termed as subalterns is discussed below.

Kusum in *A Far Cry… A Reminder*

The play begins with Leima, a priestess attempting to bring back the lives of her dead husband and son while Kusum awaits and reminds her to be quick as the sun is about to rise. Leima fails in her attempt and loses her life. Kusum continues her journey and she witnesses the death of a young boy. She is waiting for the return of her elder brother who had joined the insurgents believing in the cause. She is actually a mad woman who is pulling a bullock cart carrying dead bodies. As the story of Kusum unfolds, it comes to light that she and her father had been waiting for her elder brother for the last five years. Waiting was what left for both to do. And while they were waiting, she had been continuously writing letters to her asking him to return. Her father had been trying to fix the wheel of a bullock cart for the last five years and yet he had not succeeded. As she saw the light of finally sending her letter to her elder brother, her father and her elder brother were shot dead by men with horns who carried guns. Thus, she is a victim of the violence of insurgency and counter insurgency measures. She is a mad woman who has lost her sanity because of her loss.

Leihao in *The Priestess*

The play centres on Leihao, a thirty five year old Maibi who lives a dual life. On one hand she is a Maibi who is in service to the gods,

"Lainingthou and Lairembi" and on the other hand, she is the wife of a fisherman and a mother to her son. The duality is highlighted when her son, Lemba approaches her while she is possessed and she fails to recognise her own son. She needs to be brought back to the sane world by Ema Sanglakpi. She is reminded by Ema Sanglakpi, the head of the Maibies that the verse of god is secret and she should not forget to keep it with her and not misuse it and her life as a maibi will be different from any ordinary person. Her occult power is reflected in the play when she foresees the doom that would befall on her husband in her dream. In spite of that one cannot escape one's destiny. Rabei gets apprehended by the 'Lammei' (fireball). The playwright has used 'Lammei' which means fireball as a symbol of armed forces. No one can trace Rabei and Leihao is left with nothing except using her blessing as a Maibi to find her husband. She traces him and finds him in chains. He is in pain with all the bruises and is wearing only his briefs. He is brutally tortured by the chairs with the head of a serpent (symbolising the armed men). He gets thirsty and asks for water. Leihao is not allowed to bring him water. Instead they force alcohol on her and rape her by taking turns. People find her dishevelled and with a bottle of whiskey and they start calling her names and at the same time throwing stones at her. The play ends with Maibi Sanglakpi and the other maibies rescuing her from there.

Shanarei in *Mythical Surrender*

Shanarei is a victim of violence committed under the guise of counter insurgency measures. She resides at a hut built on one of the phumdis of the Loktak lake. She is from the periphery who is holding the torch of age old tradition by residing in the phumdis which was a home to her and her deceased father. Her father is an affluent folksinger who used to teach folksongs. She lives a very humble life with her husband, Chaothoi. However, their peaceful married life is cut short when the serpents like armed forces intrude their privacy. The captain rapes Shanarei while his subordinates kill her husband. He implants the seed of impurity on her and she gives birth to a son who resembles the serpent. She acknowledges the impurity by affirming her own son as the son of her enemy. Her son not only resembles his rapist father physically. He

follows the hideous and violent traits of his father and tortures the common folks even to the extent of killing Shanarei's father-in-law. His inhumane act leaves his mother no choice and Shanarei destroys what she creates by killing him.

The three main women protagonists of the trilogy no doubt bear the characteristics of subaltern as they are from the periphery and are victims of dominant military excesses. Whether it is Kusum who has lost sanity and leads a life of a mad woman or Leihao who is violated by men with horns and Shanarei who has to give birth the son of her rapist and the one who kills her husband, one can clearly find women who are driven at the periphery and whose voice is not reaching the centre. Like Spivak (1988) who has argued that the subaltern cannot speak as the subaltern does not have a voice, the three women also cannot speak as their voice is muted by the violation of their bodies and their sanity.

Spivak (1988), in her celebrated essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", contends that the subaltern cannot speak and the reason being her lack of fully authorised political speech in the social and political sphere. She tries to situate "subalternity" by dealing the tribulations of gender and focuses on all Indian women during colonial times. According to her, "Sati women" fall under subaltern group as the Hindu woman loses her voice in the conflict between the brown men and the white men or between tradition and modernisation. She concludes her essay by stating "the subaltern cannot speak" (104). Her conclusion sparks controversy in terms of its interpretation. If we take the sandwiched state of the "Sati women", we are also reminded of the condition of women in conflict zone where they have to bear the dire consequences from both ends. As to the contention of Spivak that "the subaltern cannot speak" (104), she does not mean that the women reeling under colonial dominion do not have a voice but it means that they are represented either by the colonisers' or the colonised's male discourse who speak on behalf of them.

Plumwood (1993) uses the term "backgrounding" to show how women are put at the back through their traditional roles and how they

provide the background to men who assert their dominance and are in the foreground where their achievements are recognised. Simply put, women provide the environment in which men's achievements take place or men assert their dominance. In the same way, the women in the trilogy seem to provide the environment for the armed men's dominion and are the subject of their achievement. However, the researcher argues that though the women protagonists are indeed deeply in shadow and are in the background, it is so because their resistances are scrunitised through the lens of the dominant men's and neo colonial's perspectives and they are interpreted in that discourse.

Foregrounding the subaltern women

In the trilogy, the playwright has put the women who are the victims of insurgency and counter insurgency measures in the front. They are foregrounded while the perpetrators are backgrounded. The perpetrators who are the representation of patriarchy and the dominant neo colonial forces are portrayed through symbols. In "*The Priestess*, the symbols used are 'Lammei' i.e. the fireballs and chairs with the head of a serpent while the serpents symbolise the armed forces in *Mythical Surrender*. The same is portrayed as men with horns and guns in *A Far Cry… A Reminder*. It can be argued that the playwright's use of symbols and not actual armed men against the female protagonists is to create a space or a discourse different from the patriarchal or the neo colonial space or discourse. The ambiguity of the perpetrators render their speech ambiguous and thus it leads to a discourse where the women speak for themselves. Leihao is a victim of counter insurgency measures and her body becomes the battlefield. The irony is the play ends with people commenting on her morality while she is rescued by Maibi Sanglakpi and her kind. As mentioned earlier, she leads a dual life. Her identity as a wife and as a mother puts her in that situation and on the other hand her identity as the server of god which cannot be contained inside the patriarchal nor the neo colonial domain frees her. Kusum in *A Far Cry… A Reminder* fixes the wheel which her father failed to do while he was alive. The wheel represents time and her father wants to fix time and lead them to a world of peaceful co existence where there is no discrimination. Kusum fixes the wheel but could not bring the time that

her father had longed for. However, the wheel of her cart is filled with the stories of the dead who are victims of different forms of violence that are meted out to the people in a conflict area. Before the death of her brother and her father, she continuously wrote letters to her elder brother to return back and lead a normal life like the brother of her friends. But their death takes away her sanity and she pulls a bullock cart carrying dead bodies, witnessing several deaths and retelling their unjust deaths. Thus, Kusum serves as the medium of narrating the inhumane treatment meted out to the people in the fringe. Like Leihao, Shanarei of *Mythical Surrender* loses her husband and her body is violated against her will. They represent the women of conflict areas whose bodies become a medium of war. Shanarei carries the child of her rapist which she calls venomous. She does not want to give birth to her son as she considers it as a venomous plant. The son turns out the way she has called it. He is born as serpent like his rapist father and follows his footsteps of torturing the common folks of Loktak. Shanarei goes beyond the traditional role of a mother who only cares and provides for her child by annihilating the venom that she has created. Thus, she is the creator as well as the destroyer and that brings her closer to Mother Nature. (Diana, 2021) She is left with no choice but to kill her own son to save the future generation and that she calls that choice "…the gift a violated mother gives to her son who is the seed of contaminated blood… this is a pure gift by me to save the future community…" (trans. 99).

Conclusion

It can be clearly seen through the arguments made above that the three women protagonists: Leihao, Kusum and Shanarei represent different sections of women of a conflict state like Manipur who are joined as a whole by their common sufferings in the hands of the excesses of militarisation. They are the subalterns whose voices and cries of injustice are set aside and not responded by those in power. The playwright realises that such subaltern women do put up strong resistance to violence and they can be only be presented by shifting the perspectives as well as the discourse from the dominant male and neo colonial ones to a female oriented perspectives and discourse. Thus, deviating from

Spivak's (1988) parlance that the subaltern cannot speak but also in consonance with what she meant by it, the playwright makes the subaltern speak.

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Bollywood and Monsters: The Love-Hate Bond

Aparajita Hazra

Abstract

The Indian Hindi film industry, lovingly called Bollywood, started its tryst with horror somewhere in the 1930s. Ever since then, horror has been one of the emotions that have been courted time and again in Bollywood films to considerable box-office popularity. What is intriguing is that, the history of the horror films that has regaled cine-goers down the years shows an interesting graduation as well as a remarkably esoteric syncretism. What started out as somewhat puerile and if not a tad hilarious projection of horror executed through West-inspired bizarre props and ghouls, has evolved down the years into serious depiction of fear through what Ellen Goldberg calls 'Cultural Horror' in films that probe tabooed issues of rape, honour killing and domestic violence. Again, Bollywood often draws upon the rich religious iconography of India to create the liminal aporia of terror or horror. For instance, the mystic and somewhat mysterious practices of *Tantric* or *Aghori Sadhana* often feature in Bollywood movies to create that otherworldly defamiliarization of the Gothic.

This paper proposes to take a deep look into how Bollywood horror often derives its monsters from the abounding oeuvre of Indian mythology and folklore as well as the troubled psychological realms of socio-cultural trauma, and in the process evolves from a rather simplistic dabbling in the *Unheimlich* to a more sophisticated reel-life study into socio-cultural abjection and evil.

Keywords: Bollywood, Cultural Horror, Defamiliarization, the Gothic, *Tantric, Unheimlich,* Abjection.

Indian films began their journey on 7th July 1896 with the short films by the Lumiere Brothers at the Watson Hotel in Bombay. Later, came films imported from abroad under the aegis of the colonial rule. *The Drum* by Zoltan Korda was one such film. Set at the Northwest Frontier of India, the film brings forth the political turmoil during the British Raj. *Gunga Din*, an American film that came out in 1939 is another such work. Directed by George Stevens, this film from RKO Radio Pictures starred Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. the plotline was adapted from the 1890 poem 'Gunga Din' by Rudyard Kipling. These films, mostly bearing the perspective of the colonizers, only worked to augment the colonial enterprise. These films, brought out chiefly between the 1930s and the 1940s, were known as the 'empire cinema' and 'presented ideological concerns and images in keeping with this imperial vision'[1]

The tables began to turn when the promotion of the Imperialist enterprise started giving way to a nationalist enterprise as Indian films began to appear in the cinematographic horizon. Dadasaheb Phalke brought out the first Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913. Then followed films like *Mohini Bhasmasur* in 1913, *Satyavan Savitri* in 1914, *Lanka Dahan* in 1917, *Shri Krishna Janma* in 1918, and *Kaliya Mardan* in 1919. Interestingly, all of these films drew their plotline from Indian mythology and the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Now, this crossover from the 'empire cinema' to the indigenous films also meant a crossover from imperialist themes, informed by the justification of the colonial enterprise, to a nativistic nationalism, informed by the religio-cultural heritage of India. On top of that cinema had the reach to the very grassroots of the Indian population , who, according to The Indian Cinematograph Committee, '…gain the cinema sense very quickly—the uneducated sometimes more quickly than the educated'.[2] The mythogical and epical stories came to life on the silver screen thereby almost providing a panoply of visual extravanga. This in turn, brought the mythological repertoire of India, that was the core vehicle of tradition, alive to the general Indian mind, be it literate or otherwise. This then acted as a contrapuntal reading of the liberal secular modernity that the British Raj stood for, and promoted the Hindu nationalistic fervor to the tee.

The visual arts in India have a long history. Right in the 1st century BCE, during the late-Mauryan (322-184 BCE) period, Asvaghosa composed *Sariputraprakarana* and the *Buddhacarita*. Bhasa was another Sanskrit playwright in the 1st century BCE whose works had remained undiscovered till as late as 1913 when the Indian scholar Ganapati Shastri discovered them. Later on, there came the illustrious playwright Kalidasa. According to Indologists like William Jones, A. B. Keith, Stanley Wolpert, Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi and Ram Gupta, Kalidasa ruled supreme around the 4th—5th century CE and wrote three plays: *Abhijnanasakuntalam* ("Of the recognition of Sakuntala"), *Malavikagnimitram* (*Pertaining to Malavika and Agnimitra*) and *Vikramôrvaúîyam* (*Ûrvaúî Won by Valour*). Most of these plays were high on Opsis as they brought spectacularity to the forefront for visual pleasure.

Even before that, right in the Vedic ages, the *Rig Veda* had a lot of story element couched in narrative, dialogue and musical forms. The stories in the form of dialogue, monologue, soliloquy or even chorus were called the *Akhyana* or *Samvada* hymns. These did not have much ritualistic value, and had a lot of purport to reality. The story element was known as the *Akhyana,* which could come across in the form of *Itihasa*[3], Purana[4], Mahakavya[5], Kavya[6] or Gatha Narasamsi.[7] Sanskrit theatre, right from the days of yore, thrived on state patronage, which meant that there was a decline when towards the 12th century there was a decline in the political authority of the indigenous dynasties. Traditional theatre forms persisted, though, in various forms in various parts of India. Even today, one comes across visual art forms like the *Jatra* in Bengal, *Tamasha* in Maharashtra, *Bhavai* in Gujarat, *Yakshagana* in Karnataka, *Koodiyattam* in Kerala, *Karyala* in Himachal, *Saang* in Rajasthan, *Bhand Pather* in Kashmir, *Bhaona* in Assam among other forms. And in all of these, visual extravaganza kept playing a pivotal role.

In most indigenous visual art forms in India, the plotlines drew heavily from mythology, the *Puranas*, the epics, *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Thus these visual art forms kept reiterating and thereby, fortifying the Indian cultural quintessence all the more.

Foreign influence came in with the Parsi theatre in India in the 1850s and ruled the roost till the 1930s.[8] In the mid 19th century, some members of the British community of Bombay (now Mumbai) were in the habit of staging plays as theatre. Taking a leaf out of that book, some students from the Elphinstone College started a Drama Society of their own and began performing Shakespearean plays. Initially written mostly in Urdu, the Parsi theatre, "Pari Natak Mandali" being the first, staged plays like *Roostum Zabooli and Sohrab* (1853), *King Afrasiab and Rustom Pehlvan, Padsah Faredun* among others. Later they performed in the pluricentric Hindostani, which had two standard registers, Hindi and Urdu. The Parsi Theatre, "blended realism and fantasy, music and dance, narrative and spectacle, earthy dialogue and ingenuity of stage presentation, integrating them into a dramatic discourse of melodrama".[9] But it was by the Parsi theatre that western influence was led into the performative culture of India.

But this paper will zero in on the way in which the Gothic has been projected in Indian Cinema. True enough, the Gothic may very well have been influenced by the West in Bollywood, and continues to do so, Indian films have managed to create an identity of their own too, as far as dealing with horror and terror. So films like *Mahal* (1949), *Puraani Haveli* (1989), or *1920* (2008), that use the stereotypical Gothic paraphernalia like the haunted castle, or the grotesque monster and startling noises, or films like *Gehrayee* (1980) that talk about demonic possession *a la The Exorcist* (1973), or films like *Chhori* (2021) that remind one heavily of films like the Children of the Corn movies (1984 to 2020), The Gothic in Bollywood, (this paper will only stick to the Bollywood film to keep it precise) has seen myriad vicissitudes that have interestingly been influenced by social, cultural as well as political inflections.

A quick look at the entire oeuvre of horror films that have been produced in India would reveal a gamut of around 135 movies. Now for the sake of aiding the discourse, this article will group them up into 5 phases according to chronology.

Phase one would cover around 20 years from 1946 to 1966 with 6 films in the genre of horror. Incidentally, it is important to mention that India earned her freedom from British colonization in 1947. This is important, as the fallout influences the cinema of the day too, as will be explained a little later in the article.

The second phase would roughly be from 1972 to 1999 around 35 films. Then came Phase-3 from 2002-11 with around 38 films. Phase-4 from 2011-17 had around 39 films while Phase-5 from 2018-21 has around 16 films so far.

Now, within the short span of this article, I shall carefully cull representative films from the entire oeuvre to clinch my arguments.

First let's take a look at Phase 1(1946 to 1966). I shall take up *Mahal* (1949) or Mansion, *Bees Saal Baad* (1962) or Twenty Years Later and *Woh Kaun Thi* (1964) or Who was She? These were movies that made optimum use of the mystique and struck a poignant note as far as the sad but beautiful ghosts in these movies were concerned.

Mahal as a film was listed in the British Film Institute's list of "10 great romantic horror films" and Scoopwhoop's "14 Bollywood Horror Movies That You Just Can't Watch Alone". So it was pretty scary. *Mahal* dealt with the theme of reincarnation as one finds the spectre of the wronged Kamini (played by the beautiful Madhubala) haunting the protagonist Shankar (played by Ashok Kumar). But later it was found that it was the very much alive Asha, who was pretending to be the ghost of Kamini because she thought that it would bring her close to Shankar. In *Bees Saal Baad*, the wrongdoers and their sons get killed supposedly by the vengeful spirit of a girl who had been raped and then had killed herself. The motif of revenge or '*Vindicta mihi*' looms large in the movie, especially the first part, but gradually it is revealed that it was actually her uncle Ramlal—absolutely alive and kicking—who was committing the murders. *Woh Kaun Thi* shows the hero Anand (played by Manoj Kumar) being haunted to the verge of insanity by the spectral doppelganger of his wife Sandhya (played by Sadhana Shivdasa). But later we find that it was Ramesh (played by Prem Chopra), Anand's cousin who was using Sandhya's long lost sister to create the spectral

charade so that Anand can be pronounced insane and the property would then pass on to him. So here we evidently come across the Radcliffean kind of Explained Supernatural.

So these films regale more in the Terror of the unknown than the actual horror of the macabre. And then of course, at the end comes the logical explanation to dispel all fear of the *Unheimlich*.

Now here we need to look a little beyond the text into the socio-political context of India as a nation. After Independence in 1947, the newly decolonised land was looking forward to modernity, with liberal, secular scientific methods more at work. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India from the Congress Party told the nation: 'scientific approach and temper are and should be, a way of life, a process of thinking, a method of acting and associating with our fellow men".[10] Thus, suppression of all that is orthodox and non-rational and based on religious faith came to be an integral part of the narrative of rational secular thinking. And thus we have the explained supernatural. Incidentally, it'll be nice to remember that Ann Radcliffe too was not very fond of Catholicism as religion.

Then we come to Phase 2(1972 to 1999). This phase saw the rise of the phenomenal 7-brother team of the Ramsays, namely, Kumar, Tulsi, Shyam, Keshu, Kiran, Gangu and Arjun Ramsay, who were sons of filmmaker Fateh Chand U. Ramsay, better known as F.U. Ramsay. The Ramsays doled out horror movies one after the other in rapid succession. Films like *Do Gaz Zameen ke Neechey* (1972) meaning Six Feet Under, directed by Tulsi Ramsay and Shyam Ramsay, and produced under the banner of Ramsay Films, finds the protagonist Rajvansh returning as a zombie of sorts, to avenge his murder by his wife Anjili. Then there was *Andhera (1975)* or Darkness, again by the Ramsay Brothers, just as was Darwaza (1978)or *The Door.* This was a phase when Bollywood Horror movies saw the Ramsay Brothers all over the place in producing cinema of Terror. In *Darwaza*, Suraj and his wife are trapped in an old cursed mansion where a monster wreaks havoc. Suraj slays the monster with the *Trishul* or trident in the temple of Kaali Mata as the only way out. In *Jaani Dushman* (1979) meaning Enemy of your

Life, on the day of the marriage, Jwala Prasad's bride, clad in red, poisons him, and he becomes a monster, and engages in abducting brides dressed in red and then killing them. In *Dahshat* (1981) or Terror, Vishal's wife injects a deadly animal serum into his body, and he turns into a bloodthirsty monster every night. In *Nagin* (1976) or The Serpent, the woman is a shapeshifter snake.

So, as a complete turnaround from the explained supernatural of Phase 1, we now have the introduction of the fantastic-grotesque. The monster becomes the metonymy for evil and the perfect epitome of what Julia Kristeva would call Abjection, where meaning and rationality made no sense any longer. The monster, the symbolic correlative of Evil is to be countered by religious faith symbolised by the *Trishul* or trident, *Sindoor* or vermilion, *Mangalsutra* or the holy thread of matrimony worn round the bride's neck, holy chants, *Havan* or ritual fire—all seminal signifiers of religious faith, by a *Tantric* or priest who exerts the agency of religion.

On top of that, the Shapeshifter movies of the Second phase(1972-1999) were coming up in a big way too. Apart from *Nagin* and *Dahshat* that we already discussed, we have here *Raat* (1992) or Night where a girl is possessed by the spirit of a dead cat and *Junoon* (1992) or Passion where we come across a sort of Were-tiger so to speak. Significantly, the motif of possession came up in a big way at this juncture too. Some of the who's who of Bollywood acted in some of these, thereby lending more gravity to these films, than was normally accorded to horror movies. The main impression that these grotesque monster infested films left behind, was that of blood and gore—lots of it. The Creature-feature was prominent in these movies too. The Shapeshifter demons were created by using a load of garish mudcake make up slapped on, as prosthetic make up had still not advanced much in Bollywood.

What is significant is that in almost all of these films, the epitomisation of intrinsic evil was defeated by using symbolic weapons and means that are pronouncedly linked to the sphere of religion—Hinduism, mostly. The strong and determined Religious overtone in stating that the weapon of God is the only way to slay the monster—the symbol of evil—was

blatant. The Good-Evil binary became more evident than ever with all traces of the explained supernatural taking a backseat in this second phase, as the nature of horror turned from Radcliffean to a more Walpolesque mien.

And all this time the Ramsay Brothers were making very brisk business by showing corpses dug out of graveyards—maniacal doctors doing strange things to dead bodies, trying to bring the dead back to life. There was a very clear warning against tampering with nature—so unbelieving, atheist nature-defying scientists were always brought to book by the monster in these films until they embraced Faith as the cure-all panacea.

Now, just as the rationalising of the Uncanny in the first phase was a reflection of the socio-political weltanschauung of the day, the excessive emphasis on Religious faith in this second phase was mirroring the social or rather the socio-political backdrop.

In 1975, Indira Gandhi of the Congress Party, the then Prime Minister of India declared Emergency Rule purportedly to calm down a festering nation. But After the Declaration of Emergency in 1975, the common people lost faith more than ever in the state apparatus and all that it stood for. The Nehruvian ideals of secularism came into question too as the Congress failed to live up to the expectations of most of the general public. Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Economic Growth (University of Delhi) and editor of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, T N Madan once famously said in a lecture delivered at the President's Panel in Honor of the Fulbright Fortieth Anniversary Program, on the occasion of the 1987 meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in Boston: 'The principal question is not whether Indian society will eventually become secularised as Nehru believed it would, but rather whether it is desirable that it should?'[11]

Thus the celebration of the mythic, the mystic and religious orthodoxy came up as a counter narrative to secular efforts at modernity that had ruled the roost in the earlier phase. On top of that in 1967, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was established by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, advocating the rebuilding of India as a nation in complete accordance with Hindu

culture and this movement gained a substantial foothold in the Hindi-speaking regions of northern India before the BJP was formally established in 1980. As a result the symbols of Hindutwa like the *trishul*, the *yagna*, the *mangalsutra*, the *sindoor* etc. came to be lionised and heroed. Supernatural Possession became one big theme in vogue in films like *Raat*, *Gehrayee* (1980) etc., in the same line of thought. In *Gehrayee*, the daughter of non believer industrialist father is possessed. As events take turns towards the bizarre, the non believer has to accept faith at the end, as relief comes only when the little girl is exorcised by a Tantrik priest. In *Jadu-Tona*, a little girl's body gets eerily possessed by a criminal's soul who wishes to get revenge on some of his former criminal friends. Here too the respite comes when the little girl is exorcised by a priest. In *Mangalsutra,* Gayatri is a devout Hindu and is married to the atheist Vijay. The non-believer Vijay gets possessed. He has to be exorcised by a Tantrik to allow good to prevail over evil.

In all of these films, the practice of curing exorcism of demonic possession through orthodox rituals was emphasised, thereby highlighting the belief in the supernatural.

As the second phase leads on to the third phase (2002-11), one finds that the possession motif continued through the next phases too. The motif of possession continued, but one significant change is that, this time the bizarre and grotesque monsters many a time gave way to the Monstrous Feminine. The damsel in distress disappeared and the femme fatale rose to prominence. But the tralatitious religious iconography continued in the form of the infallible remedy to evil. The *trishul*, the *rudraksh*, the *nimbu-mirchi*, the holy water, force-cremation of the possessed body etc kept reminding the audience that it is one's faith in religion that saves the day.

But some add-ons were there in the new phase. There were more normal people now in the character line up—not the larger than life unrelatable ones of the earlier phase. Relatable situations like relationship rifts, extramarital attraction, urban condominiums as location for the monstrous were brought in. Psychological nuances were attempted, but there was an interesting return of the Revenge Motif from Phase 1.

One mentionable factor in this phase was the entry of many big names of Bollywood into these horror films for the first time signalling the impression that horror films were beginning to be less despised than before. The more famous and established actors did not feel that acting in horror movies is going to tarnish their image, thereby lending a sense of authenticity to the films. For instance *Kaal* (2005) had names like Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn, Vivek Oberoi, Lara Dutta, Esha Deol in its star cast. The audience started taking these horror films seriously. Watching a horror movie was no longer puerile or flippant business.

The seriousness of these films was heightened by the fact that some of these films also took up social issues. *Kaal* (2005) or Time, talked of preserving wildlife. *Gauri, the Unborn* (2007) raised the concern for Female Foeticide.

This was a time when Bollywood reached out to the world too. *Naina* (2005) or Eyes, was premiered in the Marché du Film section of the 2005 Cannes Film Festival. It was an adaptation of the 2002 Hong Kong-Singaporean horror film *The Eye* directed by the Pang brothers. Again, *Anjaane* (2005) or the Unknown was based on Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001). So, clearly, Bollywood was no longer embarrassed with its horror movies .

Then came Phase - 4. But in this phase, there was a slight but significant regression in the subject matter and technicalities of filmography. Apart from a few like *Bhootnath Returns* (2014), most of the films made use of the Grotesque. The cheap thrills, the good-and-evil binary, the jumpscares were still there. Not much psychological complexity worked behind the incidents of the uncanny. Interestingly, mythology and religion stood strong ground again. For instance, in *Creature 3D* (2014), directed by Vikram Bhatt, the monster is a *Brahmarakshas*, a man-eating demon whom Brahma, the Hindu god of creation, has cursed to become a creature with no salvation, eternally condemned to roam on earth and suffer.

Fighting evil with religious iconography was still the invincible combatant for the demonic evil. For instance, in *Machhli Jal ki Rani Hai*

(2014), directed by Debaloy Dey, the Spirit is defeated with the help of the spiritual *kamandal* or the holy water pot and the holy trishul (trident)

There was, in this phase, some effort to involve technology in horror too. *Ragini MMS* (2011) did try to raise the menace of cybercrime, but plummetted into the vortex of eroticism. *3G—A Killer Connection* (2013) shows Sam facing eerie happenings after he buys a 3G enabled phone. *13 B* (2009) had a ghostly presence involving a television .

But the majority of horror films in this phase saw the resurgence of the sort of shallowness that ruled the horror films from the old Phase-2 again, punctuated by exotic locations and again, a deliberate movement towards a little tilt towards eroticism. The plotline would be rather clichéd with a rubric of cheap thrills trying to keep the gothic feel alive.

In the last phase, which I shall call Phase -5, the thrills and scares were there of course, but a visible attempt to raise social issues alongside was seen subcutaneously. *Pari* or Fairy (2018) tried to expose the radicalism of religious beliefs and the wrongs against women. *Tumbadd* (2018) was a well-made play denigrating the endless greed of man. S*tree* (2018) or Woman tried teaching the necessity of respect for women. Again, *Laxmii* (2020) is a statement for the social acceptance of transgenders. *Roohi* (2021) or Soulful, as a film, exposes the horrific custom of bride-lifting in some parts of Northern India. *Bhoot Police* (2021) or Policing the Ghost, exposes the excruciating pain meted out by the British Colonisers to the poor colonised labourers through a vivid flashback that explains the raison d'être of the ghostly presence. *Bulbbul* (2020) is the eponymous film where the beautiful protagonist of the same name turns out to be the witch or c*hurail* herself and showed up to be the real champion of women.

So, the motif of the Monstrous Feminine continues in the films in this phase. Strangely, in a weird way, these movies empower women and leave men at their mercy. Even the Female Gaze is evident in the camera perspectives of some of the movies, which visualise the events from the perspective and visual angle of the woman. The Gothic, as a champion of transgression in one way, probably opens up allowance for other transgressions serving to advance important social causes.

But the trend of normalising the supernatural continues till date. The explained supernatural of the first phase seems to have taken a long break as Bollywood horror revels in the delicious suspension of disbelief.

Endnotes

1. P. Chowdhry. Colonial India and he Making of Empire Cinema: image, ideology and identity. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 1
2. W. Mazzarella. 'Making Sense of the Cinema in late Colonial India' in censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from sedition to Seduction. (Indianapolis: Indian University Press. 2009) pp 63- 86. P66.
3. Itihasa; Itihasa or 'Ini-ha-asa' means so it was indeed. So Itihasa brings forth accounts of former incidents in history.
4. Purana: Purana means ancient, old, of yore. So the Puranas were accounts of stories from the ages before. There are 18 Mahapuranas or Major Puranas—Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Shiva, Bhagavata, Narada, Markandeya, Agni, Bhavisya, Brahmavaivarta, Linga, Varaha, Skanda, Vamana, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda, and Brahmanda Purana and Upapuranas or the Minor Puranas.
5. Mahakavya: Mahakavya means great kavya, or poetry and thus mostly refer to the genre of Indian epic poetry describing elaborate accounts of war, love and life in Sanskrit. The Ramayana with 24000 verses and the Mahabharata with about 100000 verses, were two of the most famous Mahakavyas. Later on there came other texts like the *Kumarasambhava* and the *Kiratarjuniya.*
6. Kavya: Kavya means poetry. The poet Asvaghoca (c. 80–150 AD), is said to have used the term for the first time. Kavya is a short lyrical work or narrative in a Sanskrit literary style punctuated by metaphors, similes, and hyperbole, used by Indian court poets between c.200 BCE and 1200 CE.
7. Gatha Narasamsi: Gatha Narasamsi is a form of story telling existing from the Vedic times and mentioned in ancient texts like the Shatapatha Brahmana. The storytellers, often known as the Vinaganaginas, would

tell the stories of valiant heroes and extol their deeds, often to the accompaniment of the musical instrument Veena.

8. Ananda Lal. (ed.). *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2004).
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Veeram and *Joji*: Intertextual Dialogism, Hypertext Formations, and the Malayali Macbeths

Sacaria Joseph & Anuradha Mazumder

Abstract

Adapting a literary work presupposes reimagining the work: and adapting it into a new socio-cultural milieu presupposes stretching the process of reimagining further. Composed in the first decade of the 17th century, and set in 11th-century Scotland, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* embodies a distinctly Eurocentric *weltanschauung*. Therefore, adapting the play in a non-Eurocentric milieu entails an automatic adoption of a non-Eurocentric *weltanschauung* in and through the cultural and ethical codes of the milieu in question.

This paper studies two 21st-century Malayalam film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, namely, Jayaraj's *Veeram* (2017) and Dileesh Pothan's *Joji* (2021), through the critical lens of adaptation theory to examine how effectively the directors reimagine and re-embed *Macbeth* within two different historical and cultural milieus of Kerala. The films surprise us with their innovative approaches to the process of adaptation: *Veeram* relocates the drama, the murders, and the power struggle in Macbeth in the medieval feudal society of Kerala, and its retelling of the Scottish play is mediated through the epic narrative tropes of the *Vadakkan Pattukal* ('Northern Ballads') composed in Kerala between the 16th and 18th centuries; *Joji* sanitizes itself clean of all external, recognizable similarities with the dramatic original and becomes an intriguing exploration of a diseased, amoral mind while still retaining unmistakable parallels and allusions to Shakespeare. The atmosphere of Jayaraj's *Veeram* is suffused with the warrior ethics of the 'Northern Ballads,' while that of Pothan's *Joji* is clouded by the masked threat of the COVID-19

pandemic that cleverly alludes to the disease-and-sickness motif of Shakespeare's play.

Through their relocating, transforming, absorbing, and splintering of the dramatic hypotext in different ways, these adaptations point to the continued influence of Shakespeare in the Indian filmic imagination. More importantly, the plethora of meanings and interpretative possibilities generated through these cross-cultural refashionings of Shakespeare validates these adaptations as significant additions to the discursive field of adaptation studies and invites us to consider these films as independent creative acts in their own right.

Keywords: Shakespeare, adaptation, *Macbeth*, intertextuality, hypertext, popular culture, Indian cinema.

Introduction

Adapting a literary work presupposes reimagining the work. Adapting it into a new milieu presupposes stretching the process of reimagining further. Composed in the first decade of the seventeenth century, and set in eleventh-century Scotland, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* embodies a distinctly Eurocentric *weltanschauung*. Therefore, adapting the play in a non-Eurocentric milieu entails an automatic adoption of a non-Eurocentric *weltanschauung* in and through the social, cultural, political economic and ethical codes of the milieu in question. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has been adapted into films in various languages as well as into various social, cultural, political and economic milieus at different times over the years. Every adaptation is not only different from the others but also adds new dimensions to the Shakespearean play. Jayaraj's *Veeram* (2017) and Dileesh Pothan's *Joji* (2021) are two instances of reimagining *Macbeth* in Malayalam within two different historical and cultural milieus of Kerala. Both films surprise us with their innovative approaches to the process of adaptation: *Veeram* relocates the drama, the murders, and the power struggle in *Macbeth* in the medieval feudal society of Kerala, and its retelling of the Scottish play is mediated through the epic narrative tropes of the *Vadakkan Pattukal* ('Northern Ballads') composed in Kerala between the 16th and 18th centuries; *Joji*

sanitizes itself clean of all external, recognizable similarities with the dramatic original and becomes an intriguing exploration of a diseased, amoral mind while still retaining unmistakable parallels and allusions to Shakespeare. The atmosphere of Jayaraj's *Veeram* is suffused with the warrior ethics of the Northern Ballads, while that of Pothan's *Joji* is clouded by the masked threat of the COVID-19 pandemic that cleverly alludes to the disease-and-sickness motif of Shakespeare's play. This paper studies two recent films by two Malayali directors – *Veeram* and *Joji* – through the critical lens of adaptation theory to examine how effectively the directors reimagine *Macbeth* in the twenty-first century, within two different historical and cultural milieus of Kerala.

Critical discourse on film adaptation is largely influenced by the nature of the relationship between a literary work and its film adaptation; therefore, a study on film adaptation necessarily presupposes a clarification of the relation between the literary work and its film adaptation. This paper will discuss three distinct discourses of film adaptation – the slightly dated but still prevalent discourse that places a premium on the fidelity of the film adaptation to its literary original; a second discourse that considers film adaptation as an independent signifying practice, and the more recent discourses that read film adaptation as an intertextual dialogical process leading to hypertext formations. Against this theoretical background, the paper would analyse *Veeram* and *Joji* as instances of intertextual dialogism as well as hypertext formation, whereby *Macbeth*, the hypotext, is interpreted, reimagined, re-contextualised in a different culture and transformed into films independent of Shakespeare's generic model.

Film Adaptation and the Fidelity Question

If the meaning of a literary work is regarded as the meaning intended by the author which the author wants to communicate to the reader, reading becomes the process of arriving at the author-intended meaning. "Intention is design or plan in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 121-2). The completion of the act of composing a work may be regarded as proof of the

intention of the author. From this point of view, a film adaptation of a literary work becomes the cinematic rendition of the author-intended meaning embedded in the literary work.

Film adaptation discourse has traditionally been dominated by the conventional notion of the superiority of a literary work to its film adaptation on account of what Robert Stam refers to as three superimposed prejudices:

> *seniority*, the assumption that older arts are necessarily better arts; *iconophobia*, the culturally rooted prejudice (traceable to the Judai-Muslim-Protestant prohibition on "graven Images" and to the Platonic and Neoplatonic depreciation of the world of phenomenal appearance) that visual arts are necessarily inferior to the verbal arts; and *logophilia*, the converse valorisation, characteristic of the "religions of the book," of the sacred word" of the holy texts (Stam 58).

This presupposition of the superiority of the literary work calls for the adaptation's fidelity to its literary source. The notion of fidelity to the literary work makes the process of adaptation a process of transposing the literary original from its literary matrix to the cinematic matrix capturing its author-intended meaning – its 'essence' – while retaining or recreating the fundamental qualities and significance of the original. The plot, ideas, descriptive details, and other stylistic dimensions of the literary work must also be translated into appropriate audio-visual analogues pregnant with significance. In this context, "if a film is to be a good adaptation, it needs to be faithful to its literary source and that the best adaptations are those that come closest to preserving and revering the literary text" (Cartmell and Whelehan 2).

One approach to ensuring fidelity to the literary source while adapting it to a film is to follow the chain of events in the literary original systematically and translate them into cinematic images with such faithful precision that the literary work remains 'intact' as far as possible in the cinematic medium. The filmmaker does so if he considers the literary work a sacrosanct signified. In such a scenario, he tries to maintain faithfulness to the plot, the theme, the form and other vital aspects of

the literary source more or less exhaustively in the film adaptation. He is careful not to introduce into the film anything alien to the text. Such an approach, while trying to ensure the preservation of the supposed essence of the literary work, may not be mindful of the techniques of cinema that are vital for a good film.

Under the sway of the fidelity question, film adaptations of plays are often conceived essentially in terms of the theatre. In such productions, the text of the play is neither re-arranged nor altered. Paul Newman's adaptation of Tennessee Williams's play, *The Glass Menagerie*, is a typical instance of the literal translation of a play into a film. Because of his obsession with fidelity to the original, Newman wanted to make his film as close to Williams's play as possible. He adapted the play without having conceived it sufficiently in cinematic terms, and the result is an unsatisfactory adaptation. "The success of movie versions of plays is measured by the extent to which the script rearranges and displaces the action and deals less than respectfully with the spoken text" (Sontag 28); Newman, on the contrary, treats his dramatic original as sacrosanct. The BBC Television Shakespeare series — British adaptations of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays for television is another interesting case study in this context. They are plays filmed on location with fidelity to the literary work as their defining feature. Jack Gold's 1983 *Macbeth* is another such instance of a popular film version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; but the 'faithfulness' of the film to the Shakespearean original is such that it is more appropriate to call it a filmed play rather than a film adaptation. Unsurprisingly, *The New York Times* reviewed it saying that Gold's "*Macbeth* has the uncluttered directness of a first-rate documentary" (O'Connor) while *The Christian Science Monitor* reviewed it saying, "this production often cannot make up its mind if it wants to be a studio-stylized version or a naturalistic version" (Unger). In order to satisfy the expectations of the audience, film adaptations of classics often attempt to remain true to the original through an almost literal translation of the source text into the language of film, which often results in unimaginative adaptations. Conscious of this practical difficulty, Bernard Shaw advises filmmakers with his characteristic candour: "Do not treat my printed text with blindly

superstitious reverence. It must always be adapted intelligently to the studio, the screen, the stage, or whatever the physical conditions of performance may be" (Dukore 166).

Radically reinterpreting the literary work and transposing it into the medium of cinema by remaining faithful to the meaning and spirit of the original is another way of trying to ensure fidelity to the literary source. Akira Kurosawa's 1957 film, *Kumonosu-djo* (known in English as *The Throne of Blood*), is an example of such a radical reinterpretation and transposition of *Macbeth* into the medium of cinema. Kurosawa transmutes the theme of *Macbeth* onto the screen, reinterpreting it through the artistic conventions of the Noh tradition of classical Japanese drama. The theme of *The Throne of Blood* is *ge-koku-jo*, which in Japanese means 'the retainer murders his lord and deprives him of his power.' Such treacherous murders were quite prevalent in many parts of Japan during the Japanese civil war, which lasted for a hundred years beginning from the 1460s; soon the civil war itself came to be known as *ge-koku-jo* (Manvell 113). Kurosawa found the theme of *ge-koku-jo* – 'treacherous murder' – in *Macbeth* too. Therefore, retaining the spirit of *Macbeth* to the best of his ability, he reinterpreted the Shakespearean original in the light of Japanese sensibility and through the conceptual lens of the *ge-koku-jo*. Hence, as Anthony Davies notes, "the dramatic rise and fall in *Throne of Blood* bear a remarkably close relationship with the dramatics of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" (153). Interestingly enough, critics came up with varying responses to the film. While many consider it a commendable adaptation of *Macbeth*, some, like Geoffrey Reeves and Peter Brooks refuse to call it a Shakespearean film, because, it does not use the text. Even Frank Kermode refuses to consider it as a version of *Macbeth* but regards it only as an allusion to Shakespeare's play (Davies 154). The fidelity question presupposes that a literary work "'contains' an extractable 'essence,' a kind of 'heart of the artichoke' hidden 'underneath' the surface details of style" (Stam 57). The supposed extractable essence and intention of the author, if such things do exist, are not accessible except through the text.

Usually, when an adaptation is commended for its 'faithfulness' to its literary original, it garners praise for capturingwhat is considered to

be the fundamental aspects, the 'essence' or the 'spirit' of the literary original. However, as Dudley Andrew notes in *Concepts in Film Theory*, "More difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original's tone, values, imagery and rhythm, since finding stylistic equivalents in film for these intangible aspects is the opposite of a mechanical process" (100). Moreover, "Fidelity criticism depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct 'meaning' which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with" (McFarlane 3). The supposed single, correct meaning is none other than the meaning intended by the author. Therefore, traditionally, as Roland Barthes says in his essay, *Death of the Author,*" The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (143).

In fact, there is no consensus as to what fidelity to the source entails – whether it is fidelity to the plot with all its accompanying details, or the physical description of characters, or the author's intention (if ever he had any clear intention) which is difficult to arrive at anyway, or the style and artistic devices, or the narrative point of view. Since there is no guarantee that an author composes a text with a specific meaning and intention in mind, the argument of fidelity to the literary work in adaptation does not hold sufficient water (Stam 57-8). According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (121). Therefore, the intention of the author has no relevance in interpreting its meaning.

Jessamyn West, the American novelist, was convinced of the pitfalls of an overemphasis on the fidelity question. When her stories were being made into films, "she felt it would be better to have a good film not faithful to the book than an inferior film faithful to the book" (Fischer 44).West herself made the necessary changes in her original stories in order to make them filmic. She argued that "a book should merely serve as the idea, the stimulus, [and] the inspiration for the film script" (Fischer 44). Moving away from the conventional notion of

fidelity in adaptation, Robert Stam similarly argues that "an adaptation should be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression" (58). Stam's observation duly recognizes the different demands of different artistic mediums.

Film Adaptation as an Independent Signifying Practice

Barthes argues that the person whom we traditionally regard as the author of a work is not the author but a mere scriptor, "born simultaneously with the text" (145). The scriptor does not decide or finalise the meaning of a text. He has no control over the limitless possibilities of meaning that can emerge from every reading of the text. From a post-structuralist perspective, a literary text, as Michel Foucault describes it, is nothing more than "an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier"(116). A text is not the vehicle for the scriptor to express his emotions or ideas. Since a text is not intended to express or communicate anything, it does not express or communicate anything. Hence, Foucault says that "the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of "expression'; it only refers to itself" (116). Writing is never a finished product; instead, it is an ongoing process. As Barthes argues, "*writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction…; rather, it designates … a performative, a rare verbal form in which the enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered" (145-46). Since a text has no inherent meaning other than the meaning that the reader attributes to it, a good literary work posits infinite possibilities of readings leading to multiple interpretations, critiques and meanings. Every reading adds new dimensions to the literary work that were not explored in earlier readings.

From the post-structuralist view of things, therefore, a film adaptation can be regarded as a cinematic rendition of the filmmaker's act of reading a literary work. Since every reading posits possibilities of new meanings, the literary work lends itself to infinite possibilities of film adaptations. From this point of view, the art and craft of adaptation becomes an act of interpretation, a meaning-making act, and the resultant creation becomes a new work of art almost independent of, but in

relation to, the original. Hence, a film adaptation is no longer a signifier of the literary work that inspired it. Instead, it merely stands in a relation of reference to the original; as such, it must be considered an independent work of art. Just as a literary work is, in Foucault's words, "an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier" (116), a film adaptation is also an interplay of signs. In fact, as Stam points out, the "structuralist semiotics of the 1960s and 1970s treated all signifying practices as productive of 'texts' worthy of the same close attention as literary texts" (58).

Film Adaptation as an Intertextual Dialogical Process

Based on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which argues that every text is interrelated and interdependent on previous texts created within a socio-political textual environment, Julia Kristeva developed her theory of intertextuality. While the terms 'intertext' and 'intertextuality' are understood differently by different semioticians like Gerard Gennette, Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre and Julia Kristeva, all of them agree that just as a sign refers to other signs rather than directly to things, a text refers to other texts. In her essay, "Word, Dialogue and the Novel," Kristeva argues that "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read … any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). All texts, including film texts, are intertextual in nature. If an intertext, as Robert Scholes says, is "a text lurking inside another, shaping meanings, whether the author is conscious of this or not" (150), the relation between a literary text and its film adaptation is intertextual in nature.

In its widest sense, the concept of intertextuality implies that every individual text is a fragment of a larger cultural discourse. "The concept of intertextual dialogism suggests that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces. All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations on those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and conflations and inversions of other texts" (Stam 64). Therefore, every text must be understood in relation to other texts, their textual dynamics and ideological assumptions.

Dialogism, according to Bakhtin, implies a text lending itself to multiple and even contradictory points of view. "The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while itsactual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments" (Bakhtin 281).The intertextual turn in film criticism with regard to film adaptations of literary texts was the result of Bakhtin's concept of the author as an orchestrator of a pre-existing discourse, which opened up a non-originary approach to all arts. When we approach the adaptation question from the perspective of 'intertextual dialogism, "an adaptation … [will come across] less [as] an attempted resuscitation of an originary word than [as] a turn in an ongoing dialogical process" (Stam 64). Stam rounds off his arguments with an apt comment on how film adaptations are "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts on an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (66).

Film Adaptation as Hypertext Formation

The relation between the literary text and its film adaptation can be explained from the perspective of hypertextuality, as discussed by Gerard Genette in his 1982 book, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree.* In Genette's words, "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext)* to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5). Understood in this sense, while a literary work becomes the hypotext by virtue of predating its film adaptation, the latter becomes the hypertext. The grafting process enables the hypertext to exist independently of the hypotext, in fact, even without making a mention of it. The former originates from the latter through a process which Genette refers to as "transformation." In the hands of a filmmaker, all the existing film adaptations and their literary original together form a collective hypotext. To quote Stam again, "Film adaptations, in this sense, are hypertexts derived from pre-existing hypotexts that have been transformed by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and articulation" (66).

This paper analyzes two recent adaptations of *Macbeth* in regional Indian cinema – in the Malayalam film industry to be specific, with its distinct cultural and cinematic sensibilities – to see how Britain's Bard is 're-worlded' in two distinct temporal and socio-cultural milieus of Kerala, one of the Southern states of the Indian subcontinent. It reads the adaptations through the critical lens of intertextual dialogism, and as instances of unique hypertext formations that become interesting sites of intersection of other texts, including texts which will be written in the future.

Veeram: *Macbeth* in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*

The 'Northern Ballads' and the 'Southern Ballads' (*Vadakkan Pattukal* and *Thekkan Pattukal*, respectively) are the two sets of Malayalam folk poetry passed down the generations through the powerful oral traditions of Kerala. The Ballads are a rich source of information on Kerala's folk tradition and literature. The songs of the 'Northern Ballads' especially focus on the heroic deeds of local warriors and celebrate the local martial art traditions; its heroes and heroines mainly belong to the *Puthooram* house and the *Thacholi* house of the medieval feudal society of Kerala. The 'Northern Ballads' also narrate the story of the famed warrior, Chandu Chekavar, who had been known for centuries as the master of deceit till M. T. Vasudevan Nair rescripted the legend, vindicating Chandu as a misunderstood man, in the Hariharan-directed celebrated film, *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989).

However, when Jayaraj looked at the *Vadakkan Pattukal* through a Shakespearean lens nearly three decades later, he saw the ever-unfolding significance of *Macbeth* in the tale of Chandu Chekavar's intemperate ambition and brutal betrayal of his cousin, Aromal Chekavar, while assisting the latter as his lieutenant in a duel against Aringodar Chekavar. In Chandu from the *Vadakkan Pattukal* (composed between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, and depicting the medieval feudal society of Northern Kerala) one indeed finds an intriguing Indian counterpart of the medieval Scottish army general, Macbeth. The textual dynamics and ideological assumptions of the tale of Macbeth stand in an intertextual and dialogical relation to the tale of Chandu in the *Vadakkal Pattukal*.

Placed alongside each other, the tale of Macbeth seems to incarnate in that of Chandu or vice versa, each enriching the other. Discussing the dialogics of adaptation, in his book, *Film Adaptation*, Stam writes:

> In the broadest sense, intertextuality or dialogism refers to the open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated, and which reach the text not only through recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination" (64).

Macbeth, situated in a Eurocentric *weltanschauung* (punctuated by a unique set of political, economic, social and cultural codes) in an intertextual, dialogical encounter with its Indian counterpart, situated in an Indian *weltanschauung* (punctuated by an entirely different set of codes) – that is how we can look upon Jayaraj's ambitious epic film, *Veeram* (2017), an adaptation of *Macbeth*, shot simultaneously in Malayalam, Hindi, and English. Jayaraj enfleshes the human drama in *Macbeth* in the tale of Chandu of the warlike medieval feudal society of northern Kerala, organised along the heroic ideals embedded in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. These heroic ideals were fostered in the *Kalari*, training schools for 'kalarippayattu,' a form of martial art that originated in Kerala in the sixth century BCE and is considered among the oldest martial arts in the world. The *Kalari* discourse underscored the importance of mastering 'kalarippayattu' and engaging in 'ankam' (duel) for noble causes – the highest ideals for every young man (and even for women, in some cases). It was an age in which disputes, especially disputes among noblemen that could not be settled in local assemblies, were settled by fighting an 'ankam' either directly or indirectly through hired professional fighters known as 'Chekavar's (warriors). "As a matter of honour and chivalry all those who were approached with the request to take part in the ankam willingly agreed to do so. We also find when professional mercenaries were engaged by parties on payment basis for participation in the ankam" (Menon 83).

Chandu's betrayal of his cousin was his act of revenge against Aromal and his family; for they had denied Chandu permission to marry

his childhood sweetheart, and Aromal's sister, Unniyarcha. Despite being Aromal's assistant in the duel, Chandu sabotages Aromal by allying with the latter's enemy, Aringodar; Chandu secretly gets the metal rivets fastening the blade of Aromal's sword to its hilt replaced with wooden rivets, resulting in the blade breaking loose of the hilt at a critical moment during the duel. Despite the sabotage, Aromal wins the duel by hurling his broken blade at Aringodar and killing him instantly. Nevertheless, after the victory, Chandu stabs an unguarded Aromal to death at an opportune moment. Befitting his act of betrayal and the subsequent murder of Aromal, Chandu in the *Vadakkan Pattukal* came to be known as 'Chathiyan Chandu' ('Chandu the betrayer'). In the legends, Chandu is later killed by Aromal's son, Kannappanunni, and his cousin, Aromalunni. Chandu's redemption in *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (*A Northern Ballad of Valour*) notwithstanding, Jayaraj saw in Chandu emerging from the *Vadakkan Pattukal* a perfect counterpart of Macbeth. In these twelfth-century legends surrounding Chandu, Jayaraj identified the fundamentals of the plot of the sixteenth-century Shakespearean drama.

> There is a great similarity between Chandu's betrayal of Aromal and Macbeth's betrayal of Duncan … Chandu kills his cousin Aromal while Aromal is sleeping in Chandu's lap. Macbeth kills his cousin and king in sleep. Aromal sleeps in Chandu's lap because of his trust in his cousin, so also, Duncan sleeps in Macbeth's house because of his trust in his cousin …. It is a woman who provokes each of them to murder — his ladylove [who is also the niece of Aringoder], Kuttimani, in the case of Chandu, and his wife, Lady Macbeth, in the case of Macbeth" (Jayaraj, *Veeram*).

If Shakespeare's Macbeth is compelled to murder Duncan for the throne of Scotland, Jayaraj's Chandu is moved to murder Aromal to become the 'Chekavar' ('warrior in charge') of the 'Eighteen and a Half Kalari' in place of Aromal. His grudge against Aromal for his objection to his much-desired marriage with Unniyarcha, as well as the seductive Kuttimani's sway over him, provide him with the necessary spur for the heartless betrayal and murder of Aromal. "Guilt and penitence and the

inscrutable desire for power that rule their lives, make Chandu and Macbeth strikingly similar individuals, while Kuttimani dons the garb of Lady Macbeth with a notable ease" (Veeyen). The plot of the film unfolds at a fast pace in a conspicuous paralleling of the plotline of *Macbeth*. *Veeram* can be seen as *Macbeth* unfolding in the twelfth-century feudal society of Kerala among the Chekavar clans, and yet it is a film independent of *Macbeth*.

Veeram brings together two distinct yet astonishingly similar cultures and texts in a dialogical process in which the significance of each is unfolded and enhanced further. "Film adaptations," as Stam argues, "can be seen as a kind of multileveled negotiations of intertexts" (67), and *Veeram* is a significant example of such a negotiation. Like any other film adaptation, as Stam would argue, *Veeram* "is caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, which no clear point of origin" (66). While Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the tale of Chandu in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*, and the film *Veeram* exist in an intertextual dialogical relation, they also exist in a relation of hypertext and hypotext: *Veeram* is the hypertext, with Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the legend of Chandu together forming the immediate hypotext. Simultaneously, Jayaraj's film also stands in an intertextual relation with Hariharan's retelling of the Chandu legend in his celebrated 1989 Malayalam-language epic-historical film, *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*.

Joji: A Hypertext to *Macbeth* and *Irakal*

Dileesh Pothan's 2021 film, *Joji,* opens with a declaration that it is inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Talking about his film, Pothan clarifies, "*Joji* is not an adaptation of *Macbeth*. We have not used the plot of *Macbeth* in the film in any way" (Pothan, Dileesh Pothan Interview: Part 1). *Macbeth,* in fact, remains nothing more than a source of inspiration for the film. However, the intention of the filmmaker notwithstanding, an informed audience immediately recognises echoes of *Macbeth* lurking all over *Joji*.

Set in the insulated world of a sprawling, lush rubber plantation in

the lap of a Covid-19-ridden rural Kerala, *Joji* depicts the tragic tale of its eponymous protagonist Joji, the youngest son of Kuttappan P K Panachel, a wealthy plantation owner from a Jacobite Syrian Christian community. Kuttappan, the daunting, iron-fisted, ageing patriarch, runs the Panachel family and his estate in a way that allows little breathing space to other members of the family, comprising his sons, Jomon, Jaison, and Joji along with Jomon's son, Popy, and Jaison's wife, Bincy. As long as the patriarch is at the helm of affairs, none of them enjoys either personal freedom or financial independence. Everyone, except Jomon (who alone loves and respects the father), is found to be secretly looking forward to the death of the patriarch for their own personal reasons. Deception and scheming are, thus, at the heart of the film. The scenic beauty and the seeming serenity of the plantation around the house serve to mask the discontent, tension, greed, and hostility lurking in the minds of most of the family members. To mask is to conceal and deceive; and the Covid-19 mask, along with the scenic beauty and the seeming serenity of the locale, functions as a powerful metaphor for deception, which is a leitmotif in *Macbeth*. Both serve as objective correlatives to the theme of deception embedded in the Shakespearean text: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.7.82). "To beguile the time / Look like the time — bear welcome in your eye / Your hand, your tongue; Look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under't" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.2.61-64).

Joji, the eponymous protagonist of the film is a far cry from Macbeth. Apart from being the meekest, and the physically weakest among the three brothers, he is an emotionally disturbed, indolent, insecure, and sly engineering dropout, a failure in the eyes of his authoritative father. To add insult to injury, he is financially dependent on his father, who calls him a 'second-rate loser' and abuses him both verbally and physically. He is neither able to stand up to his father nor strong enough to cope with the stifling ambience in which he finds himself. Even then, indolent as he is, the idea of orchestrating his father's murder does not come to him until a sudden medical emergency at home presents him with an opportunity. He engineers his father's death by tampering with the old man's medication when the latter is recuperating from his stroke-induced

paralysis. Bincy, who is aware of Joji's patricidal plot (for more than one reason, it could be said that she is the one who plants the seeds of the plot in him, though unwittingly), looks the other way, with her own calculated intent.

After getting rid of his father, a remorseless but distraught Joji murders Jomon, the next patriarchal figure in the family, in his desperate but futile attempt to cover up his role in his father's death. As the chickens begin to come home to roost, and Joji finds himself cornered from every side and exposed, he shoots himself in the head before the police come to arrest him; but he does not die. The film ends on an ambiguous note, with the scene of a paralysed Joji coming to consciousness in a hospital bed and a police officer trying to question him.

Pothan eschews all visible markers of fidelity to the Shakespearean play; there are no natural portents on the day of the murder, no supernatural soliciting, nor a trace of the guilt-induced insomnia suffered by the protagonist after the deadly act. Still, the central motifs of the dramatic original are everywhere, especially in Pothan's exploration of the deception-and-disease ecosystem that pervades *Macbeth*. His film explores a frail misfit's unresolved need for recognition and space in the hypermasculine world of his father and elder brothers that treats him with contempt. Murder, ironically, becomes Joji's only way of reclaiming agency in such a world. His extreme apathy and 'normality' after the patricidal act (he is seen fishing right after replacing his father's medicines) is portrayed as a sickness; and, in a directorial masterstroke, Pothan reinforces the sickness motif through the frequent use of the visual image of the COVID-19 mask. The mask, besides being a potent symbol of the deception lurking the Panachel household, also serves to underscore the hidden sickness in the family members – Kuttappan's lack of emotion and sensitivity, coupled with an over-emphasis on money and physical strength, Jomon's drunkenness, Jaison's evasiveness, and Bincy's calculated, self-serving silence after Joji's dastardly act.

An informed and sensitive audience would also perceive faint echoes of some scenes from *Macbeth,* and dim shadows of Duncan in Kuttappan,

Banquo in Jomon, Macbeth in Joji, Lady Macbeth in Bincy, and Malcolm in Popy, thanks to Pothan's subtle and sensitive reimagining of *Macbeth*. Though Bincy does not quite come across as a counterpart to Lady Macbeth, by questioning Joji's manliness she nudges him, indirectly, to commit the bloody deed, thereby claiming her shadowy similitude to Lady Macbeth, who provokes Macbeth to murder by questioning his manliness. As Pothan maintains,

> "*Joji* is an effort to create through an independent film the experience one goes through while watching or reading *Macbeth*. It is an effort to recreate cinematically the message in *Macbeth* in the contemporary society in Kerala in the background of Covid-19" (Pothan, Dileesh Pothan Interview: Part 1).

Pothan himself acknowledges that *Joji* is indebted more to K. G. George's 1985 film classic, *Irakal* (transl. '*Victims*') than to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. *Irakal* narrates the tragic story of a Jacobite Syrian Christian family that comprises an iron-fisted patriarch and rubber tycoon, Mathews (known also as Mathukutty), his three sons, Koshy, Sibi, and Baby, and a daughter, Annie. The dynamics of this dysfunctional family, living in a large double-storied bungalow surrounded by an expansive rubber estate, is cut out for its own tragic turn of events largely on account of the maladjusted Baby, an angry young man, a product of the turbulent period of the Indian Emergency (June 1975 to March 1977). While the drug-addicted and depressed Baby – a suspended engineering student who wades through murders before being killed by his own father – serves as an interesting comparison with Joji, the two young men are different in their mental orientations and actions. Baby is a loner and has already transitioned into a criminal; Joji's 'transgressions' involve secretly spending his father's money on ordering things online, in collusion with his adolescent nephew. While *Irakal* does not evoke *Macbeth*, Joji evokes both *Irakal* and *Macbeth*, sharing an intertextual, dialogical relationship with both. The three texts thus become inextricably intertwined in an ongoing process of texts generating more texts, of hypertexts continuously recycling and transforming hypotexts, generating a cultural discourse where it is impossible to determine a clear point of origin.

Conclusion

Shakespeare was a pioneer in adapting from various sources and modifying sources freely for the plots of his plays. The adaptations by Jayaraj and Pothan similarly re-interpret, reimagine, and relocate Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in two different historical and cultural contexts of Kerala using diverse indigenous tools in their transformation of their source texts, while simultaneously retaining the creative tension between hypotexts and hypertexts. The hallmark of a good adaptation lies in reinventing the familiar world of the literary text and shaping it into something entirely new in such a way that texts do not exist in a hierarchy of source-material and adaptation but as independent artistic works that are in continuous dialogue. As director-adapters, both Jayaraj and Pothan are well acquainted with the language, idiom, and conventions of the literary and the filmic forms; consequently, their works speak for their creative competence while establishing themselves as significant additions to and participants in global adaptation discourse. Shakespeare's Scottish army general is seamlessly absorbed into the cultural imagination of Kerala in their adaptations so that Macbeth becomes Malayali.

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Revisiting the scripted fate, death and terror in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Sujato Ghosh

Abstract

In Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, though minor in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, are given a significant role. They serve as a lens through which the audience experiences the absurdity of the human situation, a key element that amplifies the characters' powerlessness and disbelief. The audience is made to feel the characters' lack of control over their fate, a battle that dominates the play from the outset.

> Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two people who have been written into a scheme of things, and there's nothing they can do about it except follow through and meet the fate that has been ordained for them … I have written about two people on whom Shakespeare imposed inevitability (Louis, D3).

This sense of certainty in their fate invokes a feeling of resignation in the audience as they face the characters' lack of control over their lives. Life spins out of control for them. One imagines the author of *Hamlet* to be their fate, their God. The two characters' apprehension of death comes true, and the scripted fate falls upon them. Both feel trapped in a situation where escape is not a luxury. But there is no justification for not getting apprehended by the horror of the situation. Critics have pointed out that the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is not a situation of liberty to wait and watch but a situation where the

terror of the condition is to act out their destiny and, therefore, accept their fate.

Keywords: Terror, horror, Guildenstern, player, absurd, Hamlet

Terror suggests a penetrating and concentrated fear that is somewhat protracted and may refer to abstract or imminent menaces. The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* begins with the hint of a sustained terror. Just at the play's beginning, the situation's improbability is deepened by the tossing of the coin, which always faces the head as it comes down. The jinx, however, is broken by the introduction of the players and the playgroup. The absurdity of the human situation, the lack of control, and the inevitability of their fate all contribute to unorthodox bewilderment that the audience cannot escape. The characters' acceptance of their fate and resignation reminds us of our existential dilemmas. The tragedians, who view the two characters as mere players on stage, play a pivotal role. They enact a bloodthirsty melodrama that significantly heightens the terror of the situation, thereby deepening the audience's emotional involvement. The tragedians, who never seem out of focus and always appear in their original costumes, become an integral part of the play, a foil to the two central characters of Stoppard's play. Terror looms over them, too. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they, too, have no control over the situation and suffer not from the lack of will to save themselves but from the inability to escape the situation. The play that they are acting on is also scripted. Ironically, their doomsday is also well realized as they know how much comedy or else they display to entertain the 'audience'; they will be known as tragedians to the rest of the world. The tragedians' performance is crucial in heightening the audience's emotional engagement, making them feel the terror that pervades the play more deeply. The tragedians' role is to entertain and make the audience feel the characters' terror as their own.

Stoppard's setting is not tied to any place in the world. It has the stage as its only setting. We are unaware of whether this place, where we find the two 'Elizabethans,' is 17th-century England, Denmark, or any other place outside the continent, or Britain in recent times. Even the coin tossing does not involve the characters except that they seem

worried and surprised at the coin turning head every time it falls. The coin tossing adds to their menacing situation, where they feel anxious that the problem is not changing, and they think it may never change again. No critics claim any divine influence or logical or emotional interpretation. Stoppard's play does not intend to bring the original *Hamlet* into it and improvise and interpret it, but what it does is exceptional as it slowly curls into the Shakespearean text and does not disturb the intent of the great Bard but makes us think about Hamlet in a different theory in a different light. According to Neil Sammells, Stoppard, under the influence of Beckett, manages to get into Shakespeare's *Hamlet (112)*.

As the play progresses, we are stunned to see the meaningless jugglery of words that stresses the communicative lapse even between the two main characters. This 'meaningless jugglery of words' is a literary device Stoppard uses to highlight the characters' existential crisis and struggle to find meaning in their situation. It is not only Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who practice such wordplay; their interaction with the other play characters produces meaningless babbles that mean almost nothing. The Player in the play adds enough crisis to the happenings, and with his words, we are made to realize the soup they are in. We are made to learn how life constantly threatens us with its improbabilities and impossibilities. However, these meanings are hard to comprehend in an absurd play. Loss of identity leads to more menacing situations that drive towards genuine existential crisis. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in such a situation, need to remember their names and distinguish themselves and the audience. Their mock interviews with each other before they interact with Hamlet are full of confusion regarding their names, though they give little importance to it and show their loss of nerve when speaking to a childhood friend. Terror looms over the entire set of characters in the play. The inexperience of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in tackling situations as these show up, and in the actual encounter with Hamlet, we find they have failed in their approach. In addition, they prove themselves to be failures even in their future encounters to convince Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are destined to be doomed, and as the play progresses, this destiny shows up. To the audience, watching the play's scenes and remembering the destiny of the

two characters in the original Shakespeare play is more terrifying and menacing. The two characters helplessly follow the Player's advice to relax, respond, and never question the situation. This is itself an act of anxiety, helplessness, and apprehension and carries a sense of the situation that is fraught with alarming trepidation. Life gives us situations where we only compulsively play our part without control. The situation spins out of our control, and we keep ourselves hooked on the thought that the situation will improve and we have a part to play in it. As our destiny spins out of our control, so does the known destiny of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who know that they are simply spending some time planning and negotiating, but their end is scripted, and the way to it is terrifying enough.

Death is one of the most crucial things in the play. The terror and fear of death can only be observed and even acted upon on stage, but representation of death by the dying person himself cannot take place on the stage; therefore, death cannot be acted as Guildenstern says. The irrepresentability of death is faithfully represented in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's Are Dead.* It is interesting to note that there is almost no ambiguity at the end of Stoppard's play. It is unambiguous and follows what happens in Shakespeare's text. Things that were bound to happen right from the beginning of the play happen at the end. One may have several decisions and may have changed the course of one's life an infinite number of times. Still, they are all within certain limitations that are always there and are bound to act when needed; therefore, a course of action that seems like our step toward freedom is limited, restrained, contained, and constantly subjected to a more extensive course that is predestined and determined already (Fleming, 57). The struggle for independence from the futility of life and insignificance fails in the end. The audience does not leave the chairs relieved of the thought that the catharsis has taken place, and therefore, they can leave with the great realisation that good things bring good luck and vice versa. The audience instead leaves the theatre hall in a state of flux and disgust, thinking that destiny is unavoidable and that one has to live a life of fear and apprehension of the approaching doom and foreboding.

At the end of *Hamlet*, we realize that everyone destined to die dies following the predestined path. Death looms large over the play, creating

an atmosphere of doom and foreboding. It is death that the actors can only perform depending on the circumstances. The Player says that dying is compulsory in the act. The actors only play the mode and the emotion of dying. The atmosphere becomes terrible when one imagines that they are playing the role of those people who are destined to die. One finds that *The Murder of Gonzago* simply becomes the death play of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As actors, they start to play the game of being on the boat to England. They realize they are moving into darkness, but they also find that it is the unknown world where everything is possible, including their death. While reading Stoppard's play, one wonders about the effect of terror on the actors who, before committing themselves to the play, keep playing the role of those characters in Shakespeare's play whose future is destined and will eventually lead to death. It is an act of coincidence that Rosencrantz tears open Hamlet's death order. Since both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern understand that whatever they try to present and prove to the world, their fate will follow the predestined one, they choose not to play the role of turncoats as Hamlet's friends; instead, they decide to continue to act as victims and innocent mere players of God who will eventually fall at the end of the play. It is this lack of choice that creates the terror and absurdity in the play, but at the same time, their effort to live in it, in the role that they are assigned and their thoughts of momentary freedom that makes Stoppard one of the most significant third wave absurd playwrights of the century. Critics sanction the play as an avant-garde specimen of the Absurd, but there are opposing views, too. Critics like Felicia Londre believe that Stoppard, by heart, is not an absurdist, and what he gives in the theatre is not his universal vision of the universe but his philosophical anxiety and may be considered a literary exercise (36). In one of the interviews, Stoppard mentions that he didn't know the meaning of the word existential until he came upon Rosencrantz and applied it to his play (Ambushes for the Audience, 6). To them, life becomes meaningless, and they keep doing all they can to make it meaningful and at least understand their situation. But Stoppard, unlike a true absurdist, queries that it is not always possible to comprehend life, but does the inability to answer the obstinate questions of life necessarily lead to the fact that life is deprived of any meaning? The fundaments of existentialism

and absurdism suddenly seem disturbed in Stoppard. What remains is the threat of execution from the dearest thing that humans can hold to their hearts: their lives. One wonders at the steady downward graph of the two victims of fate, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, despite knowing their fate, plunge into the activity of treason, but this time, they deliberately frustrate themselves as they choose to betray themselves. They also understand their insignificance in Shakespeare's play. The only significance they initially find is staying away from the play. Still, soon, they realize that things are spinning out of their control and therefore, their only option is to stay within the play, play out their emotional state of terror, and arrive at their doomsday.

> GUIL: … we are little men, we don't know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etcetera-it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the designs of fate or even of kings. All in all, I think we'd be well advised to leave well alone. Tie up the letter – there – neatly-like that.-They won't notice the broken seal, assuming you were in character. [110-111]

The above conversation points out the two men's realisation that they are still insignificant and minor. They contrast themselves to more extraordinary beings like kings and consider themselves terrifyingly small to counter such figures or even come close to them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are so terrified that they, at one point, think that they will leave the letter as it is, but then they decide that their role is predestined and, therefore, they will do well to limit themselves within the play; else they may encounter even worse things. Just next to this conversation, Guildenstern, in a state of torment, asks the Player why so much depends on their carrying out the act since they are incredibly insignificant men. The Player replies that they are none other than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and, therefore, fate will operate on them. Their argument seems justified as they tear themselves up in the situation that slowly turns fatalistic, and they demand an explanation for the entire thing only to be denied but just the answer that all things end in death and, therefore, nothing is unusual. While reading Stoppard, one may wonder whether the author is trying to make these characters more significant or harping much more than

Shakespeare on the insignificance and meaninglessness of life. While watching the play in performance, the audience may initially seem relaxed, seeing two characters searching for a future and certainty as they are close to the old ways. Still, soon, the Player arrives and declares that certainty is no longer the normal state of life and uncertainty is expected. The audience also observes that fate operates at most levels and layers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Still, as the Player notes in the play, there is much room to display their aptitude apart from fate, though destiny is inevitable. It seems that Guildenstern is balancing the Stoppardian initiative properly. He opines that we all can change our course of action, decide things, and move fast in the direction that seems fitting as we inch closer to the ultimate destination. Still, all our actions seem contained in something more significant and larger that moves as destined and is beyond our control, just as natural and explicit as the wind and the current.

An apparent reading of the text gives us the impression that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are men of inaction. They are men of words and keep engaging themselves in baffling and meaningless verbal jugglery. They have no contribution to helping Hamlet nor have any actions to help each other. As they read the confidential letter, they do nothing and go to the scaffolds perplexed and, significantly, without confrontation. This is scary and does not give the audience peace of mind even when leaving the theatre hall. Disgust, dissatisfaction, apprehension and a fear of the looming fate overpower their mind. Irving Wardle, in response to the 1992 production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at Israel, opines that the play caught the crux of the tyranny imposed by the state by constructing a collective terror where all those involved become a scout, and all of them eventually become losers. He viewed the production of the play as a direct explanation of the contemporary political situation of the state and the damage caused to the people and lives using state terror (20-21).

Guildenstern possibly makes Stoppard come close to Albee when he says that a thousand casual deaths are useless to the actual death. The dying person feels the natural intensity of it when he realizes that this is the end of it and there is no return. This experience is of only one time and is different from acting it out like players on the stage. Albee

in *The Zoo Story* mentions the same through Jerry, though it is in a different setting and context. Through the Player and Guildenstern, Stoppard presents the two sides of the argument that approach existentialism. Guildenstern has always insisted on the search for meaning in life and death, which is what he comes close to even when he dies an insignificant death. He is the one who has always wondered about their existence, their reason for coming into the setting, the place where they are, and every other thing that has taken place around them. He has been the most curious and expressive of the two men of Tom Stoppard in the play. The meaninglessness of names and situations is also hinted at as both the main characters keep on forgetting their names, and so do the other characters in the play. The play reminds us that we all are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in some way or the other. There may be a chance to see ourselves in the actual play, standing outside the stage as players, but that will not make any difference as fate will spin the course of action away from us. We will merely stay as innocent players, seeing ourselves fall and fall into immeasurable depths, death or otherwise. The anticipated experience is no less horrifying than the real one.

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Drama as Social Discourse: A Critical Appraisal of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron*

Arzuman Ara

Abstract:

Michael Madhusudan Dutt is one of the important modern dramatists of India. His *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* are social satires that critique the follies of the Bengali society during the early colonial period. What is distinctive about these two compositions is that, in them, Dutt broke away from the colonial heritage and introduced a novel Indianness in choosing local themes, plots, characters and even language even as he followed a western orientation in dramatization. The plays satirize greed and hypocrisy in the contemporary society. But while they project scenes from the history of a transitional period of Bengal, the human and social appeal they register make them universal artistic creations. registering Dutt as one of the most important pioneers of modern Indian drama.

Key-words: modern drama, satire, farce, Indianness, social criticism, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata, Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron*

Introduction

Theatre in India in the early colonial period developed in imitation of the European dramas brought by the nation's erstwhile British rulers. It flourished most prominently in Bengal which was the centre of the early British rule. Girish Chandra Ghosh, Dina Bandhu Mitra, Dwijendra Lal Roy, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt were among the early exponents of Indian theatre. They innovated by bringing in Indian themes which were dramatized following the European traditions.

Themes from different countries were taken up alongside Indian ones. Together, they represent a kaleidoscope of experiments which gained immense popularity among the elite patrons of Calcutta. The theatre of that period also slowly overtook the indigenous *Jatra* tradition which was largely non-urban centric and more folk oriented.

Michael MadhusudhanDutt has four plays to his credit among which *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* are social satires. These two plays are distinctive examples of social criticism conveyed through the medium of the performative arts. The present article is an appraisal of the two plays as social discourse functions in their representation of the society in Bengal in the decades over the 1870s to the 1890s. Following a qualitative approach based upon theories of representation and performance, this study seeks to analysis the theme, plot, characterization and dialogues in these plays. This is a study of the two plays that is important for a number of reasons. Such a study allows us to re-look at history, an important objective given that "the history of Bengali theatre has been distorted. Its historical context has not only been left undiscussed but also ignored, to the detriment of re-interpretation of our theatre history" (Pal, in Bannerjee, 109). At the same time, this project also allows us to appreciate social representation as well as to gain an insight into the social and political role of theatre in the staging of certain plays.

Social Themes & Social Criticism through Plays

Michael Madhusudan Dutt is known for introducing Indianness in a large way in the early theatres in Calcutta. The constituent elements of this Indianness included the creation of a plot based on events set in the contemporary Indian society. Of course, Dutt was not the pioneer in this, for as Ghulam Murshid (115) points out. It was *Nil Darpan* by Dina Bandhu Mitra that paved the way for the inclusion of Indian themes in plays. As Murshid indicates:

> Several farces were subsequently written over the next two decades, highlighting the problems of peasants and the underprivileged in villages. Madhu himself wrote two farces in 1860, one called *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* (*Is this Called Civilization*?)

> and the other *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron* (*New Feathers on an Old Bird*). Both reflected a great deal of social awareness on the part of Madhu. Indeed, the Blue Mutiny proved to be an important catalyst for social reform in Bengal. (Murshid, 115)

It is important to realize that if *Nil Darpan* had been a political and ideological counter-thrust to the hegemonic discourse of colonial rule, Dutt's two plays were scripted to culturally resist the tempting influences of western dramas. They represent the voice and opinion of a people willing to compete with and to resist the colonial power through any means. Hence the writing of these plays was historically significant. In fact, as Pal elaborates:

> Traditional history has always been dismissive about political content and, from that point of view, it is a natural tendency, a common phenomenon traceable to the nostalgia of the so-called "Bengal Renaissance". It is a typica1 case in point of a colonial legacy which revels in an intellectualism, exalted to an unattainable position, as far as the people are concerned. It comes down to a question of intellectual complacency and a self-imposed alienation. Modem historical research starts from a critique of this very alienation. It re-interprets it as the root cause of the tragedy, which not only led to the failure of the Bengal Renaissance, but the intellectual trend which pursues to this very day. Here, too, there ls a commitment, but a commitment restricted to the middle-class: the petty bourgeois class. The directors not only belong to the middle class, but openly profess the dead values of their class, and, therefore, they rot in their own alienated-world. There can be no objection, per se, to choosing a middle-class family for portrayal, but the confusion lies in identifying oneself with this decadent class, sympathising with their pettiness, shedding tears for their well-deserved decline-in short, trying to revive a corpse! They openly declare that they write plays for the petty-bourgeois elite, whatever that may mean. Their plays profess to capture the middle-class milieu, a dull bankrupt world where nothing ever happens. (Pal, in Bannerjee, 110)

Dutt's two farcical satires *Ekei Ki Bole Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* are examples of social criticism that highlight the social hypocrisy and the dominant cultural trends influenced by the ideological imperatives of colonial forces. Murshid explains the background of the plays as:

> On 8 May 1859, Ishwarchandra Sinha wrote, 'I am thinking of some domestic farces to follow immediately after the first representation of the *Sermista* and before it is repeated just to show the public that we can act the sublime and the ridiculous both at the same time and with the same actors.' Madhu wrote the farces in response of this. The first was *Is this Called Civilization!*, and the second was *New Feathers on an Old Bird*. (ibid, 125) ….
>
> Madhu could not refuse his request to write a farce. Both the farces were written about contemporary issues. At the time, a number of farces were being written about problems that contemporary society was having to deal with, such as the remarriage of Hindu widows, Kulin polygamy, and child marriage. For more serious plays, dramatists were still turning to mythology and themes related to nationalism. Madhu, too, chose topical issues for his farces; but, unlike other writers, he did not choose a social theme linked to religion. (126)

Social hypocrisy is the major theme in both the plays. "These may be called the first genuine comedies in Bengali language. In both plays, Madhu Sudan satirises the moral and social conditions prevalent in Bengal during his time. He sets forth the follies of his own generation for our laughter. He saw the hypocrisies of the moribund Hindu society trying to save itself by clinging to the past and also the extravagances and excesses in which some people were indulging in the name of 'modern' ideas" (Guhathakurta, 127-8).

In *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* (*Is this Called Civilization*?) Dutt brings in the theme of contemporary western education and how it was creating a group of nonconformist rebels in his contemporary society who neither understand the western values nor the Indian ones. Modelled after the "Young Bengal" youth group, Dutt here "…lashed out-with a degree of self-mockery at those who had had some exposure to Western education,

and had started to ape the West, choosing to scoff at their own traditions" (Murshid, 126). Naba Babu along with his friends indulge in imitating the whites and consumes prohibited items like brandy and enjoy the company of dancing girls. The smell of drink on his breath and his inebriated behaviour cause immense embarrassment to his wife and sister. However, Naba and his friends establish a *Jnanatarangani Sabha* (Assembly of Knowledge Wave) where they condemn the age-old practices of Hinduism and propagate western liberal practices like women's liberty. The hypocrisy of this youth set is foregrounded right from the Act-1, Scene-1 when Naba's friend Kali explains the purpose of the Sabha as, "We had to study only English in our college, but we should have some knowledge of our national language, so we have established this *Sabha* for discussion on Sanskrit. We gather there on every Saturday and discuss about the *dharmasashtra*s" (Das, 127-8). The location of the Sabha is quite ironically in a red-light area inhabited by prostitutes. The youth there enjoy drinks and the dances of the nautch-girls. Their indulgence in the name of liberty and enlightenment shows their moral decadence and hypocrisy.

As a social farce, in *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* the objective of the dramatist appears to be two-fold. He provides a criticism of the education system and of social hypocrisy. Naba and his friends are college students. Naba in his speech in the *Jnanatarangani Sabha,* says: "Gentlemen, birth of all of us is in the Hindu community, but we have dismantled the chain of superstition. We do not accept to bow before the idols. Our ignorance is removed with light of knowledge. Now we pray that you all unite your mind and brain and concentrate upon social reformation of this country – try for that" (Das, 139). Naba further exhorts those present: "Gentlemen, unite your women, give them liberty. Stop communal (caste) discrimination – get the widows remarried – then, and only then, our dear land India can compete with the civilised countries like England—not otherwise" (140). Taken at face value, his words signify a call for a new enlightened and liberal India, but his subsequent declaration exposes the hollowness of his professed doctrine: "Gentlemen, in the name of freedom, let us enjoy ourselves" (ibid).

Through such undercutting ironies, Dutt shows that most of the members of Young Bengal had a distorted understanding of western

values. Guhathakurta points out that, "As the first result of unassimilated English education, a certain class of Bengali young man began to despise everything Indian. They ridiculed the old generation of Pandits as ignorant and narrow, spoke contemptuously of the Hindu sastras, decried the ancient religion as superstition, scoffed at those who did not see eye to eye with them, and tried to imitate Western and ways of life. The result was that they adopted things without understanding them and carried to ridiculous extremes whatever was particularly bad in Western habits and ways of thinking" (128). Influenced by western thinking, they start considering their own culture as laughable and inferior. Through the mouth of these youth, Dutt makes them ridicule the old traditional Hindus and their orthodox ways. One young man in the play criticises his father's return from a pilgrimage from Brindaban as: "The old man came back to spoil our pleasure. This Naba is our leader and helps in the money matters; if he leaves us then it would be disastrous for us, there is no doubt about it" (Das, 124). Another character named Kalinath talks about his uncle who is a renowned Sanskrit pandit as: "Yes, there was indeed an old fool, his name, Krishnaprasad Ghose" (Das 126). Hindu holy scriptures like Srimadbhagavatgita and Geeta Govinda are called, "Mrs. Bhagabati's songs" and "Binda dutir geet" (songs of Binda — the back-biter) (Das, 126). In Act-I, Scene-I, when Naba proposes to stop Babaji from disclosing their activities, Kali proposes to kill Babaji, saying: "Nonsense! It's better if you give him a few kicks and send him to Baikuntha (the afterlife). Damn the brute! Who wants that moron in this world! Does he have got any more mission" (Das, 135). The character of Babaji, who is a Vaishnav by faith, is made to undergo harassment at the hands of the girls from the red-light area, a British officer, and then Naba's friends as well. Nevertheless, the man's promise not to disclose Naba and his friends although he professes to be a pius Vaishnav, points to the fact that the religious people exercised their own kind of hypocrisy and greed.

Young Bengal's vain love for English is subjected to criticism with Naba's dialogue in Act-I, Scene-2, when he says that: "Trifling, he called me a "liar" – is this trifling? Why that rascal is not calling me names in Bengali. He could have called me *mithyabadi*. Who would have

got angry then? But — "liar" – is it tolerable!" (Das,139). A number of dialogues of the young men is in a code-mixed form with English and Bengali words used together. Words like "hip-hip-hurrah", "we are jolly good fellows", etc. show their love for the English language and English culture even as their use of a hybridized language symbolically reflects their own hybridized condition. This is equally a projection of contemporary social realities.

Yet their behaviour raises a most pertinent question voiced through Nrittya. "Should one be shameless after learning English?" She asks. (Das, 143). Naba's drunkenness, similarly prompts Harakamini to ask the question at the end of the play: "…Those who study in Calcutta, they learn only one kind of wisdom [drinking]….these shameless ones again say that we are civilised like the Europeans….Does one become civilised for drinking wine and eating meat and misbehaving? Can this be called civilization?" (ibid 146). The last scene of the play finally brings out the pain of the women who have to live with the English-educated young men who do not respect the cultures and tradition to which they belong by birth.

Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ (*New Feathers on an Old Bird*) is a farce based on two themes – (1) men's sensuousness and (2) socio-religious hypocrisy. Guhathakurta says that the play exposes "Hindu-orthodoxy with its arrant stupidities, sham hypocrisis [sic] and hide-bound conventions" (131), Dutt here "exposes the immoral practices of that class of Hindus who profess to be religious but transgress their religion every minute of their lives" (ibid). Apart from social hypocrisy, issues of gender, class, caste and sexuality are projected in this play. Bhakta Prasad here epitomises such hypocrisy. He is a zamindar who oppresses his subjects for tax-money and is painted as being a lusty and scheming male who does not mind spending huge sums for getting access to girls. Yet as a self-professed conservative Hindu, Bhakta Prasad proclaims his shock at the liberal practices brought in by contemporary English education. When he gets a confirmation from Anandababu that in Calcutta, people across castes sit and eat together, he exclaims, "What a disaster!. I see that the glory of Hinduism is not lasting in anyway. How will it be! The power of the age of *Kali* is increasing day by day. (Sigh) Radhe

Krishna" (Das, 160). He is similarly shocked after knowing that many rich Hindus in Calcutta employ Muslim cooks. Along with objecting to the employment of Muslim cooks by Hindus, Bhakta Prasad also sceptically criticises the newly English educated people as, "…After this, after learning English, they will blacken the face of the clan. They will say, "Dead cows don't eat grass" and then they will stop the *shraddha* ceremony of their forefathers" (Das, 160).

A kind of social stigma is displayed against the Muslims as they are repeatedly referred as "*nere"* (in a derogatory manner) and their custom of eating meat is viewed with contempt. It is repeatedly pointed out that they eat meat with onions and that their body odour is disturbingly offensive. For example, Bhakta Prasad's accomplice Puñti visits Fatema's house (a Muslim household), and looking at the surrounding exclaims after spitting: "Thu, thu! It is nauseating to come to the house of the petty *nere*s. Thu, thu! Feathers of chicken, peels of onion. Thu, thu!" (Das, 155). Puñti also uses an idiomatic saying that, "Teñtul noy misti, nere noy isti" (Tamarind is not sweet, Muslims are not relatives) (Das, 165). She feels that the Muslims do not have any *jaat* or *dhamma* (caste or faith) (ibid). Thus there is a kind of objectification and otherisation of the Muslim female body and all Muslims at large. Yet, quite ironically, Bhakta is tempted to indulge in an immoral physical liaison with Fatema who is the wife of Bhakta's Muslim subject Hanif. He liberally bribes his accomplices Puñti and Gadadhar to get access to Fatima and he does not mind spending any amount for this. Gadadhar exposes Bhakta's hypocrisy by saying that: "If he eats rice from the hands of the *nere*, then his religion is destroyed. But if he takes their woman then nothing is wrong! Bah, bah! What intelligence the master has" (Das, 160).

When Bhakta Prasad goes out of his house, Gadadhar and another servant named Ram enjoy his bed and his *hukkah*. They body-massage each other after the fashion of the zamindar. Their act is a potent carnivalesque deed that makes a mockery of the habits of the upper class people. Thus did Dutt incorporate in his play an element projecting both class-consciousness and the tensions and fissures underlying and involved with class hierarchies.

Like *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* in which Dutt had used linguistic code-mixing between Bengali and English, in *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* he code-mixed Urdu and Bengali expressions. Bhakta's character becomes comical when he wears a *taj* (head-gear), *attar* (aroma), and feels that, "All *nere*s like the aroma of attar. Let me take a small bottle in my side-bag. Who knows that woman may have the smell of onion on her body, maybe I will spread a bit of it on her too" (Das, 162). Bhakta chooses a "broken-down" Shiva temple to meet Fatima, rationalizing his decision by thinking that "There is no shivatva [quality of Shiva] in the broken Shiva. Especially, for a divine apsara, why to make a deal of not leaving Hinduism? (Das, 166). The dilapidated Shiva temple therefore becomes a symbol of the loss of faith just as the brandy bottles in *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* represent the decadence of the Bengali society and the incursion of western culture.

One element common to both the plays is bribery. The white-man and Babaji in *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* and Basachpati in *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* take bribes not to disclose the hypocrisy of Naba and Bhakta respectively. In *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ,* Puñti, Gadadhar and even later Hanif too take gratification from Bhakta. This reflects a perennial problem in the Indian's social reality – bribe. Rustam Barucha highlights this social problem as:

> The lure of black money ls irresistible today. Ever since one's childhood, one would hear about policemen accepting bribes. Lots of plays would have one such character. But it ls no longer too extraordinary to deserve highlighting. And bribes are not the forte of the police alone. 'Donations' are a must for school and college admissions. 'Commissions' in order to get contracts and treating clerical staff to free cups of tea to get work done on a pending file and under-the-table deals - for employment are the order of the day. These evils haw seeped into every level of society to such a great extent that no one ls even hesitant to discuss them. Bribing a doctor's attendant to get an appointment, bribing a TTE to reserve a berth In a train, bribing the concerned authority to get a hospital bed haw all become natural topics of discussion. (Barucha, 74)

Thus, the events shown in these two plays are expositions of social reality. Guhathakurta stresses on the element of social realism in Dutt as:

> These two comedies of Madhu Sudan are a really valuable contribution to Bengali literature. They give us an accurate account of the social and moral conditions of Bengal in the late seventies and eighties. The character-sketches are unquestionable faithful to the facts. Naba Kumars and Bhakta Prasads could be found in plenty at that transitional period of Bengali history. The life presented in these plays is very real and true, although it is presented with a brutal frankness. (133)

However, Murshid maintains that "Making social reforms was not his [Dutt's] aim. What he chose had a much wider appeal; it was applicable not only to a small section of Hindus, but the entire Hindu society. As a result, purely through his humour, he could attack the fundamentalists who were basically frauds using religion as a shield behind which they could hide" (126).

It is noticeable that both the plays follow a modern western dramatic structure featuring a few acts, a number of characters and some limited events as if they were sketches composing a whole picture. Nonetheless, the theme and the treatment of the characters and the events bring in a flavour of Indianness very distinctively. "What is striking about these farces, even more than their subject matter, is Dutt's style. For the first time, he did not have to worry about Sanskrit literature and classical themes. The language he used was much more modern and natural, and if the Western influences in these farces showed through, it was not regarded as a problem. It does seem that, while writing the two farces, Madhusudan felt totally free and relaxed, and that he enjoyed the experience immensely. In all probability, *Is This Called Civilization?*, the mixture of Bengali and English spoken by the young babus must have been particular fun to write" (ibid, 126).

Conclusion

Michael Madhusudan Dutt introduced a new tone in the newly emergent Indian dramatic tradition with these two farcical social satires,

namely *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ.* He not only introduced a social theme in the plots, but also experimented with dialogue and characterisation. These two plays legitimately position Dutt as one of the pioneering figures in India's drama traditions. These plays can be read as alterative histories of the age and as depictions of an age of transition marked by the advent of colonialism, western education and the ideals of western liberalism. As social critiques, the plays show where our society was going wrong and what the pitfalls of our civilization and social customs and behaviour were at the time they were written. *Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata?* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* will keep intriguing us and compelling us to read them even in the future as plays imbued with social values. Dutt's mastery certainly lay in the fact that he vividly depicted the manners and mannerisms, the frailties and foibles of his own times, but since the follies ridiculed and satirised can be of any age and any society, the appeal of these plays is universal.

Note: *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roñ* has different spellings like *Budo Shaliker Ghade Roan*

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The Fusion of Traditional Folk Forms with Contemporary Theatrical Techniques in Habib Tanveer's Exploration of Social Justice and Cultural Identity

Ashutosh Singh

Abstract

This paper explores the fusion of traditional folk forms with contemporary theatrical techniques in the works of Habib Tanveer, focusing on how his plays address themes of social justice and cultural identity. Tanveer, a seminal figure in Indian theatre, is renowned for integrating traditional folk elements with modern theatrical practices, creating a unique and innovative stage language. This study examines key plays such as *Agra Bazar* (1954), *Charandas Chor* (1975), *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990), and *Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naon Damand* (1973) to highlight how Tanveer's work reflects and critiques the socio-cultural dynamics of India. The paper delves into Tanveer's stylistic innovations, including his use of folk performance techniques, and his engagement with themes of cultural identity and communal harmony. By drawing on the insights of critics and theorists, the analysis illustrates how Tanveer's theatre serves as a platform for exploring and addressing issues of social justice, identity, and community in a rapidly changing society. The paper also situates Tanveer's work within the broader context of Indian theatre and its evolution, demonstrating how his unique approach has contributed to contemporary discussions on cultural and social issues.

Keywords: Indian theatre, folk forms, contemporary theatre, social justice, cultural identity, stylistic innovations.

Introduction

Habib Tanveer's contribution to Indian theatre represents a unique synthesis of traditional folk forms with contemporary dramaturgy, a fusion that not only preserved indigenous cultural practices but also brought them into dialogue with modern theatrical techniques. Born in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, in 1923, Tanveer was deeply influenced by the vibrant folk traditions of his native region. His exposure to various cultural forms, including *nacha* (a popular form of folk theatre in Chhattisgarh), bhajan (devotional songs), and *pandavani* (a traditional narrative performance of the Mahabharata), shaped his artistic vision. Tanveer's work is characterized by a commitment to social justice and cultural identity, themes that he explored through his innovative use of folk traditions. This commitment is evident in his establishment of Naya Theatre in 1959, which served as a platform for the exploration of these themes through performances that combined traditional and contemporary elements.

Naya Theatre, which Tanveer founded with his wife Moneeka Misra, became a crucible for his artistic experiments. The theatre group was dedicated to creating performances that were not only entertaining but also socially and politically relevant. Anjum Katyal, in her seminal work *Towards an Inclusive Theatre: Habib Tanveer's Naya Theatre and Beyond*, emphasizes the significance of Naya Theatre in Tanveer's oeuvre, noting that it was through this platform that he was able to "redefine the possibilities of Indian theatre by integrating the folk with the modern, the local with the universal" (Katyal 29). Katyal argues that Naya Theatre's emphasis on inclusivity, both in terms of the content of its performances and its audience, was a reflection of Tanveer's broader commitment to social justice. The group's performances were marked by their accessibility, with folk forms ensuring that even those who were not literate or versed in high culture could engage with the material.Tanveer's approach to theatre was revolutionary in its inclusivity. He believed that theatre should be a medium for the people, accessible to all, regardless of their social or economic background. This belief is reflected in his decision to use folk forms, which were familiar to the common people, as the basis for his theatrical productions. According to Rustom Bharucha,

Tanveer's work was "a conscious effort to bring theatre back to its roots, to reconnect it with the everyday lives of the people" (Bharucha 12). By incorporating elements such as folk music, dance, and narrative techniques, Tanveer created a theatrical language that was both rooted in tradition and innovative in its ability to address contemporary issues.

The plays produced by Naya Theatre were a testament to Tanveer's ability to blend the old with the new, creating performances that were deeply resonant with the socio-political realities of the time. *Agra Bazar* (1954), one of Tanveer's earliest works, set the stage for his exploration of communal harmony and cultural identity. The play, based on the life and works of the 18th-century Urdu poet Nazir Akbarabadi, used folk forms to depict the everyday life of a market in Agra, bringing to life the rich cultural tapestry of pre-colonial India. Anil Mishra, in his analysis of Tanveer's work, points out that *Agra Bazar* was a pioneering effort in its use of non-elitist language and folk performance styles, which allowed it to connect with a broad audience (Mishra 44). This play, like many of Tanveer's later works, was a celebration of India's cultural diversity and a critique of the forces that sought to undermine it.In *Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naon Damand* (1973), Tanveer's use of folk traditions to explore themes of cultural identity and social change is even more pronounced. The play, set in a rural village in Chhattisgarh, uses traditional songs and dances to depict the rituals and social dynamics of a wedding, while also commenting on the impact of modernization on these traditions. Vineet Kumar observes that Tanveer's portrayal of the tension between tradition and modernity in this play reflects his broader concern with the preservation of cultural identity in the face of societal change (Kumar 88). This concern is a recurring theme in Tanveer's work, as he sought to use theatre as a means of documenting and preserving the cultural practices of marginalized communities. *Charandas Chor* (1975), perhaps Tanveer's most celebrated work, is a further example of his innovative use of folk forms to address issues of social justice. The play, based on a folk tale from Rajasthan, tells the story of a thief who becomes a symbol of resistance against corruption and social inequality. Tanveer's use of *nacha* in this play, with its combination of music, dance, and satire, not only adds to its entertainment

value but also reinforces its message of social critique. As Bharucha notes, *Charandas Chor* is "a masterful example of how Tanveer used folk forms to create a theatre that was at once entertaining, thought-provoking, and deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the people" (Bharucha 67).The themes of social justice and cultural identity that run through Tanveer's work are also evident in his later plays, such as *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990) and *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani* (1985). In *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya*, Tanveer addresses the issue of communalism in post-partition India, using folk music and narrative styles to evoke the shared cultural heritage of the subcontinent. The play's depiction of an elderly Hindu woman who refuses to leave her home in Lahore after partition serves as a powerful commentary on the human cost of political divisions. Shyamala Nair argues that Tanveer's use of traditional forms in this play serves to "highlight the common cultural ground that existed before partition, making a poignant statement about the arbitrary nature of national borders" (Nair 102). Similarly, in *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani*, Tanveer uses a Chhattisgarhi folk tale to explore the relationship between the individual and the community, creating a narrative that is both a celebration of local culture and a critique of the forces that threaten to undermine it.

Habib Tanveer's work represents a unique fusion of traditional folk forms with contemporary theatrical techniques, a fusion that allowed him to address complex issues of social justice and cultural identity in a way that was both accessible and profound. Through his innovative use of folk traditions, Tanveer created a new theatrical language that continues to inspire and influence theatre practitioners today.

Social Justice and Cultural Identity

Habib Tanveer's theatrical work is deeply intertwined with the themes of social justice and cultural identity, reflecting his commitment to representing the marginalized and voicing the struggles of the common people. Through his innovative use of traditional folk forms and contemporary theatrical techniques, Tanveer created a body of work that resonates with the lived realities of India's diverse communities, while also challenging the socio-political structures that perpetuate inequality.

One of the most iconic examples of Tanveer's exploration of social justice is *Charandas Chor* (1975), where the protagonist—a simple thief—embodies the moral integrity that eludes the ruling class. The play's folk roots in the Chhattisgarhi nacha tradition not only make it accessible to a broader audience but also ground its critique of social hierarchy in a cultural context familiar to the people. According to theatre scholar Aparna Dharwadker, *Charandas Chor* serves as a "subversive reimagining of justice, where the so-called 'lowly' characters exhibit a higher ethical standard than their social superiors" (Dharwadker 115). Tanveer's use of humor and satire in the play underscores the absurdity of societal norms that privilege wealth and status over honesty and compassion.In *Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naam Damand* (1973), Tanveer delves into the dynamics of rural society, exposing how cultural identity can be manipulated to enforce social conformity and suppress dissent. The play, steeped in Chhattisgarhi cultural practices, depicts the exploitation and subjugation of women within the institution of marriage. By juxtaposing traditional folk songs and dances with the harsh realities of gender inequality, Tanveer critiques the patriarchal structures that continue to dominate rural life. In his analysis of the play, Ashok Mishra points out that Tanveer "uses the very cultural forms that reinforce social norms to question and ultimately undermine those norms" (Mishra 137). This duality in Tanveer's work reflects his nuanced understanding of culture as both a source of identity and a potential instrument of oppression.*Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990) offers a poignant exploration of cultural identity in the context of the Partition of India, a historical event that violently disrupted the lives of millions and redefined the cultural landscape of the subcontinent. The play focuses on an elderly Hindu woman who refuses to leave her home in Lahore, even after it becomes part of Pakistan. Through this character, Tanveer addresses the deep connections people have to their cultural roots and the trauma of being forcibly uprooted. The play's use of both Hindu and Muslim cultural elements serves to highlight the shared heritage of the two communities, countering the divisive narratives that emerged during and after Partition. As noted by Sumanta Banerjee, "Tanveer's portrayal of communal harmony is not a nostalgic longing for a lost past, but a radical call for reclaiming the syncretic traditions that have always existed

at the grassroots level" (Banerjee 189). The play challenges the artificial boundaries imposed by politics, emphasizing the continuity of cultural identity despite external disruptions.*Hirma Ki Amar Kahani*, another significant work, explores the theme of social justice through the lens of tribal life in Chhattisgarh. The play, based on a local folktale, portrays the struggles of the tribal people against the encroachment of their land by powerful landlords. Tanveer's use of traditional tribal music, dance, and storytelling techniques not only brings authenticity to the narrative but also aligns the play's form with its content. By employing the very cultural practices of the community he is depicting, Tanveer creates a theatre that is both a celebration of tribal identity and a vehicle for social critique. In her essay on tribal representations in Indian theatre, Shanta Gokhale argues that *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani* "embodies Tanveer's vision of a theatre that is at once rooted in the specificities of local culture and universally relevant in its message of resistance against exploitation" (Gokhale 224). The play's narrative of resistance serves as a powerful statement on the ongoing struggles of marginalized communities to protect their cultural and physical existence. Lastly,*Agra Bazar* (1954), one of Tanveer's earliest works, exemplifies his lifelong commitment to social justice and cultural identity. Set in an 18th-century market in Agra, the play is a tapestry of the lives of ordinary people, including poets, merchants, and laborers, who come together in the public space of the bazaar. By foregrounding the voices of the common people, Tanveer democratizes the theatrical space, making it a platform for the expression of popular concerns and aspirations. In her study of Indian theatre, Erin Mee highlights how *Agra Bazar* "transforms the stage into a microcosm of society, where every individual, regardless of status, has a role to play and a story to tell" (Mee 102). The play's emphasis on collective experience rather than individual heroism reflects Tanveer's belief in the power of community and the importance of cultural identity in the pursuit of social justice.

Through these plays, Habib Tanveer articulates a vision of social justice that is deeply intertwined with cultural identity. His work challenges the structures of power that perpetuate inequality, while also celebrating the resilience and creativity of the people who resist them. By fusing

traditional folk forms with contemporary theatrical techniques, Tanveer not only preserves cultural heritage but also redefines it as a dynamic and potent force for social change.

Cultural Identity and Communal Harmony

Habib Tanveer's exploration of cultural identity and communal harmony is a profound commentary on the complexities of Indian society, reflecting his deep engagement with the country's diverse cultural tapestry. His plays serve as a powerful medium to address the nuances of identity formation, the challenges of cultural preservation, and the pressing need for communal harmony in a nation often divided by religion and politics. Through his innovative fusion of traditional folk forms with contemporary theatrical techniques, Tanveer not only celebrates India's rich cultural diversity but also critiques the socio-political forces that threaten to fragment this unity.

Agra Bazar is a seminal work that exemplifies Tanveer's commitment to depicting India's multicultural heritage. The play, set in the bustling market of Agra, captures the vibrant coexistence of different communities during the 18th century. By using folk songs, regional dialects, and the everyday interactions of the market's diverse inhabitants, Tanveer creates a narrative that emphasizes the syncretic culture of pre-colonial India. As Sudhanva Deshpande notes in *The Political Theatre of Habib Tanveer*, the play is "a celebration of the subaltern voices that constitute the soul of India" (Deshpande 67). Deshpande argues that Tanveer's work is a reminder of the rich pluralistic traditions that have historically defined the Indian subcontinent, a heritage increasingly at risk in contemporary times.In *Shatranj Ke Mohrey*, Tanveer explores the fragmentation of cultural identity through the metaphor of a chess game. The play's setting in the declining days of the Mughal Empire allows Tanveer to delve into the political and religious divisions that began to take root during this period. The folk storytelling techniques used in the play, including traditional music and dance, serve to highlight the contrast between the communal life of the common people and the divisive ambitions of the ruling elite. Ananya Jahanara Kabir, in her book *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir*, emphasizes how Tanveer

uses these folk elements not merely as aesthetic choices but as political tools to critique the exploitation of cultural differences by those in power (Kabir 103). The play thus becomes a commentary on the destructive impact of divisive politics on cultural unity.Tanveer's *Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naam Damand* (1973) is another exploration of the cultural tensions within rural communities. The play, set in a Chhattisgarhi village, utilizes traditional songs, dances, and rituals to depict the social customs surrounding marriage. However, Tanveer does not shy away from critiquing the ways in which these customs can be manipulated to serve the interests of the powerful. In his analysis of the play, Ganesh Devy, a prominent scholar of Indian cultural studies, argues that Tanveer's work reflects the "tension between the preservation of cultural identity and the pressures of modernity" (Devy 122). The play's narrative structure, deeply embedded in Chhattisgarhi folk traditions, serves as both a celebration of cultural practices and a critique of the social inequalities that they can perpetuate.*Charandas Chor* further exemplifies Tanveer's commitment to using folk traditions to explore themes of cultural identity and social justice. The play, based on a Rajasthani folk tale, tells the story of a thief with a strict moral code, who ultimately sacrifices his life rather than betray his principles. Tanveer's use of the nacha form, a folk theatre tradition from Chhattisgarh, brings humor, music, and dance into the narrative, making the play accessible to a wide audience. Nandi Bhatia, in her study *Acts of Authority, Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, highlights how Tanveer's use of folk traditions in *Charandas Chor* serves to "create a space where cultural identity is affirmed even as it is questioned and redefined" (Bhatia 147). The play becomes a powerful statement on the importance of moral integrity in the face of societal corruption, a theme that resonates deeply with Tanveer's broader concerns about social justice.In *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990), Tanveer addresses the issue of communalism in post-partition India with poignant sensitivity. The play centers on an elderly Hindu woman who refuses to leave her home in Lahore after partition, despite the city becoming part of Pakistan. Through this narrative, Tanveer explores the deep-rooted cultural connections that transcend religious and national boundaries. The play's incorporation of folk music and

narrative traditions from both Hindu and Muslim cultures serves to underscore the shared heritage that existed before partition, challenging the divisive rhetoric that followed. Veena Das, in her work *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, interprets *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* as a "profound exploration of the ways in which cultural memory can serve as a bridge across communal divides" (Das 213). The play's focus on the elderly woman's attachment to her home symbolizes the enduring bonds of cultural identity that persist despite the political upheavals of partition.

Tanveer's work is thus a powerful exploration of cultural identity and communal harmony, achieved through a masterful fusion of traditional folk forms with contemporary theatrical techniques. His plays, such as *Agra Bazar, Shatranj Ke Mohrey, Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naam Damand, Charandas Chor*, and*Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya*, are not only artistic achievements but also important social commentaries that continue to resonate in today's context of cultural and communal tensions. By grounding his narratives in the folk traditions of India, Tanveer affirms the value of cultural diversity while also challenging the forces that threaten to undermine it.

Stylistic Innovations and Theatrical Techniques of Habib Tanveer: Incorporating Brecht's Influence

Habib Tanveer's contribution to Indian theatre is distinguished by his innovative stylistic approaches and theatrical techniques, which blend traditional folk forms with modern sensibilities. Central to Tanveer's stylistic development was the influence of Bertolt Brecht, whose ideas on epic theatre and the alienation effect significantly shaped Tanveer's dramaturgy. This fusion of Brechtian techniques with indigenous performance traditions allowed Tanveer to create a unique and dynamic stagecraft that was both socially engaging and culturally resonant.

One of Tanveer's most significant innovations was his integration of Chhattisgarhi folk forms, particularly nacha, into his plays. This was not simply a matter of aesthetic choice but a deliberate strategy to democratize theatre and make it accessible to a broader audience. Drawing on Brecht's emphasis on the function of theatre as a tool for social change, Tanveer

utilized folk forms to engage with the everyday lives of the people, thereby making theatre a medium for exploring social issues. In *Charandas Chor* (1975), for instance, Tanveer employs the Brechtian alienation effect by using nacha's performative elements—such as direct audience address, improvisation, and musical interludes—to disrupt the audience's emotional involvement and encourage critical reflection on the play's themes. This approach challenges traditional Indian theatre's immersive and emotional engagement, instead prompting the audience to think critically about the socio-political context of the narrative. Likewise, Tanveer's staging techniques often involved minimalistic yet highly symbolic sets and props, reminiscent of Brecht's use of simple, suggestive scenery to focus attention on the narrative rather than on spectacle. In *Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naon Damand* (1973), the set design is stark and functional, using everyday objects to symbolize larger social and political structures. This minimalism is not only economical but also serves to foreground the narrative and characters, encouraging the audience to focus on the play's social message rather than becoming lost in the visual splendor. As Brecht advocated, this technique fosters a critical audience rather than a passive one, aligning with Tanveer's goal of making theatre a space for social critique.

Language in Tanveer's theatre also reflects Brechtian influence, particularly in the use of vernacular dialects to create a sense of authenticity and to connect with the audience on a cultural level. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who often employed a standardized literary language, Tanveer embraced the dialects and idioms of the regions he depicted. In *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990), the dialogue is rich with the linguistic diversity of pre-Partition India, with characters switching between Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. This linguistic realism, combined with Brechtian distancing techniques, such as characters speaking in the third person or commenting on their actions, adds layers of meaning and encourages the audience to consider the broader socio-political implications of the narrative.

Music and sound are also integral to Tanveer's theatrical innovations, and here too, Brecht's influence is evident. In many of his plays, music serves as both an emotional and narrative tool, similar to Brecht's use

of songs to interrupt the action and provide commentary on the events. In *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani*, the musical score is carefully crafted to reflect the rhythms of tribal life in Chhattisgarh, creating an immersive auditory environment that also serves to underscore the play's themes. Tanveer often used traditional folk music and instruments, such as the dholak and harmonium, to ground the plays in their cultural context, while also employing Brechtian techniques such as juxtaposing upbeat melodies with somber lyrics to create a sense of dissonance and provoking critical reflection.

Tanveer's approach to casting and performance further illustrates his Brechtian influences. In contrast to mainstream Indian theatre, which often relied on professional actors from urban centers, Tanveer's Naya Theatre was known for casting local performers deeply rooted in folk traditions. This practice not only brought a high degree of authenticity to the performances but also aligned with Brecht's concept of the "non-professional" actor, who performs in a way that emphasizes the social roles they are portraying rather than creating a naturalistic illusion. In *Agra Bazar* (1954), Tanveer cast local poets and folk artists alongside professional actors, creating an ensemble that blurred the distinctions between "high" and "low" art, and between professional and amateur performance. This approach challenges traditional hierarchies in the theatre world and exemplifies Tanveer's commitment to an inclusive and socially engaged theatre.

Tanveer's dramaturgical structure often eschewed linear narratives in favor of episodic and non-linear forms, reflecting the oral storytelling traditions that influenced his work, as well as Brecht's epic theatre. In plays like *The Broken Bridge* (1995), the narrative unfolds through a series of vignettes or episodes, each contributing to the overall thematic tapestry rather than adhering to a strict cause-and-effect plotline. This structure, combined with the use of recurring motifs and cyclical patterns, echoes Brecht's method of presenting events in a way that emphasizes their social and historical context, rather than creating a seamless narrative flow. Tanveer's ability to adapt these traditional narrative forms to the modern stage demonstrates his innovative approach to dramaturgy, where form and content are intricately intertwined to serve the play's social and political aims.

Habib Tanveer's stylistic innovations and theatrical techniques, deeply influenced by Brecht, have left a lasting impact on Indian theatre. By fusing traditional folk forms with Brechtian methods, Tanveer created a theatre that is both rooted in cultural heritage and responsive to contemporary social issues. His work challenges conventional theatrical norms, offering new possibilities for storytelling and audience engagement. Through his innovative use of language, music, staging, and performance, Tanveer not only redefined Indian theatre but also expanded its potential as a medium for exploring and asserting social justice and cultural identity.

Conclusion

Habib Tanveer's legacy in Indian theatre is a testament to his extraordinary ability to merge the rich traditions of folk performance with modern theatrical techniques to create a powerful platform for social critique and cultural exploration. His innovative use of Chhattisgarhi folk forms, particularly nacha, not only brought the voices and stories of marginalized communities to the fore but also challenged the conventional boundaries of Indian theatre. By incorporating Brechtian techniques such as the alienation effect, episodic structure, and non-linear narratives, Tanveer crafted plays that were not only entertaining but also intellectually stimulating, prompting audiences to engage critically with the social and political realities depicted on stage. His commitment to social justice and cultural identity is evident in works like *Charandas Chor,Gaon Ke Naam Sasural, Mor Naon Damand, Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya, Agra Bazar,* and *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani,* where the struggles and aspirations of common people are portrayed with both poignancy and humor. Tanveer's theatre was not merely a reflection of society but a call to action, urging audiences to confront the injustices and divisions within their communities. His use of vernacular language, traditional music, and symbolic staging created a theatrical experience that was deeply rooted in Indian culture while also being universally resonant. Moreover, Tanveer's dedication to nurturing local talent through Naya Theatre ensured that his artistic vision was not only sustained but also evolved with the changing times. His influence extends beyond the stage, inspiring generations of playwrights, directors, and actors to continue exploring

the intersections of tradition and modernity, art and activism. In a world increasingly marked by cultural homogenization, Tanveer's work stands as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural diversity while using the arts as a means to advocate for social equity and communal harmony. His theatre was, and remains, a space where the complexities of human experience are brought to life with honesty, creativity, and a profound sense of purpose.

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Marriage and Modernity in *Kanyadaan*: An Exploration of the Clash between Traditional Values and Modern Perspectives on Marriage

Bijender Singh

Abstract

This paper examines the thematic conflict between traditional values and modern perspectives on marriage as depicted in Vijay Tendulkar's drama *Kanyadaan*. Set against the backdrop of post-independence India, the play scrutinises the social and personal repercussions of marrying across caste lines. The analysis delves into the complexities of an inter-caste marriage, focusing on the ideological clashes between characters, particularly Arun and Nath Devlalikar, to illuminate the broader societal tensions between entrenched traditions and emerging modern ideals. Furthermore, the paper investigates the intersectionality of caste and gender through Jyoti's experiences, highlighting the compounded nature of these social hierarchies. This study underscores the enduring relevance of *Kanyadaan* in contemporary discussions about social justice, equality, and the persistent struggle between tradition and modernity in Indian society.

Keywords: *Kanyadaan*, marriage, modernity, traditional values, caste, gender, Indian theatre, social change, post-independence India.

Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan* stands as a significant work within the realm of Indian theatre, reflecting the profound socio-cultural tensions of its time. As India navigated the complex process of modernisation post-independence, traditional values and contemporary perspectives often

came into sharp conflict, particularly in the context of marriage. Tendulkar's play, through its penetrating examination of an inter-caste marriage, serves as a microcosm of these broader societal struggles. The narrative focuses on the Devlalikar family, who, despite their progressive facade, are forced to confront their deeply ingrained prejudices and societal norms when Arun Athavale, a Dalit, marries Jyoti, the daughter of Nath and Seva Devlalikar.

Kanyadaan is not merely a story of marital discord but a powerful commentary on the socio-political landscape of India during a period of intense change. The play illuminates the intersection of caste, gender, and modernity, providing a complex focal point for exploring how these elements interact and clash within the institution of marriage. By highlighting the personal and social ramifications of Arun and Jyoti's union, Tendulkar critiques the superficial nature of societal reforms that fail to address the underlying prejudices and power structures.

The dramatic conflicts in *Kanyadaan* is multi-faceted, encompassing the ideological battle between traditional values and modern perspectives, as well as the characters' personal struggles as they navigate through these conflicting worlds. In this regard, Sudipto Banerjee "Tendulkar's female characters often find themselves at the intersection of societal expectations and personal desires, revealing the inherent tensions between tradition and the emergent modern ethos" (Banerjee 45). Nath Devlalikar, a staunch advocate of social reform, finds his ideals challenged by the harsh realities of his daughter's marriage, revealing the limitations and contradictions of his progressive stance. Kumar states, in this regard, that "Tendulkar's work does not shy away from exposing the harsh realities of Indian society, where the caste system and patriarchy continue to determine the lives of individuals" (Kumar 82). Similarly, Arun's revolutionary zeal is tested by the societal and familial pressures accompanying his marriage to Jyoti, highlighting the difficulties of enacting genuine social change.

Moreover, *Kanyadaan* delves deeply into the psychological and emotional dimensions of its characters, particularly Jyoti, whose experiences as a high caste woman who marries into a low caste family

expose the patriarchal oppression in caste society. Her journey reflects the broader societal struggles women and marginalised communities face in their quest for equality and justice. Tendulkar's portrayal of these issues underscores the play's enduring relevance in contemporary discussions about marriage, social justice, and the complexities of modernisation.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to explore the conflict between traditional values and modern perspectives on marriage, as depicted in Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*. The study seeks to analyse the representation of these conflicting viewpoints within the play and investigate how the characters embody and challenge these contrasting ideologies. Additionally, the research aims to evaluate the impact of these tensions on the characters' relationships and societal roles, with a particular focus on the intersectionality of caste and gender. Further, this paper aims to contribute to understanding the ongoing societal transformations in post-independence India, reflecting on the play's relevance to contemporary discussions about social justice and equality.

Material and Methodology

The study utilises a qualitative research methodology, focusing on textual analysis of *Kanyadaan*. Primary sources include the full text of the drama, while secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, critical essays, and reviews of the play. The research employs a thematic analysis approach to dissect how traditional and modern perspectives on marriage are represented. The research is divided into three sections: Traditional Values vs. Modern Perspectives, Gender and Intersectionality, and Theoretical Perspectives and Societal Change. To analyse the drama feminist and Dalit criticism are used as tools.

Discussion

Kanyadaan centres on the character of Arun Athavale, an idealistic young man who marries Jyoti, a Brahmin woman. This act challenges the entrenched social hierarchies of the time. The play juxtaposes Jyoti's progressive along with her father, Nath Devlalikar, who wants to reform society but who late disapproves his ideology and Jyoti's act of marriage.

Traditional Values vs. Modern Perspectives

The play's portrayal of traditional values is exemplified through Seva and Prakash, who are deeply entrenched in the norms of caste-based marriage. Their resistance to Jyoti's marriage with Arun illustrates the societal pressure and old age condition of their self to adhere to traditional practices, reflecting the real-life challenges faced by individuals attempting to break away from established norms. Traditional values are depicted as rigid and resistant to change, highlighting the difficulty of reconciling these with emerging modern ideals. Nath's initial acceptance of Arun and Jyoti's marriage appears progressive, but it quickly becomes evident that his acceptance is superficial. Nath's discomfort is highlighted in his conversation with Arun, where he says, "I had my doubts, Arun, but I never thought it would be this difficult" (Tendulkar 37). It underscores Nath's internal conflict between his liberal ideals and ingrained prejudices.

In contrast, Arun and Jyoti both represent the modern perspective on marriage. Jyoti's choice to marry across caste lines symbolises a break from the past and an embrace of egalitarian principles while Arun's attempt signifies his desire of breaking the caste barriers and establishment of equality beyond caste lines. This progressive modern viewpoint indicates the societal shifts occurring in post-independence India, where there was a growing movement towards social reform and equal rights. Arun's character challenges the status quo and advocates for a more inclusive and progressive approach to marriage. Arun articulates his idealism by saying, "Our marriage is a statement against the caste system, a step towards a more just society" (Tendulkar 45).

The clash between these perspectives is not merely a personal struggle but a reflection of broader societal tensions. The play reveals how the modernisation of marriage practices is fraught with conflict, as traditional values often resist such changes. The emotional and social turmoil experienced by the characters serves as a microcosm of the larger cultural struggle between old and new values. Jyoti's experience, in particular, underscores this tension. Naik too endorses that "Tendulkar uses marriage as a microcosm to explore the broader societal shifts and the ongoing struggle between tradition and modernity in post-colonial

India" (Naik 108). Despite her marriage to Arun, she faces discrimination and violence, which she recounts to Nath and Seva, saying, "They treat me like an outsider, an intruder. Even Arun sometimes... I feel so alone" (Tendulkar 82). This is what Gopal Guru says that Dalits too have an "internalization of caste" in such a rigid form that they are not able to transgress it unconsciously (Singh and Tripathy 14) .

Furthermore, the play's narrative structure reinforces the thematic conflict. Tendulkar uses dialogue and interactions between characters to illustrate the differing viewpoints on marriage. The intense emotional exchanges and confrontations underscore the significance of these ideological clashes and their impact on personal relationships. One pivotal moment occurs when Jyoti confronts Arun about his behaviour, saying, "You wanted to change the world, but you can't even change yourself" (Tendulkar 95). This confrontation highlights the personal failures that can accompany romantic ambitions.

Besides, the impact of this conflict on the characters' relationships is profound. Arun's marriage creates a rift within his family and social circle, illustrating the personal sacrifices and societal pressures associated with challenging traditional norms. The play portrays the struggles of navigating between individual desires and societal expectations, revealing the complexities of modern marriage practices in a traditional society. Arun's mother-in-law, Seva, encapsulates this struggle when she laments, "We dreamed of a new world, but the old one still holds us captive" (Tendulkar 103).

This conflict extends beyond personal relationships to touch upon broader societal issues. Tendulkar critiques the superficial acceptance of modern values that fail to address deeper prejudices. Nath's progressive façade crumbles as he struggles with his daughter's suffering and his own ingrained biases. This is evident when he confesses, "I thought I could rise above it, but the caste system is like a disease... it's in my blood" (Tendulkar 110). This admission highlights the pervasive and insidious nature of caste, even among those who intellectually reject it.

Gender and Intersectionality

The play explores the role of gender also in the clash between traditional and modern values. Jyoti, as a woman from a high caste, gets discriminated by Arun, a low caste male on account of gender. Her marriage to Arun places her in a vulnerable position, subjected to both caste-based prejudice and gender-based oppression. Despite her efforts to conform to her new role, Jyoti remains marginalised. This dual marginalization on the axis of caste and gender is poignantly illustrated in her plea to Arun, "You see me as your wife, but they only see a Dalit woman" (Tendulkar 85). This line underscores the intersectionality of Jyoti's struggles, highlighting how caste and gender intersect to compound her challenges.

Tendulkar's portrayal of Jyoti's struggles after marriage provides a critical lens to examine with the difference of modern ideals and failure of societal change. Arun's failure to support Jyoti adequately reflects the broader failure of modern claim of development to address the entrenched social hierarchies fully. Arun's eventual breakdown and realisation of his inadequacy are captured in his desperate cry, "I wanted to change the world, but the world changed me" (Tendulkar 120). This moment encapsulates the disillusionment often accompanying the clash between idealism and reality.

Moreover, Jyoti's experience in the play reveals the limitations of the modernist approach to marriage reform. Although the marriage is initially presented as a progressive step towards social equality, it quickly becomes evident that societal attitudes have not evolved simultaneously. Jyoti's suffering and alienation highlight the superficial nature of the acceptance of inter-caste marriages. Her poignant lament, "They accept me, but only on the surface. Deep down, nothing has changed" (Tendulkar 87), underscores the persistent societal prejudices that undermine the modern ideals of equality and inclusivity.

The narrative further explores the psychological impact of these societal tensions on Jyoti. Her struggles are not just external but internal as well, as she grapples with her identity and self-worth in a hostile environment. The psychological trauma she endures is poignantly expressed

when she says, "Every day, I feel like I am losing a part of myself" (Tendulkar 92). This internal conflict adds another layer of complexity to the play's exploration of modernity and tradition, highlighting the profound personal cost one has to pay for an attempt of societal change.

Theoretical Perspectives and Societal Change

From a theoretical perspective, *Kanyadaan* can be seen as a critique of the modernist project itself. The play suggests that the mere adoption of modern practices, such as inter-caste marriage, without a corresponding change in societal attitudes and structures, is insufficient. This critique aligns with Partha Chatterjee's analysis in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, where he argues that "colonial and postcolonial societies often adopt the outward forms of modernity without achieving substantive social transformation" (Chatterjee 45). In *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar reflects on this phenomenon, showing how the superficial adoption of modern marital practices fails to dismantle the deep-rooted caste-ridden mentality.

Additionally, the play's exploration of gender intersects with its critique of caste. Jyoti's experience as a high caste woman in an inter-caste marriage reveals how gender and caste oppression are intertwined. Her marginalisation within her marital home reflects the broader societal tendency to subordinate women, especially those from lower castes. This intersectional analysis is crucial for understanding the full scope of the play's critique of societal norms. Jyoti's predicament echoes the arguments made by scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who highlights how "gender and caste intersect to compound oppression" (Spivak 103).

Furthermore, Tendulkar's portrayal of Nath Devlalikar's character underscores the difficulty of overcoming deeply ingrained social prejudices. Despite his progressive ideals, Nath's internalised biases become apparent, reflecting the societal struggle to reconcile traditional values with modern ideals. This internal conflict is captured in his admission, "I wanted to be progressive, but I am still a prisoner of my upbringing" (Tendulkar 115). This line signifies the enduring power of traditional values and the challenges individuals and societies face in moving towards genuine equality and modernity.

The play's conclusion, which sees Jyoti leaving Arun, suggests a grim reality: efforts to bridge traditional and modern values may fail without fundamental societal change. Jyoti's departure signifies the limitations of individual actions in the face of systemic issues. Her final words to Arun, "We cannot build a future on a foundation of lies and prejudice" (Tendulkar 128), serve as a powerful indictment of the superficial nature of societal change and the need for deeper, more substantive transformation. Deshpande argues that "Tendulkar's plays frequently expose the limitations of superficial reform that ignores the deep-rooted social and cultural practices that sustain inequality" (2675). In the end, Jyoti leaves her father too to go to Arun's house totally rejecting all the proposals of her father as she is disheartened to find the difference of theory and praxis in her father's attitude towards Arun and his idealism and social reality she was brought up in. Now, she dislikes her father as father is a failure on ideal father whom Jyoti followed blindly and his values ingrained in her mind are futile to cope up the social realities.

Conclusion

Kanyadaan offers a compelling exploration of the clash between traditional values and modern perspectives on marriage. Through its portrayal of an inter-caste marriage and the resulting familial and social conflicts, the play highlights the challenges and consequences of negotiating between old and new values. Tendulkar's drama provides valuable insights into the societal shifts occurring in India during a significant change, reflecting broader themes of modernisation and social reform. The current examination underscores the ongoing relevance of *Kanyadaan* in discussions about marriage and societal transformation.

The enduring impact of *Kanyadaan* lies in its portrayal of the complexities involved in reconciling traditional values with modern ideals. The play's exploration of caste, gender, and societal change remains pertinent in contemporary social justice and equality discussions. Tendulkar's incisive critique of superficial modernity and his empathetic depiction of the struggles faced by individuals caught between conflicting values provide a powerful commentary on the ongoing challenges of societal transformation.

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Recovering 'Lost' Voices in Mythology: A Study of Poile Sengupta's *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*

Ekta Verma & Bijender Singh

Abstract

In Indian mythology the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the most celebrated epics, which were written to create moral ideals for future generations to follow and emulate. For ages, these myths have been accepted entirely and unquestionably as they are and have been an integral part of our being from time immemorial. However, the 21st century has witnessed a surge of publications of epics with alternative perspectives. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, Manini J. Anandani's *Mandodari: The Queen of Lanka*, etc. are just a few to name. These re-writings, from various perspectives, endeavour to provide space to the hitherto unheard mythical characters in the grand narratives. Such re-writings also open up room for other possibilities in response to our roots, culture, mythology and many other potential realities. The present paper aims to analyse Poile Sengupta's *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*, which is an alternative reading of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Sengupta, in her play, attempts to bring forth the story and voice of two despicable villains of Indian mythology- Shoorpanakha from the *Ramayana* and Shakuni from the *Mahabharata*, who have been hitherto either overlooked or colossally misinterpreted in the mainstream narratives.The paper seeks to scrutinise the derogatory projection of the supposedly villainous characters in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and how Sengupta has tried to untangle the prejudices and (mis)perceptions woven

around these mythical figures. This is a way of recovering these 'lost' voices, which otherwise would always have remained obscure.

Key Words: Myths, Re-writing, Lost Voice, Alternative Perspective, Stigmatise

The play *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* brings to limelight the plight of marginalised sections of society in the present time as well as in the ancient time. Sengupta places the stigmatised villains of Indian epics at the centre stage and provides them with a platform where they can tell their 'lost' version of the story. There is no denying the fact that mythology continues to exert a powerful influence on modern minds; however, mainstream narratives often present a homogenised and one-dimensional view of these stories and their characters. This homogenisation results in the loss of alternative perspectives and context-specific interpretations. In this light, delineating upon two villains- Shoorpanakha from the *Ramayana* and Shakuni from the *Mahabharata,* the play provides voice to those who have been vilified and shunned in the master-narratives. For the first time in history, Sengupta allows these two villains from two different narratives to meet and interact in a post-modern world in the form of MAN and WOMAN, who are still carrying in their heart the scars of disturbing and painful memories of their past. Shoorpanakha is a demoness whose slightest reference evokes resentment, displeasure and condemnation among Indians because she, with her wicked mindset, tried to seduce Rama and became the cause behind Sita's kidnapping, who is the epitome of the ideal Indian woman, which further led to the war between Rama and Ravana. On the other hand, Shakuni is a man of intrigues who is guile, deceptive, and manipulative and widens the rift between Kauravas and Pandavas, which further incites the war. In other words, these two mythical characters are looked down upon in Indian society because they are portrayed in the Indian epics as the cause behind the mass destruction and bloodbath.

In general, epics are the encyclopedia with a vivid record of great heroes who had certain divine features and qualities beyond human reach or limitations. Romila Thapar, a historian, furthers this definition of epic in her essay "The Historian and the Epic" and remarks: "... the epic is essentially

a literary crystallisation of the heroic ideal. By its very nature, therefore, it is not to be taken as factual evidence but as the representation of an ideal ..." (199). Epics, thus, act as an instrument for propagating the core ideals and values that a particular society upholds and aspires to achieve.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are furnished through this very same treatment as the characters in them are portrayed in terms of binary, where the epitome of perfection is juxtaposed with the epitome of evil. Since the beginning, we have been seeing things through a binary approach- hero and villain, good and bad, victor and vanquished, etc. in the epics. Consequently, we fail to see the other sides of the deemed villains- Shoorpanakha and Shakuni. In the glory of heroic deeds, we turn a blind eye to their stories which are full of injustices and set the course of the narratives. We never bother to think about the painful and detrimental treatment meted out to them in the narratives and fail to empathise with them as well. In this regard, Ipshita Mitra in her article "Shakuni and Shoorpanakha Meet to Retell History", aptly remarks:

> For us, they epitomised 'evil'. Shoorpanakha, an 'ugly' vamp and Shakuni, the shrewd, conspiring and manipulative uncle. However, beneath their 'villainous' clocks resided a brother, who felt betrayed, and a sister, whose love was answered by a violent thrash from two 'godly' brothers respectively, we hardly cared to know. (Mitra)

The play *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni,* attempts to peek into thick layers inside the body of villains- Shoorpanakha and Shakuni, where the victim resides. The two misinterpreted mythical beings meet at an airport in the contemporary world while waiting for an "infinitely delayed" flight and engage in a dialogue which establishes them as victims in their own stories while the mainstream narratives depict them as the embodiment of evil. Without any specific identity, the Man and the Woman in the play are universalised and belong to all times- past, present and future. At the very outset, the Woman in the play flips over the conventional understanding of the epics in an ingenious manner and refuses to wear the traditional lens to see the happenings in the narratives- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* This is evident in her words:

MAN: If you need glasses, why the hell don't you wear them?

WOMAN: (Still shouting) And I can see perfectly well too.

MAN: So you read that rag upside down.

Pause.

WOMAN: I can read things upside down. (Sengupta 246)

The Woman in the text declares herself as Shoorpanakha and authenticates the story by saying: "It's my story. (Pause) I was her" (Sengupta 255). Shoorpanakha not only questions her traditional vilification but also challenges the stereotypical image that has been used to demonise her for expressing her sexual urges openly. She comes from a different culture where a woman can freely express her wants and can approach a man. Her autonomy and independence are rewarded with a never-healing wound by robbing her of her femininity and pushing her into eternal pain and misery. By expressing her desires, she challenges the power dynamics of the patriarchal setup that strives to suppress or silence women's voices: "Do you know what it's like ... to be a woman ... to want a man so much that ... that the rest of the world disappears?" (Sengupta 252). She not only expresses her desires but also challenges societal norms that expect women to remain passive in matters of love and desire by declaring herself boldly: "I'm Kaamavalli ... the goddess of desire ... come ... I'm all shivery for you ... come" (Sengupta 260). Articulation of such intense feelings on Shoorpanakha's part in a society that often prohibits women from expressing their sexuality demonstrates her strength and openness. She highlights the limiting and hypocritical standards imposed on women by questioning: "Was it so wrong to tell a man 'I love you'?" (Sengupta 262). Through this question, she challenges the established structures that seek to control even women's ability to express their genuine emotions.

In the patriarchal framework of Indian society, this openness on the part of women is considered inappropriate as it poses a threat to the existing structures. Men hold primary power in patriarchy and dominate the roles in the social sphere, which are usually associated with strength

and assertiveness, such as economic provider, political leadership, and protector of their families, while women are relegated to the domestic sphere, acquiring a passive and submissive role of docile wives, nurturing mothers and good daughters. In other words, patriarchy seeks to confine and control women's behaviour, and those who dare to cross these so-called boundaries are labelled as immodest, promiscuous, seductresses and vamps. Because the patriarchal structure only permits men to make initiatives of any kind, Shoorpanakha was thus severely punished for making the proposal to Rama. Her words effectively convey the plight: "... They tossed me this way and that, as if ... as if I did not deserve any more respect. As if I was a ... broken plaything" (Sengupta 261).

Here, another demeaning facet of patriarchy comes to the limelight, which views women as nothing more than a mere object in the hands of men, when Shoorpanakha was being tossed between the two godly brothers like an inanimate object. She received the same inhumane treatment that any other woman would receive. In reference to the role women are assigned to play in the epics, Nabaneeta Dev Sen aptly comments: "There is little they can do there- other than get abducted or rescued, or pawned, or molested, or humiliated in some way or other" (18). In the *Ramayana,* there is no mention of rape, but the Woman here uses the very word 'rape' to imply that she might be assaulted physically: "But as somebody or the other said, if rape is inevitable ..." (Sengupta 248). She was ridiculed, humiliated and abused, thus setting an example for future violators. All this was a result of her courage to speak the unspeakable and to express her mind which renders her a misfit in the ideological definition of woman. She goes on to say, "I wanted love ... just a little love ... for a little while" (Sengupta 262). Her only fault was that she desired love; however, the treatment meted out to her for a straightforward proposal is quite outrageous and unworthy on the part of warriors. Shoorpanakha is the embodiment of everything that a woman should not be according to the definition of an ideal woman espoused by patriarchal structures. When Shakuni tells her that she is different and an Asur, Shoorpanakha questions the very notion of being an 'other': "So? You were from hills. Does that make us both less human? Do our hearts not know love?" (Sengupta 268).

Through Shoorpanakha, Sengupta has addressed the issue of female sexuality which resonates in each and every word spoken by her in the play: "What was Shoorpanakha's crime? That she approached a man with sexual desire?" (Sengupta 277). Soorpanakha's extreme rejection and brutal punishment for expressing her desires demonstrate patriarchal control over female sexuality. Her mutilation is a harsh reminder of the repercussions for women who push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Along with the issue of female sexuality, gender roles- which any society has handed to a woman since her birth in relation to men- are also discussed. Her identity as a woman and an individual has never been acknowledged, and it still remains ignored, neglected and meaningless. Therefore, Shoorpanakha's soul residing in a modern woman rejects the prescribed roles and vehemently asserts: "Oh, fuck you. Do you have to classify me? ... (wearily.) I am a woman, don't you understand? A woman. Not a saint. Not a whore. Not just a mother, a sister, a daughter. I am a woman" (Sengupta 267). These remarks of Shoorpanakha represent the unspoken inner cries and sincere sentiments of women across the globe, which they are unable to express. Sengupta has thereby beautifully linked the Shoorpanakha's suffering to that of all women.

In his book *The Wretched of Earth,* Frantz Fanon explores the psychological and social aspects of colonialism. According to him, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip ... By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (210). In addition to challenging the idea of being perceived as an 'other', Shoorpanakha also seeks to challenge the misrepresentation of mythical beings in the epics- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* Hence, she asserts: "Because she was dark and big. She wasn't the way men like women to be. Fair-complexioned. Delicate. Shy ... biddable" (Sengupta 277). Shoorpanakha and Shakuni are portrayed as the evil of society in the mainstream narratives by unfolding partial truth about their respective stories. Both Shoorpanakha, an Asur, and Shakuni, a tribal from the hills, believe that they have fallen prey to Aryan race supremacy, which holds them in lower regard as people. The following conversation between the Man and the Woman reveals the true intentions of Aryans:

WOMAN: Shoorpanakha merely wanted love.

MAN: The Aryan greed.

WOMAN: She wasn't beautiful in the ideal way. So?

MAN: Their stinking race superiority.

WOMAN: She did not behave like a well-bred woman. So?

MAN: They came all the way south carrying their arrogance like a blood thirsty sword.

WOMAN: She showed off her breasts and thrust out her hips. So? (Sengupta 277)

This compelling exchange of dialogues between the Man and the Woman explores racism, colonialism and gender oppression that exist in Indian Society through the lens of the revered epics- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Here, Shoorpanakha becomes an instrument for criticising and highlighting the societal and historical injustices against women, such as the rejection and exclusion of women based on their physical appearance when they are deemed misfits as per the so-called standards of beauty espoused by patriarchy. Likewise, Shakuni becomes an instrument for criticising injustice, violence and cultural superiority experienced by people who live at the fringes of society and get subdued and oppressed by the power holders. Traditionally, these figures have been reduced to one-dimensional villains; however, these dialogues present a counter perspective wherein Shoorpanakha and Shakuni emerge as multifaceted and multi-dimensional characters and might be viewed as tragic characters rather than villainous. Sengupta makes it apparent in her interview with Anita Singh: "*Thus Spake* is a modern play that deals with conflict that is timeless. The two protagonists suffer because they belong to oppressed communities ... My play brings them centre stage, as the marginalized should be, and brings their suffering forward to our times" (86). Their tragedy is clearly visible in the following expressions:

MAN: They thought they were invincible, is it?

WOMAN: They hacked off her breasts.

MAN: They were conspirators.

WOMAN: Violators.

MAN: They violated all human rights.

WOMAN: They assaulted a defenceless woman.

MAN: They waged a wrongful, a totally unjustified war. (Sengupta 277)

Violent backlash will inevitably result sooner or later when the marginals are subjected to the dominant. This helps to explain Shoorpanakha's resentments and Shakuni's desire of "fanged revenge". Their acts are appropriate in this regard. They are delineated in the epics with a huge disparity and contrast, which contributes to their misrepresentation, only to justify the horrible actions of the Aryan race. This is done skillfully by juxtaposing them with each other in binary extremes- hero and villain, good and bad, victor and vanquished, Aryans and Dravidians, grotesque vamp and luminous wife. The Woman, with her unique talent of reading things upside down, can see this hidden structure in their representation and the agenda behind it. Her understating of things is clear in her words: "Look at the Ramayana. The hero is tall ... straight-nosed ... handsome. The villain is grotesque with ten heads. The heroine is slender-waisted, dazzlingly fair. The vamp is dark, swarthy, big. Outspoken. Coarse. Therefore, the vamp is a demoness. Because she speaks her mind. Because she takes up space" (Sengupta 277). Thus, the play reveals the binaries hidden in the mythical texts.

The Man, like Shoorpanakha, assumes the role of Shakuni by declaring himself an "illusionist" and delivers his story in a manner that is remarkably similar to Shoorpanakha's narration. The conflict between his tribe and the Kurus that resulted in his capture and his brothers, as well as his brothers' determination to save him, are all disclosed in a novel manner: "... Then ... then ... my brothers made a pact. They decided that they would give all their pitiable rations to me so that I would live to take revenge ... I was the youngest, you see ... and the strongest" (Sengupta 273). The Kuru's misdeeds didn't end there; they subsequently forcibly married Shakuni's sister to a blind man; this infuriated the sister, who chose to blot the sun out of her life in order to serve a blind husband. The text provides glimpses into the heart of a helpless brother who couldn't bear the injustices that happened

to his sister "who was as free as the birds flying across the hills ... (Sengupta 265)" and his family. All the injustices led to his transition and triggered him to unfold a devious plot which resulted in his "fanged revenge". His statement accurately depicts his transformation from a plain man to a conspirator: "But when plotting revenge, nothing else is important ... not my nephews ... not me ... Finally ... not even my sister ... I wanted to turn everything to dust. Dust and ashes" (Sengupta 269).

Sengupta excels in linking the plight of Shakuni with every peripheral man in the contemporary world, as this desire of "fanged revenge" doesn't leave him even in the modern world. The matrix of oppressor and oppressed may have changed with the passage of time, however, the streak of inherent injustices in it remains unchanged. This is obvious in the following statements:

MAN: My home ... my land is being torn apart. They took away my brother. Said he was an informer.

(Pause.)

MAN: We found his body a week later. He had no fingernails. No toe nails.

(Pause.)

MAN: Then my sister ... My thirteen-year-old sister ... they ... (Shouts.) You think I have any ... bleeding ... love ... left in me? (Sengupta 279)

In the contemporary world, the injustices of the centre and armed forces result in the form of terrorism with several casualties. However, near the end Sengupta endeavours to envision a future where love triumphs over hatred through the Woman in the play. Shoorpanakha, with her intrinsic inclination towards love, persuades the Man against detonating a bomb on the plane. The Man was planning it for a long time, like Shakuni, in order to avenge the atrocities of the armed forces upon his brother and sister.

Conclusion:

Since no one is entirely good or evil, the play underscores the relative conceptions of good and evil, emphasising that neither is true and the fact

that grey zones also exist between the extremes of white and black, good and evil, light and dark. Shoorpanakha and Shakuni were the outcomes of brutality, violation and maltreatment. Here, it is noteworthy that no one is born evil and fiendish; only hostile circumstances and conditions drive one to take recourse to evil. Thus, the play remarkably deconstructs the binary of good and evil; and presents the humane version of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni and calls for approaching myths and history from a modern adjusted position instead of getting influenced by the homogenous extremist account engendered by the overwhelming, standard belief system(s). This exercise helps one to unearth and recover the hitherto 'lost' versions and the possible connotations of the circumstances and events by viewing the overall social backgrounds of these characters. As a result of this process, our response towards these characters becomes comparatively flexible, and we begin to appreciate them in human terms.

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Traditional Institution for Folk Theatre and Culture in Manipur: A Study of Umanglai Haraoba

Thounaojam Ruhichand Singh & Sharmila Thingbaijam

Abstract:

The Umanglai Haraoba "an appeasement of Gods and Goddesses" is a ritual festival particularly observed by the Meitei community with sanctity in the mainland of Manipur and outside the state to some extent. It is a ceremonial rite to appease the Umanglai (Tutelary deity) and it is the unique contribution of Meitei to the domain of world culture. The ritual festival is the greatest single key to the religion, culture and history of Meitei people of Manipur. Lai Haraoba itself is a university preserving and imparting knowledge on a variety of subjects. It embodies the elements of common ancestry, integrity and communal harmony among the various indigenous communities residing in Manipur. It is also the greatest repository of spiritual insight and wisdom of the indigenous peoples in the region. Umanglai Haraoba also reveals the cosmogony-theory of the creation of the Universe then the Earth and the living creature especially human being. It is the school of philosophical thoughts of Meitei community and also the school of oral and folk literature, dance and music of the region and many more. The purpose of the paper is to highlight the socio cultural background of Manipur and human development and also to find out the roles of Umanglai Haraoba in an innovative approach as a traditional institution for folk theatre and culture in Manipur. The paper shows how the various aspects of the ritual performances of Umanglai Haraoba show the characteristics of theatre. In the Umanglai Haraoba, the origin of the Meitei, their coming and settlement on the earth, their evolution as a social group, agricultural works and weaving for a civilized existence along with multiplication of

progeny are clearly depicted through ritual performances. The origin of life in the earth (evolution theory of the living creatures especially human being), according to Meitei belief system is mainly depicted in the Laiharaoba.Present study also suggests that the Elements of theatre inherent in this ritual festival can be identified and studied profitably through an analysis of the structures of the ritual theatre.

Keywords: *Tutelary deity, Umanglai Haraoba, folk theatre, performance, ritual*

Introduction:

Manipur has been known to the people of India and across the globe since many years for her unique qualities. The state is the home of many ethnic tribes and communities with their distinctive life styles and beliefs. The land has a rich traditional culture of its own and has many spectacular contributions to the world of culture. The Meitei people live with our heads held high because of the rich cultural heritage left behind by our ancestors. Umangla is the tutelary, ancestral, domestic, sylvan and clan deities of the indigenous people of Manipur which are worshiped especially by celebrating a ritual festival popularly known as Umanglai Haraoba. There are about 150 Umanglais residing in above 700 shrines in the different parts of North Eastern India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. As the Laiharaoba consists of fertility rites, some of the Umanglais are very popular for begging child by infertile couples. Some of the Umanglais are closely associated with worshipping for sick, weak and handicapped children. Worshipping of Umanglai is a compulsory ritual programme of the wedding ceremony of Meitei community. Thus, there is an inseparable relation between Umanglais and Manipuri society. So, each and every locality in Manipur is compulsorily having one shrine of Umanglai as there is such strong traditional belief of Umanglai culture.

Umanglai Haraoba "a socio-cultural festival or the performance of ceremonial rites to appease the Umanglai" is counted as the unique contribution of the indigenous peoples to the domain of world culture. The Meitei peoples in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Bangladesh and Myanmar also, celebrate Umanglai Haraoba. The worlds famous Manipuri dance

(Ras Lila), polo and Nat Sankritan (recognized by UNESCO), etc. are the products of Umanglai culture.Laiharaoba, the vibrant festival, is widely helpful in the socialization and nation making process of the indigenous peoples. It embodies the elements of common ancestry, integrity and communal harmony among the various communities residing in the region. In short, it can be said to reflect the culture of the indigenous peoples in totality, irrespective of caste, creed or faith. The ritual festival is the greatest single key to the religion, culture and history of Meitei people of Manipur. Lai Haraoba itself is a university (the Universe of Knowledge in the Meitei society) preserving and imparting knowledge on a variety of subjects. Identity and civilization of the Meitei nation are clearly reflected in this festival. Umanglai Haraoba also reveals the cosmogony-theory of the creation of the Universe, then the Earth and the living creature especially human being. It is the school of philosophical thoughts of Meitei community and also the school of oral and folk literature, dance and music of the region and many more.

Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution of Culture:

Before discussing the Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution for folk theatre in Manipur, let's have an idea about the significance of the Umanglai Culture in Contemporary Manipuri Society. Among all the various ethnic groups that have settled in Manipur, the Meiteis are credited with having the greatest number of population. But inside the Meitei ethnic group there are two religions, e.g. Meitei Hinduism and Meitei Sanamahism. One follows Hindu religion and the other follows indigenous Meitei religion (Sanamahi). Even if these two religious groups profess two different religions, the unique thing is that both of them worship Sanamahi deity and Umanglai with the same rites and rituals in equal measure.

The Meitei Hindus make it mandatory to preserve the South-West Corner of the house as the abode of Lainingthou Sanamahi which is considered as a sacrosanct area and every day they worship this Home deity with rituals which is same as what is practiced by the followers of Sanamahism in the same corner of the house and in the same manner. Moreover, the said Meitei Hindus and followers of indigenous Sanamahi

religion together pay obeisance as one, to the local ancestral deities (Umanglais) with awe and reverence with much merry-making. Both the members of the two religious groups in unison give financial contributions when Umanglai Haraoba or merry-making of the sylvan deities takes place for days for gathering in the locality. The Meitei Hindus and the Meitei Sanamahi take keen interest in such festivals and they perform it with ecstasy.

In the Umanglai Haraoba, the origin of the Meiteis, their coming and settlement on the earth, their evolution as a social group, the struggle for existence by hard labours, agricultural works and weaving for a civilized existence along with multiplication of progeny are clearly depicted through dance and music. To commemorate the younger generation of these things, the Lai Haraoba is performed every year in Manipur with pomp and gaiety accompanied by offerings of fruits, flowers, prayers, songs and dances down the ages. But this should be performed under certain rules and strictures. It was greatly feared that anybody who violates these rules and practices intentionally or unintentionally will suffer and receive the scourge of God. Not only this, strict rules are observed to maintain discipline in the precincts of the Umanglai. All those who are taking part in the Lai Haraoba as also the spectators are to observe this discipline. There are beliefs galore that if the participants fail to conform to the prescribed rities and rituals along with the rules and regulations governing the different aspects of the Lai Haraoba, misfortunes are sure to befall the village people.

Unfortunately, the change of time and emergence of modern society has brought about undesired influence into the festival and its sanctity has been at threat. Modern people are heavily influencing in transforming the festival into an entertainment festival. This undue influence has disturbed the psychical of tradition and culture loving citizens of the society. But during the past 40/50 years it has been seen that with the march of time there has been an almost lack of enforcement of discipline in regard to such a very important aspect of the Lai Haraoba. As a result, non-conformation of the accepted rules and standards of observance of the rites and rituals in Lai Haraoba has become very common now-a-days leading to a very unhappy trend of deterioration

even to the extent of creating a complete mess. There is a tendency for the disappearance of the right kind of dress, costume, folk songs, prayer, dancing style, rites, rituals and festival materials. Most of the social disciplines present earlier during the Laiharaoba precincts are crumbling. Many irresponsible fellows have appeared on the scene acting according to their whims in complete disregard of the pristine purities of the important facts of Lai Haraoba and in violation of the sacred practices of this great festival. It is very unfortunate to think that the Laiharaoba has been slowly reduced to a mere amusement piece or entertainment programme by inserting many items quite unconnected with it.

The present paper aims to highlight the significance of Umanglai culture in the contemporary Manipuri society. Umanglai Haraoba is a ritual and religious festival consisting of fertility rites and ancestors' worship. It also reveals the cosmogony-theory of the creation of the Universe then the Earth; Evolution theory of the living creatures specially human being; Self-understanding and meditation plus the abode of the almighty lord; School of philosophy and thoughts of Meitei community; Publicity for the high ideals of the Meitei; Annual conference of a Meitei village; Training Centre for leadership of Meitei ; Democratic ideals of Meitei; Defence, sports and health education system of Meitei; Integration and understanding among the villages i .e, Oneness of the village; School of financial management; School of social discipline and observance there of.; Protection of forest and environment; School of agriculture, handloom and handicraft of Meitei; School of oral and folk literature, dance and music; school of the various culture of Amaiba, Amaibi and Pena player; school of ritual performance and theatre, and many more. Thus, Umanglai Haraoba is the oldest traditional institution consisting of the different facets of culture and tradition in Meitei society.

Lai Haraoba: The Folk Theatre

The objective of the present paper is to find out the roles of Umanglai Haraoba in an innovative approach as a traditional institution for folk theatre and culture in Manipur. This religious and social festival, besides being the repository of different facets of culture, is the biggest source

of a variety folk theatre in Manipur. Most of the rituals of Lai Haraoba are the most important parts of the old Manipuri folk theatre and performance which reenact our cosmogony, civilization, socialization, etc. It will not be exaggeration to say that it is only because of Umanglai Haraoba that Manipur has got world famous theatre personalities like Heisanam Kanhailal, Ratan Thiyam, etc. The indigenous people are always inspiring by this ritual and folk theatre. It can also be said that Umanglai Haraoba promoted the birth and growth of Shumang Lila a popular form of secular theatre of Manipur. Many scholars also agree that the highly ritualistic dramatic forms of performances like world famous Manipuri *Ras Lila* and *Nata-Sankirtana* have been restructured here in the soil of Manipur based on the Umanglai Haraoba, the pre-Hindu tradition of theatre.

The ritual of the Lai Haraoba is the folk theatre, not a literary one, and it was and it is still the main responsibility of the Amaiba, Amaibi and Penakhongba to preserve the ritual performance. There are indeed differences in the rituals being practised in the various forms of Lai Haraoba, and some quite considerable. This is due partly to the different Lais (Gods and goddesses) who are addressed, and also to local variations. In general, however, the basic rituals of the Lai Haraoba represent a tradition that has remained substantially unchanged over time. The Lai Haraoba is a sprawling complex of song, dance and ritual performances which have clearly grown up over a period of time, and incorporated within itself a number of diverse elements. These are enclosed within the overarching structure of the coming of the Lais to be present at the festival on day one and their return to the heaven on the final day. On the beginning of the festival the Lais are called forth from the waters by the Maibi (at Lai Eekouba= calling the Lais from water) and ceremonially taken in procession to the shrine (Lai Higaba=bringing the Lais by boat). At evening the Lais are sung to sleep by the Penakhongba chanting and playing the Naosum (lullaby), and each morning the Lais are greeted with Yakeirol. On the central days the Lais are symbolically brought out in the courtyard to witness the rituals. The main ritual performances may be grouped into the following broad sections:

1. The Laibou (birth) cycle consists of dance sequence depicting creation, an invitation to sexual congress, the creation lyric (Anoirol), and a mimed dance with antiphonal singing demonstrating the life-cycle;
2. The Panthoibi cycle (Pamyallon, Phisarol, Yumsarol, etc.) is a series of lyrics largely to do with fertility, agriculture, Handloom and handicraft, etc.;
3. A third cycle, performed beneath a canopy (Phijang), consisting of complex dances, accompanied by songs, which are meant to portray the creation of the universe; and
4. On the last day only, a series of dances and lyrics which symbolize the gathering in of the universe into one (Ougri) and ending in a song of rejoicing (Khencho),etc.

At the end of the festival the deities return to heaven by means of a boat (Hijing Hirao). This final section begins with the cutting of the tree to make the vessel, following which it is 'rowed' to heaven (Lai Nongaba). This concluding episode mirrors the coming of the Lais at Lai Eekouba and Lai Higaba on day one. To this main structure other interludes are added. There are numerous cleansing and apotropaic rites, and offerings of flowers and fruits. At set points the Amaibi becomes possessed and delivers oracles. In its traditional form the end of the Lai Haraoba was also the occasion for communal harmony and sporting activities.

Thus, in the ritual dances of Lai Haraoba we see the performers demonstrating the cycle of life of a human being- from the foetus in the mother's womb, to birth and to habitation with erection of house, cultivation and weaving of cloths for offering to the gods- by gestures of hands and body. They also demonstrate how the undulating surface of the newly created earth was levelled by the youthful gods and goddesses. In re-enacting those acts of the Almighty and other divine beings, the Meitei believe that their pleasure evoked and in return the mortals on the earth are blessed with happiness and prosperity. There are also a few dance numbers and songs in such a performance charged

with erotic elements along with the reproduction of the love episodes between the divine couple- NongpokNingthou and Panthoibi. In view of all this, the festival is regarded by modern scholars as a 'fertility rite'.

It has already been stated that Lai Haraoba is a ritual performance and also a theatre. Various aspects of the ritual performances show the characteristics of theatre. The re-enactment is that of some eventful occasions, which the Meitei believe to have actually taken place sometime in their primordial past. This occasion generally refers to the myth of creation which is the Meitei have cherished in their oral tradition from generation to generation. This is a source of a dramatic performance entirely different from the Aristotelian model of drama. When the myth is re-enacted it assumes the form of living theatre developed by the Meiteis through long process of evolution. Through this performance they make the supernatural powers, who are believed to be deified ancestors of their tribe know the fact that they are not forgotten and that they are being honoured and entertained when the season comes. Local scholars also look at Lai Haraoba as a traditional drama composed of dances and songs in which young and old participate. Elements of theatre inherent in it can be identified and studied profitably through an analysis of the structures of the ritual theatre. When we look at the structures of the Lai Haraoba we are concerned with the art of a group of people having no written text but a different text orally handed down from generation to generation. Lai Haraoba is not an individual writer or artiste's work. It has a structure which has evolved in the course of a long process and a long history in the life of the people. The structure of theatre in Lai Haraoba is the 'structures of performance' in its own 'time of perception and cognition'. The text involved is not a written dramatic text composed for the event of theatre. The text is the 'performance text' which is the basis of the whole theatrical performance. This is the text perceived by the audience through the various channels of sensation produced by the experience of actual performance. To understand the structural organisation of Lai Haraoba it will be necessary to examine the way in which the various components of the ritual performances are organised in order to produce a unified configuration and a pattern, which is essentially the pattern of the theatre. Lai Haraoba

is a continuous structure of performance which takes place within a time-and-space framework.

Conclusion

From the above shown facts and circumstances it is brought to light that the sacraments of Meitei Umanglai-Haraoba is not merely a Meitei theistic or religious festive observance but also the source of almost all the cultural heritages in the socio-religious, socio-economic socio-recreational and alike fields. It is also one of the most important source and resource of dancing, musical, balletic and melodramic arts. It is the most interesting and heart capturing social function in the Meitei native indigenous and cultic theme. In short, the Lai Haraoba festival is a genuine festival of the Meiteis that has raised this stylized dance to the domain of a very high artistic and aesthetic expression and has produced one of the beautiful and authentic traditional schools of religious dancing in the world. This is the unique contribution of Manipur to the world culture.

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The Impact of Censorship Laws on Artistic Freedom: A Study of the 'Chinthamani' Play in Telugu Theatre

Nagaraju Pejjai & Siva Prasad Tumu

Abstract:

Chinthamani performances in Telugu theatre caused debate and government intervention due to modern adaptations that added obscene scenes, particularly those that depicted Subbi Shetty, a member of Arya Vaishya community, in an offensive manner. As the play was banned by the state government, many people of Telugu speaking region expressed their disappointment.This research investigates the responses of Telugu theatre community to the ban on Chinthamani, and the research focuses on conflict between social standards and artistic freedom. This study draws upon the original script, the play's historical significance, archival extracts, and social media responses in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis. Research was conducted through a mix of qualitative analysis of the themes and historical significance of the play, as well as quantitative surveys of the theatre community. Study findings emphasize social media's role in mobilizing protests against the ban, the loss of theatre work due to the ban, and efforts to revoke the ban. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of dialogue between theatre communities and government authorities in preserving cultural heritage and encouraging social commentary and artistic innovation.

Keywords: Chinthamani, Telegu Theatre, Ban, Societal standards, Artistic freedoms

1. Introduction:

In the history of Telugu theatre, "Chinthamani" is considered a groundbreaking piece that combines creative originality with a critical

examination of society. Authored by Kallakuri Narayana Rao and initially released in 1921, this play quickly resonated with the Telugu spectators due to its powerful depiction of social issues, notably the problem of prostitution. Its storytelling skills and literary excellence elevated it to a prominent position in Andhra Pradesh's theatrical realm, garnering lasting praise (Pothugunta 14).

Since its inception, "Chinthamani" has served as a reflective mirror of society, confronting audiences with the complexities of human morality and the consequences of vice. The play delves into a wide range of topics, from ethical quandaries to spiritual evolution, exploring the nuanced interplay between temptation, redemption, and societal norms. This rich narrative has not only engaged audiences but also established the play as a powerful tool for societal change and cultural self-reflection.

However, recent adaptations of "Chinthamani" have sparked renewed controversy due to deviations from the original intent and the inclusion of objectionable content, prompting the government to intervene. These adaptations, characterized by the introduction of vulgar language and insensitive portrayals, especially of the character Subbi Shetty, have sparked public outcry and legal scrutiny (S.V. 336; Kotte 33).

The play's journey must be understood within the broader context of censorship in Indian theatre history. Censorship has been an enduring issue in Indian theatre, reflecting the conflicts between artistic freedom, societal norms, and political tensions. First formal censorship law was introduced in India under British rule with the passage of the "Dramatic Performances Act of 1876" (Bhatia 6). Even after independence, colonial censorship frameworks were not abolished, but rather maintained and expanded (Ibid 89). Afterwards, the Cinematograph Act of 1952 was enacted to further restrict artistic expression (Maheswari 68). In independent India, censorship laws have frequently been utilized to govern speech and suppress political opposition. The actions are taken in response to a complaint of offense. The practice of censorship has had a significant impact on the advancement and artistic representation of Indian theatre. These impacts include the rise of self-censorship among artists and organizations, the stifling of political theatre and progressive movements, and the need for artistic adaptation to navigate restrictions.

The threat of violence and financial loss led many artists and organizations to self-censor, cancelling performances and exhibitions to avoid conflict (Maheshwari 333–339). Vijay Tendulkar's plays Ghashiram Kotwal and Sakharam Binder are examples of this phenomenon. Both the plays were attacked by Shiv Sena, an incident that went through the judicial process. The play, Ghashiram Kotwal was banned after 19 shows in 1970. Following protests, the ban was lifted in 1974. Similarly, Sakharam Binder was banned in 1974 on charges of obscenity under Section 292 of the IPC (Ibid 79). The main objection was its challenge to the sacred institution of marriage in the Maharashtrian Brahmin value system. This ban was also later revoked after the production team endured turbulent times. The incidents of extrajudicial censorship likely contributed to a chilling effect on artistic expression. As a result, some theatre practitioners were probably influenced to self-censor and avoid sensitive themes. The self-imposed restriction may have been a reflection of fear and uncertainty within the theatre community. As a result, some of the theatrical content may have become more homogenous as practitioners limited their topics of choice.

A further example of censorship's impact on artistic freedom is found in the practice of political theatre. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), a progressive movement that blended artistic expression with social activism through performing arts, faced government repression despite its cultural significance. In 1950, censorship practices and entertainment taxes by Congress contributed to the decline of IPTA (Ibid 104). The government's financial restrictions limited IPTA and similar groups to staging performances on sensitive political topics.

Activist and prominent street theatre personality Safdar Hashmi was murdered because he was perceived as a threat to the political power. In his performances, he critiqued the government and capitalist structures. His murder represents an attempt to silence an artist's critical and political voice. After Hashmi's death, the government's tardy response demonstrated bureaucratic inertia and a failure to address the underlying causes of violence and opposition (Ibid 111-112). The lack of timely action suppressed artistic expression. In this case, political power

influenced both the police and the judiciary to protect the murderers and delay justice. Here, political power illustrates how censorship is indirectly imposed through violence and institutional failures.

In reaction to Hashmi's death, intellectuals and artists protested outside the residence of Home Minister Buta Singh; they performed street plays at various places and opposed government-sponsored cultural events; they designated Hashmi's birthday as National Street Theatre Day; they held numerous art auctions to support cultural activities and events in honor of Safdar Hashmi; the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat) was founded in February 1989; and Sahmat initiated the 'Artists Alert' campaign (Ibid 108-115). These people's unified actions reject violent repression and endorse freedom of expression.

The reasons for banning Chinthamani performances share many similarities with Vijay Tendulkar's Sakharam Binder. The performances of both plays were banned due to their perceived obscenity and offensive representations of communities. However, Chinthamani's performances do not reflect the core values of Sakharam Binder, since the adaptations of Chinthamani were primarily centered on entertainment and attracting large audiences. The Telugu theatre community's mobilization in response to Chinthamani's ban resembles another incident in Indian theatre. The incident shares a common characteristic of uniting theatre personalities for a common cause. The common characteristic is observed between the response to Chinthamani's ban and the reaction to Hashmi's death. Both instances demonstrated theatre artists' unified actions.

In light of censorship, this study explores the reactions of theatre community to the restrictions placed on "Chinthamani," examining the conflicts between societal demands and artistic expression. The aim is to explore the intersections of censorship, politics, and artistic freedom in Telugu theatre by analyzing the historical context, cultural impact, and current debates related to the play's performance.This research analyses the consequences of censorship on artistic freedom in Telugu theatre and studies the theatre community's reactions to imposed bans. It identifies the contribution of social media in shaping a unified response to the ban. Using this comprehensive approach, the research intends to contribute

to broader discussions about balancing artistic integrity with societal norms in contemporary Telugu theatre. As it examines the case of "Chinthamani," this study reveals artists' challenges and strategies in navigating censorship while preserving cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review:

For this research paper, we have depended on script of the play, and the books and journals who reflected on the play since 1930. For this we have selected few books, and they are "Rayalaseemalo Ranga Sthalam Okatava Bhagam", "Padyanataka Parijatham", "Marapurani Manishi", and "Godavari Seema Janapada Kalalu Kreedalu Vedukalu". Other than this, to understand the present view on the play, we have referred newspaper clips, and social media responses. The existing literature review reports the themes of the play: social standards, spiritual values, and ethical consideration of prostitution.

It emphasized spiritual transformation of Bilwamangaludu from the person who was addicted to prostitution, and transformation of Chinthamani from courtesan to a nun. The literature review identified the popularity of Chinthamani from 1920 with its poetic richness. It revealed that Subbi Shetty character was already misinterpreted before year 2000, it also emphasized issues around respectful representation. This lead for major debates, and to protest from Arya Vaishya community and female spectators. The literature review also found that the ban on 'Chinthamani' has relevance within the broader history of censorship in Indian theatre.

The present research probably demonstrates lack of analysis of the spectators' engagement from the first performance to present scenario, and societal impact of the play. It also presents limited comparison of various performances and its reception. In case of theoretical frameworks, the research adapted moral and socio-cultural analysis, ethical criticism and performance theory. These theories assist to identify the themes in the play, analysis of the characters, performance context, cultural context, and influence on spectators. Within this theoretical frame, the research identifies how the play performance of Chinthamani addresses ethical dilemmas, echoes social values, and influences the spectator in present scenario.

3. Methodology:

This research paper explores the responses of theatre practitioners to the ban of the play "Chinthamani," employing a mixed methods approach. Initially, qualitative methods were utilized to delve into the themes, characters, and historical context of the play. Subsequently, a quantitative survey was used to gather 300 responses from theatre practitioners and cultural activists. These responses were collected through closed and open-ended questions. We also collected responses through social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups dedicated to Telugu theatre practitioners, Facebook, and YouTube videos. The mixed methods approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the ban's impact on artistic freedom.

For the survey, Google Forms and telephonic interviews were employed; Theatre practitioners were randomly selected across different age groups ranging from 25 to 80 and professions within the Telugu theatre community—including playwrights, directors, musicians, makeup artists, actors, stage technicians, lighting technicians, journalists, professors, and critics. Semi-structured questions guided both the telephonic interviews and Google Forms, focusing on perceptions, experiences, and suggestions related to the ban. Analysis encompassed WhatsApp group messages and Facebook comments regarding the play's ban, spanning from January 18, 2022, to May 30, 2024.

Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics for closed-ended questions and coding for open-ended responses, aiding in the categorization of themes. To decode the qualitative data, the researchers depended on long sessions, poring over transcripts and digital responses. They used colorful sticky notes and sprawling mind maps to visualize emerging themes. For closed-ended questions, researchers utilized Google Forms' "Summary of responses" feature, which automatically generates visual charts to provide a quick overview of the collected data. This approach provided insights into artistic freedom and the reflections of theatre practitioners regarding the ban.

However, the survey method via Google Forms yielded an insufficient number of responses, reflecting challenges in engaging current

practitioners of "Chinthamani." Similarly, the telephonic interviews did not yield a substantial number of participants associated with recent performances of the play.

The strengths of the research methodology are very detailed textual analysis, evolution of historical context of the play, and the collecting the responses of the present generation. The weakness of the research methodology is the limited scope of performance analysis, and a smaller number of people who responded for the survey. Remarkably, theatre practitioners under 40 years old had a lower participation rate in the survey. This lack of response is probably due to their unfamiliarity with the play, and many of them from this age group neither watched the play performance nor read the play script.

4. Results:

The research investigates responses of theatre practitioners and cultural activists to the ban imposed on the play "Chinthamani". This investigation focused on shared points among artistic freedom, social standards and political motivation. Firstly, this study found the historical significance of the play in Telugu speaking region. Then, it observes how theatre practitioners and cultural activists expressed discontent and concern over the ban. This research identified the significant role of social media in influencing theatre practitioners and cultural activists to protest the ban. Furthermore, the study explored the possibility of rifts within the theatre community as a result of political involvement in the protests. It identified the complex responses for an inquiry based on economic challenges and the loss of theatre work caused by the ban on theatre professionals who have been performing the play since the late 1980s. Immediately following the ban announcement, the theatre community discussed possible approaches to revoking it. These discussions suggested several initiatives to revoke the ban. These initiatives included removing unpleasant scenes, notifying theatre professionals who misinterpreted the play, requesting the formation of government review panels, organizing formal protests, and taking legal action.

Thus, the study examines in detail the impact of the ban on "Chinthamani." It demonstrates a conflict between the expression of

theatre personalities and social norms. Majority of the responses expressed concern about rescinding the ban and preserving the original script's value. The results suggests that theatre community avoid overly explicit content in order to reach a larger audience. The majority of respondents favored careful self-regulation in play interpretations. The study recommends a fair censorship approach that ensures the preservation of artistic freedom while respecting community standards.

5. Discussion:

The study reflects on the cultural significance of Chinthamani through an analysis of its characters, themes, and historical background. This analysis examines the complexities of character representation and the underlying themes in the original text, as well as recent interpretations. This discussion explores how the theatre community unites during demonstrations, how social media offers support, and the impact of bans on public perceptions. The analysis explores the correlation between the responses of theatre artists, societal norms, and political influences within the scope of the ban.

5.1. Character's Overview:

In the play, there are eleven characters, each portraying distinct social roles and ethical positions.

Bilwamangaludu is the protagonist of the play. His introduction to Chinthamani, a courtesan, causes his personality to undergo a significant change. This transformation illustrates the progression from personal choices to spiritual enlightenment. He is initially depicted as a pleasure-seeking individual. Later on, he gets caught up in deep personal conflicts, ultimately achieving redemption through these challenging experiences.

Chinthamani also transforms in the story. She embodies core human values and transformation capacity, even in seemingly unchangeable circumstances. She always raises ethical concerns about her profession. She rebels against her mother, and at the end of the play, she becomes a nun. Her transformation from courtesan to nun illustrates the conflict between societal expectations and personal decisions. Chinthamani cunningly and decisively manipulates others as per her mother's request.

Overall, Chinthamani is a complex individual who deals with her own moral struggles.

Vasudevamurthy, the father of Bilwamangaludu, demonstrated parental control and adherence to traditional beliefs. Vasudevamurthy contradicts with his son's rebellious decisions. Regularly, he warns his son concerning the risks associated with infatuation with Chinthamani. Vasudevmurthy's departure greatly shapes the transformation of Bilwamangaludu. Thus, Vasudevamurthy navigates family relationships, exhibits a deep sense of responsibility and shapes the narrative.

Damodarudu provides consistent guidance and steadfast support to his close friend Bilwamangaludu. Damodarudu is depicted with a strong sense of integrity, and he demonstrates a polished sense of humour. As a scholarly person, he embodies traditional values.

Subbi Shetty, a merchant (a member of Arya Vaishya), is portrayed as a naive and playful individual in the story. His speech and actions reveal his lack of knowledge about the world. He becomes a victim of Srihari's schemes, Chinthamani's mother. Subbi Shetty loses considerable wealth due to his promiscuity, initially to Ranganayaki and then to Chinthamani. His innocent and humorous actions provide comic relief throughout the play.

Bhavani Shankarudu is a wealthy individuals who seeks comedic sexual encounters. He exemplifies the harmful impacts of unregulated desires. He leaves his attractive wife, disconnects from his family, and loses all of his belongings in order to be with Chinthamani. Following his surrender to her charm, he encounters various difficulties arising from this romantic relationship. Bhavani Shankar admits to a decline in his sanity and dignity through self-examination. He expresses sincere regret for his actions. He displays self-pity, personal weakness, and a heartfelt self-examination in his struggle for Chinthamani.

Somagiri Yogindrudu, an intellectual, preaches and guides others, and he demonstrates the highest humanitarian values. During Bhavani Shankar's life of infatuation and ego, Somagiri Yogindrudu guides him towards spiritual enlightenment. Somagiri Yogindrudu disapproves of Chinthamani's behaviour, but guides her with humanitarian values.

Lord Krishna influences the characters' destinies and ethical dilemmas.

Radha, the wife of Bilwamangaludu, represents faithfulness and dedication. She displays open-mindedness despite being a traditional homemaker. Radha possesses beauty, and she radiates love, trust, and self-respect. Radha symbolizes both passion and fulfilment in her life by relentlessly fighting to win back her husband from Chinthamani. Radha remains optimistic despite the challenges and pain she faces. Her tragic death and steadfast devotion profoundly influenced Bilwamangaludu's journey.

Srihari, the greedy mother of Chinthamani, controls Chinthamani's choices. She impresses others with her cleverness, often fooling them. Srihari's relentless pursuit of material gain influences Chinthamani's actions. Srihari's nature embodies the greed that guides Chinthamani into morally ambiguous dilemmas.

Chitra, a young and innocent girl, is Chinthamani's maid. Even though she is too young to be involved in prostitution, she undergoes maturation under Srihari's guidance in the Chinthamani household. She monitors Chinthamani's decisions and suggests alternatives when possible. She is admired by spectators for her innocence. As a result of their interactions, these eleven characters advance the plot and illuminate ethical, religious, and communal concerns.

5.2. Synopsis of Chinthamani:

Due to the influence of her mother, Chinthamani uses her charm to manipulate men. By luring Bhavani Shankarudu and Subbi Shetty, she steals their wealth. Bhavani Shankarudu's infatuation with Chinthamani triggers a chain of events. Despite the consequences, he lavishly spends on Chinthamani.

Bilwamangaludu lives with his wife, Radha, in a peaceful and contented environment. He initially learns of Chinthamani's reputation, beauty, and virtue. Bilwamangaludu is captivated by Chinthamani's charm when they first meet, causing him to gradually neglect his familial responsibilities. At one point, he even disregards the death of his father in order to devote himself to Chinthamani. In the midst of a stormy night, Bilwamangaludu

is driven by his infatuation to meet Chinthamani. During that day, Radha, his wife, follows Bilwamangaludu out of a deep concern for his safety, love, and devotion, and to protect him from his destructive path. They arrive at a river that he must cross in order to reach the residence of Chinthamani. In order to get a boat, Radha leaves him on the riverbank. In the meantime, Bilwamangaludu jumps into the flooded river in order to cross it. Mistaking a body for a log, he uses it to cross. Tragically, it is Radha's body; she had fallen from a cliff while attempting to bring a boat. This incident profoundly affects Bilwamangaludu, leading to a spiritual metamorphosis. Seeking solace and guidance from Sage Somadeva, Bilwamangaludu eventually embraces an ascetic life as Yogi LeelaShuka Krishna and composes the Sanskrit text "Krishna Karnamritam".

Meanwhile, Chinthamani decides to renounce her previous life and embrace a new path as a nun, following a profound realization of the repercussions of her actions and finding inspiration in an encounter with Lord Krishna. The narrative delves into the intricate nature of human desires and the quest for atonement through an exploration of themes such as temptation, ethical choices, and spiritual growth.

5.3. Historical Significance:

Chinthamani has played a significant role in Telugu Padya Natakamu (verse-drama) with social theme. The play demonstrates poetic richness with music and songs. With the poetic richness, the play attracted millions of Telugu spectators' hearts. In Telugu theatre history, the play has been performed widely and it has been recognized a sone of the popular plays in Telugu for last 100 years. Before the play published, the play was performed successfully more than hundreds of the times. The play had been performed 440 times by the time of the release of its fourth edition on the 10th of January, 1923 (Kallakuri 2). With in the short periods reaching these many numbers of performances suggests that the play was accepted and popularized by many Telugu speaking spectators. The play has been performing on the celebration of Hindu festivals, such as Dusehra-navarathir and Shrirama-navami. As the play was so popular, it was also adapted into films in 1933 and 1956. In 1933, the film version of Chinthamani was adapted directed by Kallakuri Sadasiva Rao and produced

by Madan Theatres (Volga et al. 73). In the 1956, Ramakrishna Rao adapted the play into film and released (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 345).

The theme of the play strongly suggests to educate people against prostitution, reflects societal injustices towards a woman, and presents the exploitation of young children (Kallakuri 2; Kotte 27). The theme was communicated with a lot of humor and wit. Especially, the character Subbi Shetty plays significant role in creating humor and wit, and the character has been delighted Telugu spectators, and it contributed a lot to the plays success. This character was created by the playwright after he was inspired by observing a merchant in Kakinada (Kotte 31). Along with the humor, the play also demonstrates devotional scenes, and these scenes deeply touched the Telugu spectators in early 1930s. One such example was recounted by Ramachandraiah Tirumala, describing a performance around 1932 in Viziyanagaram. During this event, a spectator, deeply moved by the depiction of a devotional act in the final scene featuring Bilwamangaludu, rushed onstage to embrace the actor portraying Bilwamangaludu and offered items originally intended for his daughter's wedding (Tirumala 123). The scene at the end of the play also portrays a revolutionary theme: a woman who ultimately rebels against her own profession as a prostitute. This scene resonated with many Telugu spectators and significantly influenced community perceptions. As Tulasi Balakrishna reflects the play's moral narrative discouraged prostitution, and historical accounts suggest that the play led some individuals to refrain from associating with prostitution after witnessing its performances (27 Jan. 2022).

However, over time, the play was adapted by many people, and these adaptations were performed by many troupes. This lead competition among the troupes to attract spectators for their performances. Results of this, the troupes gradually included many obscene scenes to attract the large number of spectators. The inclusion of obscene scenes into the original script led to controversy and offense to women, children, and particularly community of Arya Vaishya (Pothugunta 32). Despite this negative impression, the poetry, verses, and sensible humor of the original play attracted a large number of spectators and created significant impression on Telugu people. It is evident that the characters in the play "Chinthamani" have depicted the lives of many people from the 1900s

to the present. This enduring relevance demonstrates the play's ability to attract diverse audiences over time.

The debate over the prohibition of the play highlights the essential requirement for continuous communication between artists, communities, and authorities. It emphasizes the significance of maintaining artistic authenticity. The controversy calls for a balanced approach to artistic expression and cultural respect. This serves as a reminder to artists that their work may have an impact on society. As a result, it offers an insightful lesson regarding the interaction between community rights and creative freedom.

5.4. Controversies and Community Reactions:

There are seemingly three primary reasons for banning "Chinthamani": obscenity, morality, and community representation. In the original script, Kallakuri Narayana Rao intended to highlight the immoral actions of prostitution and the exploitation of girls. His aim was to educate people on these issues and discourage such practices (Kotte 27). However, later adaptations of the play included obscene scenes and language not present in the original script (S.V. 336). These adapted scenes began to offend female attendees and children (Kotte 32). This shift in the performance script led to a clash with societal norms.

The obscenity reached its peak through the portrayal of the characters Subbi Shetty and Shrihari. The character of Subbi Shetty was depicted on stage wearing a white dress and with a black-painted face, which triggered protests from the Arya Vaishya community. They expressed their dissatisfaction with this representation, feeling it was derogatory and portrayed their community negatively (Kotte 33). Gradually, the depiction of the character became increasingly obscene, and as the obscenity grew, the protests from the Arya Vaishya community intensified, leading to petitions to the government.

Along with the appearance of the Subbi Shetty character, many interpretations and adaptations that varied from the original script have led to controversy. The playwright designed this character with the intention to entertain the audience with sensible comedy, including the action of

stumbling towards the brothel in a drunken state (Kotte 31). Despite the playwright's intention, various troupes misinterpreted and adapted the character with vulgar dialogues and gestures, contributing to the play's negative reception. It seems that the Arya Vaishya community itself encouraged the original version of the character Subbi Shetty in the 1960s. According to Rangareddy, the community sponsored the play with that kind of characterization, and many spectators from that community enjoyed the play at that time. Aravapalli Subbarao founded the Royal Theatre in 1936 and gained popularity with Chinthamani (Sastri and Chakravarty 131). It is argued that Subbarao, a member of the Arya Vaishya community and a prominent theatre organizer, misinterpreted the play Chinthamani in its early days (Yallapragada). However, the majority of the evidence suggests that many theatre practitioners and spectators, along with the Arya Vaishya community, did not accept the incorrect interpretation of Subbi Shetty. A dominant group of spectators viewed Subbi Shetty as a humorous character meant for entertainment in the original play. Reflecting on the original script, very few spectators found the character offensive and derogatory. However, a large number of theatre practitioners recognized the character's evolution from comic relief to obscene actions.

Several Arya Vaishya organizations submitted petitions to Dr. Rajat Bhargava, IAS, Andhra Pradesh's Special Chief Secretary, concerning matters related to Chinthamani. On January 6, 2021, Konnakalla Vidhyadhara Rao from the "Vijayawada Urban District Arya Vaishya Sanghamu" filed the first petition. Shortly after, on January 10, 2021, Puvvada Chandra Shekhar, the founder president of the "Arya Vaishya Officials and Professionals Association," Andhra Pradesh, also submitted a petition. Mukkala Dwarakanadh, President of the "Arya Vaishya Mahasabha," Andhra Pradesh, followed with a petition on January 19, 2021. Later in the year, on June 16, 2021, Miththili Sarada, President of the "Vijayawada Urban District Arya Vaishya Sanghamu-Mahila Vibhagamu," submitted another petition. Devaki Venkateshwarlu, Honorable President of the "International Vaishya Federation" Vijayawada, contributed a petition on June 25, 2021. The final petition in this series was submitted by Boddu Srinivasa Rao, "Governor of Vasavi Club International," on August 30, 2021. Arya Vaishya community petitions

voiced collective concerns about "Chinthamani's" themes and representations.

The petitions submitted to the government requesting to ban the play demonstrated various concerns. A dominant concern for most the organizations is the task of adapting characters with offensive language, particularly in the case of Subbi Shetty. This offensive text veers away from the original play text. According to the petitioners, the misrepresentation brings dishonour to the Arya Vaishya community. Furthermore, the petitioners strongly oppose any disrespectful representation of the community. They emphasize the play's negative social effects. According to them, using vulgar language in "Chinthamani" for profit undermines the educational purpose of the play and misleads children.

They pointed out that the revised version included erotic film songs. This misrepresentation was deemed detrimental to the youth and societal values. Furthermore, this showed disrespect towards revered figures and deities, causing unrest within the community. The performances portrayed women in a negative light and used inappropriate language, contradicting the play's initial goal of enlightening and uplifting society. Thus, the petitioners collectively urge the government to ban the play, arguing that it deviates from the original text and could harm social values. This plea for intervention reflects a broader concern about upholding cultural authenticity and safeguarding the community from misrepresentation and exploitation for financial gain.

The protest by the Arya Vaishya community triggered government intervention in the work of theatre practitioners. Alongside the community, many others expressed dissatisfaction with the play's obscene language and misinterpretations. Initially, Dwarkanath, the leader of Arya Vyshya Mahasabha, met with Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to explain the issue (Janyala). He also submitted a petition to ban the play. As many believe, the community concerns prompted immediate political attention here. The ban was put into effect several months following their initial meeting. Rajat Bhargava, Special Chief Secretary, issued G.O. No. 7, officially prohibiting the play's staging (Rao). This state-issued decree marked a significant change in artistic expression regulation.

Many theatre practitioners were unaware of the government officials' report, and they reflected that following Dwarkanath's meeting, there had been ample time to guide those involved in the production of the play "Chinthamani." They believed that such guidance could have potentially prevented the ensuing conflict between the community and theatre practitioners. However, it appeared that this guidance was not provided, resulting in an inability to resolve their differences. Additionally, the government had the opportunity to organize a committee comprising senior theatre practitioners, which they seemingly failed to do. Several theatre practitioners indicated that such a committee could have facilitated a platform for constructive discussions and mutual understanding. This lack of communication and engagement between the government and the theatre community highlighted the necessity for improved approaches in managing cultural conflicts.

5.5. Unified Response of Theatre Professionals to the Ban:

Theatre practitioners, regardless of their roles, voiced discontent with the play's prohibition. This unified response demonstrated their deep appreciation for the play. They identified that the ban threatened other plays as well (Sivvala). Many of them were initially shocked by the ban, and they were left unprepared. Later, they took action to defend the value of the play. They requested government officials to rescind the ban, explaining the play's significance. The requests were conveyed through formal letters, petitions, and personal discussions with officials. The theatre community emphasized the play's historical significance, cultural significance, and role in addressing social issues.They protested to preserve the play's authenticity for future generations. This dedication illustrates their commitment to protecting not only the play, but also Telugu cultural heritage in general.

Several prominent playwrights recommending that misinterpretations be corrected rather than the play being banned. Shiva Prasad Valluri argued that the ban on the play was an extreme action that did not effectively address the underlying problem. Krishneswara Rao Yallapragada emphasized the play's intricate literary and societal significance was not fully understood by the government. The playwrights underlined the

need to prevent inaccurate interpretations to safeguard the play's value. The playwrights' suggestions indicate that upcoming performances should stay faithful to the play's original purpose and essence.

The actors displayed mixed responses to the ban. While opposing the misinterpretation of the original play, they also raised concerns about ethical considerations and livelihood of the members who were involved with Chinthamani. Many expressed that they lose their livelihood if the government do not revoke the ban on the play. Some of the actors expressed to voluntarily remove the obscene scenes to mitigate objections. This suggests their realization to preserve the original play script. This voluntary response emphasized theatre practitioners' approach to address community sensitivities while requesting to revoke the ban on the play. In this case, adaptability of theatre practitioners probably indicates their commitment to balancing artistic freedom and social values within their work.

Member of many theatre groups organized formal protest and petitioned against ban. These efforts demonstrate a strategic and collective responses. Some of the groups are Gummadi Jairaj Kalapitam, Royal Seema Kalavedika, All India Kala Rangam, Praja Natya Mandali; Telugu Dandu, Adarsha Grameena Samskrutika Seva Samstha; Andhra Pradesh Kalakarula Sankshema Sangham, Andhra Pradesh Rashtra Sanskruthika Mariyu Nataka Prishath and Aravinda Arts. The groups are from different regions and communities, and they highlighted the unified stance of the theatre community in protecting freedom of theatre artists.

One of the prominent groups that organized a protest was Gummadi Jairaj Kalapitam. On January 23, 2022, the president, Sri Gummadi Jeevan Kumar, and the secretary, Sri Aguru Trinath Naidu, held a gathering at Kautha Purnananda Kala Vedika, Gandhi Nagar, Vijayawada. In this meeting, theatre practitioners, playwrights, poets and cultural activist gathered and voiced their disagreement with the ban of the play. They reflected on the significance of the play, and they concluded meeting to urge the government to revoke the ban. In the same way, under the leadership of M. R. Ganta, Rayala Seema Kalavedika submitted a petition to the chairman of Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sri Chamaluru Haritha. In the petition, they mentioned to revoke the ban. All India

Kalaragam also made their voice heard by submitting a petition to the village secretariat office in Pothavaram, Prakasam district. In their petition, the members highlighted the injustice of the ban, emphasizing the adverse effects on theatre practitioners and calling for its immediate revocation.

On the 73rd Republic Day, January 26, 2022, Praja Natya Mandali and other theatre professionals gathered at Kaleswara Rao Market in Vijayawada to express their solidarity and commitment to supporting artistic expression (G.V.). This gathering on a national holiday illustrates the symbolic significance of the protest. Here, theatre practitioners presented a petition to the statue suggests two significant protest methods. First, it indicates that theatre practitioners cleverly critiqued the government's lack of responsiveness by comparing it to the statue's immobility. Second, selecting the statue reflects Gandhi's legacy of non-violent resistance, which aligns with the theatre community's peaceful protests. In this protest, theatre practitioners highlighted the financial hardship faced by families who depend on the play, Chinthamani. In her speech, Rathnashree, a senior actress, requested that the government revoke the ban and support the families of theatre employees who have been performing the play for many years. G.V. Ranga Reddy, Praja Natya Mandali's state president, echoed the willingness of theatre practitioners to stick with the original script.

On January 19, 2022, in Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore, All India Kala Rangam and Nellore Jilla Kala Sanghalu jointly protested in front of the Collector's Office. Members of the group expressed their disappointment with the ban. They stated that the ban had a negative impact on their profession due to the fact that they had been entertaining the public and relying on "Chinthamani" to earn their living. In his remarks, Madugula Sudheer, Founding President of All India Kalaramangam and a traditional harmonist for theatre performances, stated that the play's ban led to him losing a great deal of theatre work. The demonstration suggests that the ban negatively affects the economy of many theatre practitioners and demonstrates the urgency of lifting the ban.

Paravastu Phanisayana Suri from Telugu Dandu organized a protest against the ban at the Telugu Thalli Statue near Maddilapalem Junction in

Visakhapatnam on January 23, 2022 ("Drama Artists Protest" 0:20-1:20). It is possible that this protest contributed to an increasing number of people opposing the ban since Visakhapatnam is one of the dominant centers for Telugu theatre. The aim of the protest was to unite theatre practitioners in expressing their collective disapproval of the ban. According to Apparao, a renowned actor from the popular TV show Jabardast, numerous theatre practitioners across various departments - including actors, costume designers, prop makers, makeup artists, and musicians - depend on Chinthamani performances for their livelihood (Ibid 1:21-2:09).

The Andhra Pradesh Kalakarula Sankshema Sangham (APKSS) from Tadepallegudem also made substantial efforts to resist the prohibition. The members of the group met deputy Chief minister Pamula Pushpa Srivani to submit a petition to revoke the ban. As mentioned, she responded positively, assuring that she would find a solution suitable for both the theatre community and the Arya Vaishya community. The positive response provided optimism to the members of APKSS and to other theatre practitioners.

On January 19, 2022, the Vijayanagaram-based Rangasthala Kalaakaarula Sankshema Sangham (RKSS) staged a protest against the ban near the local Collector's office. Along with RKSS members, Bhisetti Babji, president of the Dr. P.V.G. Raju Kala Vedika, urged the government to revoke the ban (Rao). The protest emphasized widespread opposition originating from Viziyanagaram.

In addition to others, Aravinda Arts, a theater group based in Tadepalli Gudem, opposes the ban. In a personal interview, Gangothri Sai, director of the group, discussed the importance of depicting the community respectfully. His view emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach between artistic expression rights and artists' accountability when depicting a community in the arts.

Collective action across theatre groups demonstrates the power of organized protest in the arts sector. Theatre professionals demonstrate their commitment to preserving their artistic heritage and financial stability. An appeal for financial assistance and other alternatives in relation to the prohibition on Chinthamani performances emphasizes the relationship

between an economic perspective and creative expression. Theatre professionals' answers make it clear that they have a shared ethical duty to support a responsible rendition of "Chinthamani". The community's active participation in the discussion about censorship reflects a nuanced understanding of balancing artistic freedom with societal norms.

5.6. Impact of Digital Platforms: From Social Media to Public Protest

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, social media was instrumental in fostering widespread public discourse and the exchange of opinions. The virtual forum created during the pandemic was quickly adapted by the theatre community as a means of facilitating dialogue on a variety of topics. The State government of Andhra Pradesh imposed an 11 pm to 5 am curfew and other COVID-19 measures, effective from January 18, 2022 ("Covid-19 Threat"). The ongoing impact of COVID-19 in the state also forced many practitioners and cultural activists to rely on social media to discuss the play's ban. As of January 2022, India's most commonly used platforms are WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook (Basuroy). The data for this study also suggests that Telugu-speaking theatre practitioners also actively used these platforms to spread their views, seek support, and coordinate protests and petitions. Some of the examples for such communications include text messages; multimedia sharing; comments and replies; reactions and likes; and group chats.

These communications substantiated to encourage solidarity against the ban and highlight artistic freedom in the public domain. The social media interactions within the theatre community fasten to meet at physical space, to organize protests, to facilitate thorough conversations, and to approach legally. Furthermore, these physical gathering cultivated partnership among different cultural groups.

The survey data conducted for this study highlights the fear and strong disappointment of theatre practitioners and cultural activists regarding the ban of the play "Chinthamani." The survey revealed that theatre practitioners believe the ban significantly influences their choice of themes, topics, characterizations, and representations in their future work, viewing it as a violation of their creative liberties. Additionally, discussions on social media by theatre practitioners echoed the sentiment

that the ban was politically motivated. Some practitioners also feared that the ban could cause divisions within the theatre community: one between contemporary performers of "Chinthamani" and other theatre practitioners; and another based on affiliations with the ruling party and the opposition party.

This disappointment led to various suggestions that addressed the concerns raised by the ban. The data also indicates that theatre practitioners and cultural activists plan to integrate these suggestions to develop a clear approach to the issue and preserve the freedom of artistic expression. The suggestions provided by theatre practitioners and cultural activists include: cutting obscene parts; issuing serious warnings to performers engaging in obscene acts; establishing a committee to review the performance text of "Chinthamani"; altering the names of characters in the play; protesting and appealing to lift the ban; sticking to the original script; government regulation of performances; reflecting on the performance approach; petitioning the High Court; gathering letters from theatre practitioners and cultural activists; and questioning government censorship.

5.5.1. Cutting Obscene Parts:

Many practitioners suggested removing scenes that represent the character Subbi Shetty in an obscene manner, as well as deleting objectionable dialogues and scenes from the performance text. Ramachandar Rao Tadakamalla, a senior theatre practitioner, also proposed that the court could delete a few obscene scenes in the text if necessary and then lift the ban.

5.5.2. Warning Seriously the Performers Who Perform Obscene Parts:

Some theatre practitioners expressed that the government should have warned the troupes to remove the obscene parts in the play before imposing a ban. A warning could have been a more prudent approach than directly banning the play. Additionally, there was a sentiment that the ban should specifically target those troupes that misinterpreted the play.

5.5.3. Forming a Committee to Review the Performance Text of Chinthamani:

Kameswararao N.S. and D.S.N. Murthy recalls similar instances of bans in Maharashtra, where plays like Tamasha and Vijay Tendulkar's "Sakharam Binder" were initially banned but later reinstated after government officials reviewed them properly. Practitioners recommended that the government establish a committee made up of academics and senior theater professionals to examine and revise the performance text of Chinthamani. The government could base its decision to impose the ban on the committee's final recommendation. The practitioners believed there was bias in the government's decision to ban the play and that there was insufficient consideration of all relevant factors. This implies that rather than imposing complete bans based on the complaints of a single community, censorship should be approached with more nuance and knowledge.

5.5.4. Changing the Name of the Characters in the Play:

Some theatre practitioners believed that changing the name of the character Subbi Shetty to a non-caste-specific name could help avoid objections and potentially allow the play to be considered a social play by the government. They also suggested changing the title of the play and removing obscene scenes to gain acceptance.

In a recent telephone conversation with Srinivasarao Addanki (popularly known as Srinivasarao Alla Kunta), the play's organizer, he revealed that the play is now being staged under the new title "Bhaktha Chinthamani" instead of original title "Chinthamani." Additionally, he mentioned that the character Subbi Shetty has been renamed Subba Rao. A poster for the upcoming performance on July 16, 2024, at the Nagulu Meera Swami temple in Ramayapalli Gramam, Hanumanthunipadu Mandalam, Prakasham district was shared by Srinivasarao Addanki, featuring the characters' names and photos of the actors in their respective roles. In the poster, despite the name change from Subbi Shetty to Subba Rao, the costume and makeup for the character remain unchanged from the previous representation of Subbi Shetty. Srinivasa Rao noted that the play has continued to be performed after the ban and has not

been stopped by anyone. His perspective contrasts with that of other theatre practitioners who have raised concerns about losing work due to the ban.

These suggestions to modify the name of characters and title of the play possibly approved the play "Chinthamani" has adapted to overcome objections and continued to perform. The performance group changed the play's title to avoid censorship and renamed Subbi Shetty to a common name to avoid caste-based objections. Along with these changes, they also probably removed obscene scenes from the performances. These changes possibly allowed various theatre groups to perform the play without authorities' intervention. These re-adaptations probably preserve the original text's essence.

5.5.5. Protesting and Appealing to Lift the Ban:

Theatre practitioners and cultural activists organized protests and appealed to the government to lift the ban. They gathered and demonstrated unity, emphasizing their freedom of expression and the importance of the play to their community. These protests were aimed at showing the collective disagreement with the ban and urging the government to reconsider its decision.

5.5.6. Adhering to the Original Script:

Theatre practitioners expressed their commitment to perform "Chinthamani" without adding any dialogues, songs, or dances that deviate from the original script.

5.5.7. Regulating the Performance by Government:

Theatre practitioners believed that the government should pass an order to ensure performances adhere to decency and cultural values.

5.5.8. Reflection on Performance Approach:

Senior theatre practitioners requested that performers need to reflect on how they present the play. Some practitioners acknowledged past mistakes and expressed the need to correct their interpretations of the play to avoid future issues.

5.5.9. Petitioning the High Court:

Ramachandar Rao Tadakamalla suggested that theatre practitioners write formal letters to the Chief Justice of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh, asking for these letters to be considered as public interest litigation to lift the ban. Additionally, few theatre practitioners discussed about submitting affidavits to the High Court, promising to perform only the original script without obscene scenes.

After the PIL is filed on the ban, the deliberation of the High Court brought significant issues associated with censorship, community sentiments and freedom of expression. The court questioned why the stage play is banned while the novel Chinthamani remain uncensored ("High Court Questions Government Ban"). This discrepancy raises a concerns that the regulation or censorship of stage plays is not regulated by a statutory authority in India, unlike films. According to Section 95 of the Criminal Procedure Code, films are typically regulated by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). In one of the hearings, a division bench stressed the delicate balance between freedom of expression and the possibility of offending others ("Andhra Pradesh HC Refuses to Stay Ban"). The bench also revealed that that it is impossible to issue a stay order without reviewing the play's content. Trinath, theatre artist, and Raghu Rama Krishna Raju, Member of Parliament, are the petitioners, and they were instructed to provide a copy of the play and its English translation to the court. Approximately after one year since the play was ban, in the hearing, court recommends that the government establish a committee of artists to address the concerns raised in order to avoid a blanket ban on staging the play due to obscenity (V.). The case remains pending, but the theatre practitioners are performing the play with changing the name of the play and name of the Subbi Shetty.

5.5.10. Collecting Letters from Theatre Practitioners and Cultural Activists:

Administrators of Prajanatya Mandali and other theatre groups planned to collect and submit letters to the director of the cultural department of Andhra Pradesh, requesting the lifting of the ban on "Chinthamani" (G.V.).

5.5.11. Questioning Government Censorship:

Theatre practitioners questioned why the government bans the play but allows the movie version to remain available on YouTube. They argue that if the play is banned, then the movie, based on the same script, should also be banned. They also expressed that censor boards should be consistent in their regulation across different mediums. Some theatre practitioners compared the play performance with the TV show "Jabardast," questioning why "Jabardast" is not banned even though it ridicules many identities. A few theatre practitioners pointed out that various Telugu movies also represent different communities. They asked whether, in this case, the government would ban those movies as well. They reasoned that if anybody bans any play based on caste, religion, or other backgrounds, no one can perform any play in the world.

Some reflected that obscene content is available in folk theatre forms and questioned whether the government would ban those as well. They noted that if folk theatre forms are banned, there would be no entertainment medium for the poor. Others questioned government officials and politicians who used foul language in public meetings and media, pointing out that they are not held accountable in the same way as the play was banned. These questions from the theatre practitioners suggest they are challenging the government for ignoring similar or worse content in other mediums.

5.6. Political Motivations and Community Divisions: The Complex Dynamics of the Ban

However, discussions on social media and physical platforms have also led to community division and exposed political motivations. These discussions often escalated existing tensions within the community, and led to conflicting viewpoints. A potential example of such a discourse unfolded at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) office in Tenali, where a press conference was conducted and later shared on various social media channels ("TDP office Tenali's Video" 00:01-05:40). The video featured few theatre practitioners requesting government to revoke the ban, and allow to perform the play without Subbi Shetty. This video ignited debates as the press conference was organized in the TDP party

office. This video influenced many theatre practitioners to believe that the issue was politicalized. This incident emphasized tension between political interests and cultural values.

Bharadwaj Govindaraju argues that the play's ban, aimed at appeasing a specific community, escalated tensions and compromised the protection of artistic freedom. This interpretation suggests the government implemented the ban for political expediency. Bharadwaj's observation coincides with Satyaarayana Y.'s viewpoint, as he also pointed out that political motivation was a major factor influencing the government's decision to impose the ban. One may question this perspective in light of a 2014 news report highlighting the police's decision to suspend performance permits for the play due to public unrest. According to the newspaper, certain dialogues and songs in the play incited violence in villages, leading to law-and-order problems (Rajulapudi). This news report highlights the delicate balance between artistic freedom and social standards.

The Minister of Endowments, Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao, informed the media that Arya Vaishya community objections prompted the government's ban on the play, citing perceived community disparagement (Rao). His speech emphasized the delicate essence of communal identity.

The rebel to the ruling party, Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, who serves as the Member of Parliament for Narasapuram, lodged a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the high court challenging the prohibition of Chinthamani. From his point of view, the government's decision is intended to impress the community in order to gain political benefit for the ruling party. The main point of his PIL was to underscore the importance of artistic freedom and the contribution of art in addressing social issues. He questioned the government's decision, points out that the play has 11 characters from diverse backgrounds, but the ban was based solely on one character's objection, disregarding the representation of others ("MP Moves HC").

The Andhra Pradesh High Court asked MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju about his interest in the Chinthamani PIL ("What Is Your Interest"). In reply, Raju mentioned a Supreme Court judgment that addressed

limiting artistic freedom. The court then highlighted that one group's livelihood should not negatively impact another group's sentiments. It stressed the need for judicial review in such situations. It also pointed out that both groups have the right to react to each other's actions. Then, the court adjourned the hearing to February 23, 2022. In this case, the contradiction between artistic freedom and political influence is clearly evident. It emphasized the judiciary's role in resolving cultural and political tensions in this instance.

6. Conclusion:

The performances of Chinthamani have profoundly affected numerous individuals and caused significant controversy in Telugu theatre history. The play was originally intended to address social issues like prostitution through a story of moral and spiritual transformation. The intention of the play relevant at all times. However, over the course of time, different theatre groups have added obscene scenes to the original play. The adaptations, which were intended for modern spectators, fundamentally changed the intent of the original play and initiated a dialogue concerning cultural preservation and artistic integrity. Eventually, the proliferation of these provocative adaptations prompted government action, which culminated in the official prohibition of the play.

Based on the perspective of the Telugu theatre community, this study addressed the delicate balance between artistic freedom and societal sensitivities, as well as censorship and cultural regulation in the arts. The research highlights the effects of the ban on theatre community, and how they faced financial and professional obstacles as a result of the prohibition. The findings show that the theatre community heavily leans on social media to mobilize support and advocate for their protest against the ban. The theatre community utilizes these digital platforms to effectively engage in broad communication.

Additionally, theatre community suggests solutions to maintain a balance between artistic expression and social standards, including the removal of explicit content, the establishment of review committees, adherence to the original script, and participation in legal and formal protests.The recommended solutions showcase a deep comprehension

of the problem and a readiness to participate in positive conversations with government officials. They address to preserve the integrity and cultural significance of the play.

Overall, this research advocates for a balanced approach to censorship that considers both artistic freedom and social standards. In light of the dynamic nature of theatre, the research highlights the need for a regulatory framework to protect cultural heritage and promote artistic development. The theatre community emphasizes the need for dialogue and cooperation between them and the government. Their responses reveal that theatre remains a vital medium for social commentary. The collaborative approach of theatre practitioners probably serves as model for addressing similar conflicts in other artistic domains. The study provides an understanding of contemporary Telugu theatre by looking at debates surrounding Chinthamani. Furthermore, the study opens up avenues for further research into the relationship between performing arts and modern social expectations. The future research may also explore the role of gender in the evolution of various interpretations in current generation. For future research, the researchers may depend on feminist theory. This theory may offer new dimensions into gender dynamics, character motivation, and cultural inferences.

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Imagining an Afro-Indian Theatre of Resistance: A Possible Indian Adaptation for Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* in the Context of Land Rights

Gargi Bhattacharya

Abstract:

Ama Ata Aidoo, author, poet, playwright, and short story writer, was born Christina Ama Aidoo in Abeadzi Kyiakor in south-central Ghana in 1942. She attended the Wesley Girls' High School and was one of the first of her generation to graduate from the University of Ghana where she received a Bachelor's Degree in English. She began her literary career by entering a prize-winning story in a short story competition organized by Ghana's Mbari Club. While working with the founder of Ghana Drama Studio, Efua Sutherland, she wrote her first play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1964). Her other published pieces include the play *Anowa* (1969); a collection of short stories *No Sweetness Here* (1970); the novel *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and two collections of verse - *Someone Talking to Sometime* (1985) and *An Angry Letter in January and Other Poems* (1992). The best-known African woman writer, she has taught English and African literature in various African and American Universities. A willingness to confront issues and a deep love for her continent informs all her writing. Her art has attained the maturity of an immensely talented writer, dedicated to the national cause. Aidoo's writings, claim Alice Walker, "has reaffirmed my faith in the power of the written word to reach, to teach, to empower and encourage."[1] This paper envisages a dialectical interaction between her play, *Anowa*, and its imagined Indian adaptation. The paper explores ways that this landmark play can be adapted to an Indian context, and researches and advocates for a dramaturgical fusion.

A Case for an Adaptation—An Imagined Afro-Indian Dialectic

One of the primary reasons for the upsurge of interest in post-colonial studies in our times is the overriding need to come to terms with the complex gamut of multiple discourses of power and resistance at play both in literature and society. In the post-colonial period, dramaturgy acquires a new dimension as a means of cultural recuperation. Drama, by nature a collaborative art, is employed by writers across former colonies for the project of historical reconstruction. *Anowa* (1969), based upon a nineteenth-century Ghanaian legend about a girl who defies her parents' wishes and marries the man of her choice only to lead a life of misery, is transformed by Aidoo into one such historical document. The play is set on the Gold Coast about thirty years after the Bond Treaty of 1844, which was an agreement granting the British trading priority over the Fanti area of what has now become Ghana.

Columbus's discovery of the West Indies in 1492 had first opened markets for slave labour. In 1526, one hundred African slaves were brought to the North American continent, and by 1645, trade in African slaves began in Boston, later to be known as the triangular trade between America, Europe, and Africa. Though African slave trade was officially ended in Britain in 1808 and international slave trade was outlawed in 1830, illegal traffic in slaves continued unabated. The Bond Treaty of 1844 not only bound the Fanti slave traders to the white colonisers but also posited them at a historical juncture where the grand narratives of colonialism and capitalism intersected.

This specifically qualifies the play for an adaptation from a contrapuntal Indian perspective since, though the Indians had no direct experience of the horrors of slavery, they remained subjected to every other kind of subjugation possible, whether physical, psychological, political or cultural.The colonial encounter generated similar anxieties and complexes across colonies resulting from the dissociation of sensibility of the natives from their natural and social environment—both Africans and Indians lost their freedom and their lands. The attachment to land is typical of the Indian national character—the protests of tenants, peasants, and landless labourers against ruthless exploitation by zamindars, intermediaries

and an alien administration and continuous rise in land revenue, forced labour and involuntary evictions from land characterised land struggles in the pre-independence period.

The earliest land struggles in the country to the Bengal Revolt of 1783 against the Diwani rights of the British. The Ho Rebellion (1820-21), Kol and Bhumji uprising in Bihar and Orissa (1830-33), the Santhal Rebellion in West Bengal and Jharkhand (1855-56), the Deccan riots in Maharashtra (1857), the Great Revolt of 1857, the Indigo Revolt in Bengal (1859-62), the Naga and Mizo rebellions of the North-East, the Munda rebellion in Chhotanagpur region (1858) were major land right struggles, many of which were upsurges against land alienation by powerful landlords and forest contractors. However, this adaptation of *Anowa* should purport to scan the land entitlement issues beyond the colonial era and within the contemporary situations. *Anowa*, written in 1969, is a postcolonial text—though it is grounded in an earlier historical period, it is imperative that we read between lines to detect how colonial history has been used as a metaphor to expound the disturbing issues that now confront the erstwhile colonies. The adaptation should be therefore aimed at foregrounding the current struggles regarding land settlements which Indra seems to have inherited from its turbulent imperial past. Despite the abolition of intermediaries (like *zamindars* and *malguzars*), tenancy reforms to regulate rent, ceiling on land holdings, distribution of surplus land, and reorganisation and consolidation of agricultural holdings, the colonial systems and laws remain functional in post-independence India. The legislative and bureaucratic machinery created by the British government for control of land resources—the Revenue and Forest departments—have continued to manage land related issues including implementation of reforms. Colonial legislations like the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and the Indian Forest Act, 1927, continue to be used as instruments of land acquisition by the State. Moreover, the development policies and paradigms adopted by the 'welfare state' in the post-independence periodare antithetical to the perspective behind the land reforms.

The issue of inequitable ownership of land was not resolved and was further complicated due to a change in the government's priorities,

which tilted more towards market forces and commercialisation of land for non-agricultural purposes. Consequently, the debates and land struggles today are not only waged in response to State policies on land distribution but also against an entire 'development' paradigm with the market as a dominant player. An estimated 40 million people have been displaced since 1950 on account of 'development' projects (power plants, dams, mines and industry) of which nearly 40% are *Adivasis* and 25% Dalits.[2] Seventy-five per cent are still awaiting rehabilitation.

With the onset of globalisation, the country has seen further industrial growth, a complete transformation of land use patterns and more displacements of rural and natural resource-based livelihoods. Most of the acquisitions in the country are done under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the single most effective instrument empowering the government to acquire land for anything they think constitutes "public interest." The Act gives little scope to the project-affected families to challenge the process of land acquisition or even demand fair compensation and rehabilitation, as was the case with over one million villagers rendered landless during the construction of two dam reservoirs—the Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar—on the River Narmada, ostensibly to generate 1450 MW of electricity, provide improved irrigation facilities and prevent floods. The forty-year old Narmada Bachao Andolan, which should ideally come to form the matrix of this adaptation, emerged under the leadership of Baba Amte who organised a mass rally on February 26, 1989. The Andolan has played the critical and strategic role of highlighting the economics and politics of water distribution, the scale of human and natural destruction wrought by the dams, and the convenient legal violations of government.

Imagining the Indian *Anowa*: A Dramaturge's Notes

Let us say that the adaptation has Anubha (the Indianised Anowa) as the daughter of a dispossessed farmer Shyam, who marries (against her parents' wishes) an attractive, educated stranger who turns out to be a devil in disguise. In the original play, the complicity of a few Africans with the slave trade is suggested by the powerful image of the British slave forts "standing at the door /of the great ocean." Here, the complicity

of the rising bourgeois is represented by Anubha's husband Kartik who is the engineer in charge of raising the height of Sardar Sarovar Dam illegally, and who bribes villagers with promises of employment under the project, much like Anowa's spouse Kofi Ako who embodies the capitalist forces, enslaving fellow men and women for the accumulation of wealth. Anubha, like Anowa, declares, "I like this work. I like being on the roads," thus resisting his capitalist inclination of living off others' labour, claiming that the limit of one's wealth should be determined by the achievements of personal labour. The play suggests that her eventual disintegration was largely since, being landless, and therefore deprived of work, her life becomes deprived of meaning.

The monologue in *Anowa* where she recalls her nightmare provides a cultural anchor for the play's critique of expansionist agenda—like Anowa, Anubha will also be transformed into a symbol of her country "out of which poured men, women and children" devoured by mechanical monsters—an image that provides a way of interpreting her barrenness as the devastated countrysides of India, its fecundity nullified by turning it into non-agrarian land. She also realises the futility of bearing children who would be fed not with nature's bounty but nourished by their father's dishonest wealth.

Simultaneously, Kartik's endeavours, like Kofi Ako's, manifest in his impotence—his political power is an overcompensation for his impotence. His corruption has left him physically and sexually exhausted, representing an emasculated, colonised male who still slaves under the dysfunctional regime of hegemonic control, deprived of individuality. In *Anowa*, capitalist and colonialist exploitation is explicitly associated with dominance and gender oppression, and the play draws parallels between wives and slaves—in away establishing a relation between the personal and the political. The events suggest that contact with colonialism and capitalism disrupts traditional matrilineal societies like Abura and alters women's roles by bringing a patriarchal system as the means to subjugate women, a situation the protagonist strives to resist and redress.

This has a direct parallel in Narmada Bachao Andolan where environmentalists and authors like Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy

have led from the front, even courting arrests for the sake of defending their ideology. Our imagined Anubha, by being a strong female protagonist based in real life, would prove Indian women have feminist precedents in their own culture and need not look to Western feminism for remedies to their oppression. Anowa's insistence on working is a reminder of the fact that in India, while the ownership of land is not vested in women, they constitute a major proportion of the agricultural workforce: NSSO estimates for 1993-94 that 84.7% women were engaged in agriculture as compared to 73.8% males.[3] The play, therefore, also becomes a site of emergence of the woman's voice in land struggles, staking their claim to ownership of resources. The play is therefore able to accommodate the necessary negotiations with a woman's self-identity without surrendering the issues of the rural, agricultural national identity as the feminine principle itself is equated to 'nature', while the masculine is an imposing 'culture' in the play.

Another paramount reason for the choice of the text for a possible adaptation is its technical and idiomatic innovations dedicated to the project of a cultural reconstruction. If we take language to mean a cultural idiom employed by communities or nations (as collective formations) to articulate their political and social consciousness, then the formal termination of colonialism in the form of political domination ineluctably led to a move towards a retrieval of the indigenous cultural consciousness of the colonised subject, which entails a revival of native traditions embodied in the oracular—a potential alternate modality for post-colonial dramatists: "I still believe... when Africa comes into her own, the dynamism of orality might be something that Africa can give to the world,"[4] claimed Aidoo. By her own admission, *Anowa* is based on a Ghanaian folktale, and its enduring appeal led us to investigate and incorporate certain indigenous folk elements found amongst the descendants from the earliest races of Bhils and Gondas in the adaptation to articulate the collective cultural experience of history from the natives' perspective, as they were the earliest settlers of the Narmada Valley, and have transmitted their social encounters through music, and ballads. Since the language of the adaptation could potentially be English, the easiest way to incorporate such yarns were in the forms of moral fables

that Anubha's mother churns out to reform her headstrong daughter, as all mothers do.

Another conscious way of highlighting the continuities, inertias and swings of rhetoric is the sprinkling of proverbs, both local and international, to replace the African proverbs of *Anowa* with relevant cross-cultural aphorisms. For instance, Kartik could admonish his wife by saying, "Silence is a woman's most beautiful ornament," which, though a Greco-Italian proverb, applies suitably to the patriarch's view of women in India. Wole Soyinka said once that proverbs are the horses of speech, which gain validity from their anonymous origin, their concise claim upon sagacity and their evaluative and conservative function in a society for which they provide a grammar of values. However, through her disregard for defunct proverbial definitions, the protagonist shows how traditional material, considered a conservative force, may become a reference point for a new mode of questioning that has radical potential for social change.

Efforts have also could be made to integrate snatches of verse from Aidoo's novel *Our Sister Killjoy* which have been vastly relevant to the contemporary socio-political structure of our republic, and to the indictment of its dysfunctionality: "From all around the Third World,/ You hear the same story;/ Rulers/Asleep to all things at /All times -/ Consciousonly of/ Riches, which they gather in a/ Coma/ Intravenously."[5] In Aidoo, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has found a voice insisting that, "I know of /A mad geo-political professor/ Whom no one listens to:/ Who says/ The danger has never been/ Over population/ For/ The Earth has land to hold/ More than twice the exploding millions /And enough to feed them too. / But /We would rather / Kill / than/ Think/ or/ Feel.[6] Aidoo is conscious that "the pathways of/ History/ Are littered with the bones of/ Those who dared doubt/ Progress"[7] and who would understand it better than the thousands of homeless destitutes paying the price for the progressive development of a canal or a dam. With several such developmental projects in the offing, it is hoped that an audience would be found for such an adaptation indeed, and that it would find within itself a true supporter of the rural voice of their nation.

A Director's Dream: A Potential Afro-Indian Fusion of Folk and Tragic Elements away from the Proscenium

> And still the Indian city theatre almost unquestioningly accepts the proscenium theatre imported from a Western country in the last century. Such acceptance is really surprising in India, where the thriving indigenous theatre does not use stage or auditoriums. Or is that there as on to keep theatre distinguished from Jatra, Tamasha, Bhawai and all the other native elements? Is this the city snobbery born out of the dichotomy between the urban and rural areas of India due to the colonial character of the cities? These questions and answers finally brought me to the task of exploring the possibilities of an alternate theatre—a third theatre… substantiated by what I have seen of Jatra, Tamasha, Bhawai, Nautanki, Kathakali, of Chhan and Manipuri Dances.[8]
>
> —Badal Sircar

A play like *Anowa* has the potential to be the adapting director's greatest delight as well as challenge, since its narrative, comprised of verse, prose, songs and mime, touches myriads of storytelling possibilities including the use of proverbs, laments, colloquialisms, oral idioms and the attendant rhymes, rhythms and phraseology of oral recitation. An adaptation is especially exciting as the director's personal aesthetic impulses, far from being subordinated to a strict adherence to the original, may revel in their power to infuse it with new meanings, where the generality of the folk form and its message is adapted to a specific time and given great contemporary relevance for a postcolonial, capitalist, post-truth Indian society, attempting to contemplate its complicity in the shadow of an execrable past. As an adaptation, the play seems better equipped to negotiate with the evils of a colonial legacy as received, fostered and engendered through third world politics which has inherited from the erstwhile 'masters' a diabolic tendency to persecute the subaltern, having learnt their lessons well. As a play of resistance, *Anowa* enables the director, therefore, to address the ideological oppression meted both by the indigenous discriminatory politics and the ghost of a defunct

colonial regime which haunts us through that very agency. The adaptation could retain the use of folk traditions, coupled in performance with appropriate stylistic and formal innovations to evolve into a hybrid theatrical spectacle where form assumes as pivotal and ideological a significance as the content of such drama.

In contrast with the Western tradition of realist drama and acting, these traditional modes of performance would be stylised, incorporating dance and songs and operating from an oral base as against a literary one. This adaptation, through a rediscovery of indigenous performance methodologies, could be potentially directed towards posing an intellectual challenge to Western realism and exposing its unsuitability to convey the historical, socio-political and cultural predicament of an oppressed people. A close scrutiny of the drama which have been produced in the third world countries reveals a similarity of ideology underlying the multifarious matrix of difference. Edward Said, in his pioneering work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), argues that colonialism brought about a fusion of experiences at various levels, resulting in, and from, the crisis of the individual and the community and the formulation and articulation of the newly acquired freedom through literary texts. However, this glorious dream of freedom soon turned into a nightmare—the socialist hopes for an equitable society having been dashed to splinters by the perverse political agendas of the governing powers. Dramatists as different and far removed in their individual colonial experiences as Ngugi, Walcott, Soyinka, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad share in their articulation of this political discontent through formal innovation.

Our imagined adaptation, while having no pretences towards the kind of performative genius the afore mentioned names entail, could seek to humbly align itself to their philosophy of resistance by are trieval and appropriation of a native culture through traditional forms of dramaturgy. The use of the dominant myth of a disobedient daughter in the creation of the protagonist is employed to convey the plays artistic dissociation from the Eurocentric realist theatre, while the deployment of ballads and songs evoke a shared cultural consciousness among our people through the theatrical medium.

The play would be adapted keeping in mind a specific performative space. In India, the proscenium theatres built in Calcutta and Bombay in the 1860's radically altered the intimate and interactive character of the traditional Indian stage. The Indian concept of 'performance' engages, through the play, in a debate with the Western 'politics' of the theatre by implicitly critiquing the culturally coded meaning of the word 'theatre'. Derived from the Greek word for 'sight' and 'seeing', theatre is a limiting term for a certain kind of spectatorial participation in a certain kind of event. Performance, by contrast, though it frequently makes references to theatricality as the most fruitful metaphor to represent the social dimensions of cultural productions, embrace a much wider range of human behaviour, what Michel de Certeau calls "the practice of everyday life."[9] Drama, in the Indian context, is more a performance than theatre. Therefore, by electing to stage the play in an open-air theatre, we may be able to liberate it from the impositions of the Western model of theatre, not confining it to the proscenium arch's bourgeois glare. As a performance, it must come down from the elevated proscenium stage and interact with its audience on a basic, cellular level. The adaptation would, therefore, be an endeavour to revive the indigenous performance space with its emphasis on the direct relationship between performer and spectator.

Moreover, a proscenium performance, entailing a comparatively larger scale of capital investment, would be prohibitive to awider section of people – an exclusivism which would undermine the ideological imperative behind the staging of the play, that is, to make it reachable for as many people as possible. The protagonist herself, her husband and parents could be roles played by professional actors as they would need an understanding and internalisation that may be difficult for amateurs to attain at short notice. The fused choric voice of The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-and-Pepper, comprised of two characters (an old man and woman) in the original play, for instance, could be well replaced by ten characters—all common men and women of the village. Since *Anowa* is a play influenced, as was Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, by the elements of Greek tragedy, the idea is to construct an on-stage chorus a kin to the earlier Greek drama. The substantial dialogues shared by the

two original characters would be distributed among these ten choric personas who would be present in the backstage, forming a semi-circular human chain, as it were. During a conversation, two characters, one set at each time, would come up to the front stage, and after the delivery of dialogues, would immerse themselves back into the shadows—the device would be aimed towards depicting the process of the subalterns' voices emerging from obscurity to forge a national chorus that articulates its concerns. These players could be instructed to emote with their voices and make a minimal use of facial distortions or gestures since, as figures of oracular wisdom, they ought to seem grave and sombre in their pronouncements. The snatches that could be culled from Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* would also be attributed to this choric batch. They would also sing local rhymes and ditties, reminiscent of happier times, and chronicling in their songs the devastation of the land and its people, leading to a choric lament for an idyllic, almost pre-lapsarian existence.

The dialogues, though metamorphosed into suiting the needs of an Indian context, retains its essence of resistance and occasional, self-reflexive dark humour. They are endowed with a metonymic constellation of details so that the audience may be made aware of the ugly proportions of the Narmada dam development project. It is one of the play's foremost responsibilities to educate and inform the audience about the immensity of the problem, to which effect, the scenography could depict a ruined village with the distant image of the dam towering over the landscape—grotesquely incongruous in a natural environment, and like a monster, looming large over the consciousness of actors and audience alike. The intimidating physical structure of the dam thus becomes a metaphorical manifestation of the ruthless oppression of powers-that-be.

The only figure who stands undeflated against this dreary setting is our protagonist Anowa, who by now is known to us as Anubha. She is shown, from the outset, to be conscious of her doubly marginalised position as a woman and as poor, and her dialogues, replete with interrogations, is a constant effort on her part to negotiate her identity in a world which is only too willing to ascribe predetermined roles. She approaches history and society from a woman's perspective and her strength lies in her non-acceptance of either parental or socio-political

oppression. When her mother tries to knock sense into her by criticising her husband, she retorts: "He is mine and I like him."

Her alignment with the land-right struggle could be interpreted as a woman's struggle to gain ground in a man's world. Her confidence reveals itself in her speech, which is an Indian-English that does not smack of the spurious pseudo-European accent that her husband will adopt, with occasional comic lapses. The use of non-English words by her, and other villagers, is hoped to heighten the play's rootedness in a rural Indian ethos. As a reservoir of collective memory for her community, she cannot forget or keep silent about the injustices she sees around her even as her husband accosts her: "Why can't you live by what you know, what you see? What do you gain by dreaming up miseries...?"

The inner conflict and consequent turmoil of this eponymous protagonist in this dilemma tale is to be pronounced by effects of illumination. Production in an open-air theatre certainly does not imply an abjuring of technical necessities, of which lighting is an indispensable part. The lighting will follow and define her moods, motives and psychological states. In the initial stage of her relationship with Kartik, the contours of her contented face are softly illuminated, while the later part has the light lending her face with a sad expression by accentuating her haggard, withdrawn features with harsh, hard shafts from the key light. Lighting will also be deployed to define the dramatic relevance of a character – when members of the chorus press forward to speak, they are followed by the spotlight. The backstage is to remain largely in shadows, for the reason given earlier. The front stage holds the crux of the action. Setting, as part of the stage craft, is important to convey certain ideas about the environment and the populace—two stumps, truncated tree trunks that would couple as seats—would reveal the destruction of nature by the encroaching forces of 'development.' Otherwise, the stage is kept bare in a minimalist manner, signifying the emptiness of their lives.

Costumes are local and natural, men inthe village mostly wearing *dhoti* and a bare torso and women in plain, unostentatious sarees, a garb that Anubha refuses to discard even after she has climbed the social

ladder as the wife of a chief engineer. In contrast to her simplicity stands the husband clad in shirt, trouser and tie, often in loud, clashing colours, revealing his lack of aesthetic taste and judgement. At home, he is busy fussing around with servants, trying to extract maximum profit from his investment in their wages. Music and sounds would form an inextricable stratum of the outer reality as also the inner lives of characters. When the villagers carry, in a defining moment of the play, the body of a farmer who, having lost all mortal possessions, gives up his tormented soul, the chanting of funeral rites in the background sets the tragic tone and apprehends ominous possibilities. For the central character, the delicate but articulate flute, is appointed as a symbol. Flute music has a great affinity to mnemonic recollections and tragic pathos while having an equal ease in expressing the kind of vibrancy which Anubha stands for. Flute music defines the aura of her personality.

The conclusion of the play would be taken liberties with, as Anubha surely cannot be allowed to die at a critical juncture of the movement. After the first half of the play, Anubha and Kartik exit through different directions, signifying their separation and a psychological parting of ways. After Kartik, unable to bear the fact of his wife's discovery of his impotence, shoots himself, she is left dejected and utterly dismayed, but not suicidal. It has been strongly felt that for a woman of such strength and potential, death becomes too easy a solution. The process would be slow and painful, but she has the capacity to integrate the scattered pieces of her consciousness, just as the devastated earth gathers her forces after a disaster. A playwright may have keener tendencies towards realism, but an adapter can afford to be foolishly idealistic at certain instances. The movement for rights will not thrive on deaths; it does not need martyrs either. What it needs is people who stay alive to fight for the rights of an entire nation. Anowa lives.

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Sanatombi as Representation of a Modern Woman in Arambam Samarendra's play, *Whiskey Bottle Ama* (A Bottle of Whiskey)

Sobhana Laishram

Abstract

Women are the epitome of strength, love, sacrifice and courage. Woman plays a key role in the socio-economic development of a society. They are the keys to sustainable development and quality of life in a family. Most women have been domesticated by their traditional roles assigned by the patriarchal society and they have integrated these traditional values of inequality between women and men. Women in Manipur play a very significant role in the economic development of the state which includes agricultural production, fisheries and handloom industry and their contribution to the market economy is undeniable. They are noted for their collective empowerment and strong force shown in the two *Nupi Lans* (Women's War), a significant revolt led entirely by women folks of Manipur against the colonial authorities. They are also known for their powerful role as Meira Paibis (Women torch bearers) who are actively involved in civil society movements for justice and human rights. Their unique role in the market is evident when one visits the Ema Keithel (Women's market) in Imphal, governed by womenfolk alone. The paper tries to examine whether this legacy of women's strength has materialized in their private space or their personal lives while portraying the character of Sanatombi in the play, *Whiskey Bottle Ama* (A Bottle of Whiskey) written by the renowned dramatist of Manipuri Literature, Arambam Samarendra. Many Manipuri writers have presented a typical patriarchal system of society in their writings where women are not given much importance and their role is portrayed

secondary. When it comes to decision-making, women are not regarded as prominent as men. This kind of attitude of the society in general and men in particular, needs to be changed. It is high time to respect and ensure the safety and well-being of women. Being a socialist, Samarendra's writings are mainly based on social and political issues. But in presenting women character, his concept is motivational. Promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices and their right to influence social change for themselves and others which are the features of modern women which are clearly seen in most of his writings. The character portrayal of Sanatombi is the testimony for his idea of a modern woman. Here, the role of a modern woman in Manipuri society would be explored through the character, Sanatombi. The kind of modern woman which she represents in the play is nothing but the image of a dignified woman which consists of three things: self- respect, respect for others and full responsibility for her own actions. This study asserts that everybody must respect the right of women to equal opportunities and a dignified life. It is a collective responsibility to create a social system that ensures the safety, security and dignity of women in society.

Keywords: Society, modern woman, strength, dignity, patriarchy, commitment

Introduction

Woman has been associated with various names: an affectionate mother, a good daughter, a caring wife, a loving sister, a loyal friend and above all, a beautiful creation of God. She symbolizes virtue, inner strength, patience, resilience and fortitude. In this dynamic mosaic of identities and responsibilities, the significance of a woman's presence resonates deeply, shaping families, communities and the very essence of society itself. Celebrating International Women's Day on 8th of March throughout the world is itself a manifestation to mark a Woman's journey through her life, her struggles, her achievements and her contributions. Understanding the multifaceted nature of a woman as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and friend, etc. is important to dismantle barriers, challenge stereotypes and foster environments where every woman can thrive,

develop and assert herself. Embracing the importance of women is not just about equality but a commitment to realizing the full potential of humanity. With each role, she assumes that she makes a remarkable memory contributing to a richer, more inclusive narrative that transcends generations and paves the way for a future where the strength and significance of every woman are celebrated and valued. In India, the Constitution has granted equal rights to women in terms of freedom and opportunity such as right to education, protection against violence and discrimination, right to property etc. These are the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution ensuring empowerment and equality. Since India is a vast and culturally diverse country, there are many cases where women are still unaware of the measures taken to improve their status and if aware, they do not use them considering their traditional values.

Sanatombi : A Modern Woman

The idea of modern is most of the time entangled with the idea of the western modernity which sought to speak rationally in a universal tone. However, the term 'modern' in the paper does not rest its meaning on the culture and legacy of the west. By the term 'modern woman' it attempts to carve the identity of a woman trapped in a traditional patriarchal setting, a woman who defies the imposing patriarchal norms and the concept of an ideal woman. Sanatombi, as portrayed by Arambam Samarendra, is a married woman who like any other married women, abides by the norms of the society. She has all the traditional values of a Meitei society associated with religion and culture but at the same time she also incorporates modern outlook. She lives a traditional life as a homemaker, caregiver and nurturer who tends the home, raises the children and most importantly, maintains the relationship between herself and her husband. She enjoys doing all these as she values the state of her home more than anything else. She tries to imbibe good wholesome values where there is love and understanding between husband and wife and create a place to build memories, a sense of peace and joy from loved ones. She has a firm belief in this. Her idea of a meaningful life is to love and being loved. She manages to receive the love and attention from her loved ones. According to her views about life and relationship,

she is a respectful woman who shows respect to others and expects the same from others as well. She is ready to experience true and meaningful relationship while entering her married life.

In the play, *Whiskey Bottle Ama* (A Bottle of Whiskey), Sanatombi is married to a well-to-do man who is an engineer by profession. She is ready to embrace the new journey of life with a sense of responsibility and empowerment. She is married to the man she loves and looks forward to a strong emotional support from her husband. She feels that both husband and wife are equally responsible for the welfare of the family and upbringing of the children. The idea of a successful marriage goes in vain when her husband brings home another woman to their life. This incident drives her to think about her self and her identity. On the other hand, her husband still continues to shower her with materialistic luxuries. She feels that the material possession dishonors her values and priorities. According to her, they are just objects of comfort which cannot be compared with one's emotional values and satisfaction. She feels rejected which compels to shift her traditional role into a modern one. From the beginning, she is a woman who balances both the traditional and modern lives. The notion of financial stability is not so important to her as being conceived by her husband. In a relationship, she yearns commitment, trust, respect, communication and consideration which she fails to achieve. These experiences of disappointment, betrayal and despair in her life have transformed her into a courageous woman. Though broken with her dreams yet she remains strong and positive and she chooses to remain single. It takes a lot of courage to decide the path where she has to face all the challenges in life alone in this patriarchal society. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (2017) opines that courage is the best protection that any could have. She prefers to be independent and stand for her rights. This is how the dramatist, Samarendra projects his concept of a modern woman in the character of Sanatombi. She is not influenced or weakened by the societal norms of traditional life. The first step she takes is breaking the marital bond which becomes meaningless to her. It is not an easy task but she has put in her best efforts to go through this difficult experience. Being a modern woman, she chooses to stand up for herself and abandon the uncommitted

relationship where one cannot improve one's mental and emotional health. She leaves her husband and takes the job of a clerk in a government office where she finds many male colleagues and officers who keep on questioning her status. Virginia Woolf (1929) emphasised the importance of economic independence for woman and only by becoming economically independent, a woman can start taking decisions for herself as she would not depend on others for financial support. With all the positive attitude, she is strong enough to maintain her patience and focus on her career which uplifts her self-respect and satisfaction. In the workspace, people try to divert her mind reminding her past married life and how she was leading a comfortable life being in the company of her husband. Her present status is being analyzed by the public where she is reminded of her financial stability of the past and what hardships she is going through. But she finds contentment in being herself which nobody would understand. The kind of inner joy without any fear or anxiety that comes from within, is what she enjoys at present. These are the simple philosophies for living a happy and independent life that cannot be influenced by external circumstances. But things are not as easy as it seems in this patriarchal society. In the workplace, many male colleagues would throw curveballs to make her feel guilty for being single. She is being judged by men as well as women. Some would give remarks for not maintaining her relation with her husband while some would try to take advantage of her status. She has to go through all such humiliations in her journey. It is indeed a tough path which she has chosen. Being a single mother, she has to face various challenges and struggles psychologically, physically and emotionally. But this journey has also been filled with countless moments of joy and pride. Because she has learned how to be strong and find solutions to overcome the obstacles that came her way. Amidst all the social stigma, financial challenges and emotional burden, she takes up multiple roles and responsibilities. When she is being wooed by her employer in the office with a promise to give her a better life, she does not make any rash or emotional decisions. Instead she had an honest conversation with the employer and let him know her firm decision she has made of being single. She is not someone who can be easily lured by men. She prefers to define her own identity

without any external influences. To be strong and independent is what she has chosen confidently, consistently and with stability. It gives an opportunity for self-growth and new dimension. Thus, Sanatombi defies the traditional role of a married woman who should be subservient to her husband and accepts everything that her husband and emerges as a modern woman who sought social, legal and intellectual equality with men. Mary Wollstonecraft (1790) asked for social, legal and intellectual equality for both the sexes centuries ago and the playwright Samarendra is also reappraising this issue through Sanatombi.

Like Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll House* who refused to go back to her husband, Sanatombi does not agree to change her mind when her husband comes and asks for reconciliation. Once she has discovered her identity and realise her self worth which is not defined by catering to the needs of her husband, she does not leave any option to turn back to her past relationship or join hands with a new partner. Relating to the patriarchal system, she is being reminded by her husband how inappropriate it would be, to live alone without the support of a husband. Her husband disrespects the idea of a married woman living separately regardless of circumstances but does not care how it affects a woman's self-esteem and self-confidence when he betrays his wife. Feeling disrespectful is not at all a good sign of healthy relationship which should be based on respect, love and having boundaries. Her husband tries to align life with material possessions and social status. At this juncture, she responded to her husband gently – "You may think that you are priceless but according to me, you are just worth the price of a bottle of whiskey." (tans., 287) This is an answer to all the men in the contemporary society who think women are subordinate and inferior to men. The title *Whiskey Bottle Ama* (A Bottle of Whiskey) signifies woman's assertion of her identity against patriarchy. Sanatombi's comparision of her husband's worth with that of a bottle of whiskey signifies her realisation of her strength and her worth.

Conclusion

Through her experiences, Sanatombi aims to inspire other women facing similar challenges to never give up and continue fighting for their

success. However, it is also important to remember that as women, we deserve to live our own lives and pursue our personal fulfillment. Throughout the journey, she has learned that balancing the responsibilities of being a mother and a woman is crucial. She is confident enough to pursue her own goals and do things that make her grow and thrive, without neglecting the upbringing and support of her child. By doing so, she has turned into an empowered woman.According to European Institute for Gender Equality, the five components of women's empowerment are women's sense of self-worth i.e. women have right to have choices and have determination to choose; they have right to gain access to opportunities and resources; they have power to control their own lives both within and outside the home; and they have the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order in the national and international level.The strong character of a woman is very much evident in this play. Thus, the dynamic role of a modern woman in society is represented by the character, Sanatombi who stands by herself in every aspect of life. While balancing career and personal life, she has learned to empower herself. And while parenting as a single mother, reeling societal pressures and expectations she does feel inadequate and incomplete as she has embraced independence and happiness. Thus, she has proved herself and that is the very idea of Samarendra's modern woman who shines through her self-esteem and confidence. Against all odds, she manages to combat the challenges, obstacles and adversities. Disparity in gender is still prevalent in the Manipuri society where the playwright belongs but it is evident enough that the he respects and values individual choices while depicting the character, Sanatombi in the play, *Whiskey Bottle Ama* (A Bottle of Whiskey).

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Our Contributors

1. **Sheila T. Cavanagh**, (USA) Ph. D. Chair Professor, Masse-Martin/NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor, Emory university, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

2. **Dr. Tapu Biswas,** M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D, D.Litt. is currently Associate Professor, Department of English, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India. He is also the Vice-Principal, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva - Bharati. Dr Biswas was formerly the Assistant Registrar of Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He is Honorary General Secretary of the Shakespeare Society of Eastern India and is also the Hony. Secretary of Tagore Gandhi Institute for Culture Studies and Service-Learning (both Govt. Registered Educational and Cultural Societies). As organizational Coordinator, Dr Biswas contributed greatly to the success of the International World Shakespeare Conferences held in Kolkata and across India from 2000 till date. His authored books Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot: Indian Interpretations through Critical and Analytical Studies, Translations and Stage Productions* and *Indian Response to Western "Theatre of the Absurd"* Vols I & II, and *Badal Sircar* (the last published by Sahitya Akademi under its Makers of Indian Literature series) have been widely acclaimed both in India and abroad. He is a Recipient of UGC Research Award Post Doctoral Fellowship 2014-15, recipient of the International Mother Teresa Award in 2021. He is co-editor of the journal *Theatre International* (ISSN NO 2378- 2036) and the corresponding editor of *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences* (ISSN NO 23474777), both of which journals are Peer Reviewed publications indexed in the UGC–CARE list.

3. **Prof. Irom Gambhir Singh**, Professor and Head Department of English and Cultural Studies, Manipur University.

4. **Dr Chingtham Diana Devi**, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Manipur University.

5. **Prof. Dr Aparajita Hazra**, Former Registrar (actg), Dean, Faculty of Arts and Professor, Department of English, Diamond Harbour University, India.

6. **Dr. Sacaria Joseph** is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. An alumnus of St. Xavier's College, he completed his M.A. in English Literature from Pune University, M. Phil in English from Jadavpur University, and obtained his Ph.D. in English from Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal. As Visiting Faculty at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, he teaches courses on literature and philosophy in the Department of Philosophy. Cinema and literature are his areas of special interest and research. He has published various articles on a wide range of issues related to literature, philosophy, religion, culture, cinema, politics, and environment. He is the author of *Deliberations on James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2009; Books Way, Kolkata) and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (2011; The Book World, Kolkata). ORCID ID - 0000-0003-0297-9171.

7. **Anuradha Mazumder** is an Assistant Professor of English in Prafulla Chandra College, Kolkata. An alumna of Presidency College, Kolkata, she did her Masters in English Literature from the University of Calcutta and completed her M. Phil. in English Literature from Jadavpur University. She is currently a doctoral scholar at the University of Burdwan, West Bengal. Her areas of academic interest include Victorian Studies, Holocaust Studies, Indian English Writing, and literature's interface with cinema and popular culture. She is the author of the book *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: With an Introduction and Explanatory Notes* (2018), published by Authorspress, New Delhi. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in different literary e-

journals like *Setu*, *Muse India*, *Saaranga- English*, and *Café Dissensus*. ORCID ID - 0000-0002-2732-3761.

8. **Dr Sujato Ghosh**, Assistant Professor, Department of English (UG & PG), Belda College, West Bengal.

9. **Arzuman Ara** is an Associate Professor of ELE in the English and Foreign Languages University, Shillong campus. She was a visiting faculty at Oakton Community College, USA, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, NERIE-NCERT, Shillong campus & IIM-Rohtak. Her writings are published in India and abroad on Literature, Film, Culture Studies and language pedagogy. She writes poetry and also translates them. Her translation of Imtiaz Mahmud's *Maxim* is published from Bangladesh. Her upcoming publication includes an English translation of Imtiaz Mahmud's poetry collection *Kalo Kautuk,* an authored volume on *Critical Pedagogy and English Studies in India* and an edited volume on *Visual Cultures of India.* She has edited on *Revisiting Partition* and Sarita Sutrakatha-Riverine cultures in Indian Narratives; she has co-edited *Indian Narrative Traditions* and *Narrative Cultures of Northeast India.* She has produced study materials for several academic institutions. She is the recipient of Barkakati Journalism Award, 2004.

10. **Dr. Ashutosh Singh**, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Language, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.

11. **Dr. Bijender Singh** is an associate professor of English at Indira Gandhi University, Meerpur (Rewari), Haryana, India. He has more than eighteen years of experience in teaching and research. His areas of interest are Indian literature, Dalit literature, and Gender and Cultural Studies. He has served as Chairperson of the Dept of Law and Dean of the Faculty of Law at Indira Gandhi University Meerpur Rewari. He has more than three dozen research publications in UGC-approved, CARE-listed and Scopus journals. He is associated as a review member and honorary Editor for research journals. He has convened, chaired

sessions, and presented papers at national seminars and conferences. He has delivered expert talks in workshops, seminars, conferences, refresher courses, induction programmes, etc., and he has been an expert in research meetings at different universities. Moreover, he writes poems and short stories and has published them in magazines and journals.

12. **Ekta Verma** is a Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Indira Gandhi University, Meerpur, Rewari (Haryana), India.

13. **Dr. Thounaojam Ruhichand Singh**, Assistant Professor, Department of Umanglai Haraoba Manipur University of Culture, Palace Compound, Imphal, Manipur.

14. **Dr. Sharmila Thingbaijam,** Assistant Professor, Department of Adult Continuing Education and Extension, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal.

15. **Dr. Pejjai Nagaraju** is an independent theatre researcher, director, and IB theatre teacher with a PhD in Theatre Arts from the University of Hyderabad. His research interests include Theatre in Education, Folk and Religious Theatre, and Scenography and Technical Theatre. Dr.Nagaraju has presented papers at national and international conferences and published several articles in UGC care-listed journals. His professional experience includes teaching at prestigious international schools in Hyderabad. As a theatre practitioner, he has directed numerous plays for both professional actors and children, ranging from classic works to contemporary Indian drama. Dr. Nagaraju has participated in various workshops on theatre and education, enhancing his expertise in areas such as digital scenography, social research ethics, and IB curriculum delivery. His commitment to theatre education and research is evident in his continuous engagement with academic and practical aspects of the field.

16. **Dr. Siva Prasad Tumu** is an esteemed theatre designer, director, and pedagogue currently serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Dramatics at the University of Rajasthan, a

position he has held since 2013. He earned his M.A. in Theatre Arts and Ph.D. from the University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, and holds a P.G. Diploma from the National School of Drama, New Delhi.

17. **Dr. Tumu's** extensive professional experience includes serving as a visiting faculty member for the Theatre Outreach Unit in Hyderabad, the National School of Drama (Sikkim), and the National School of Drama (Srinagar). Notably, he has also contributed to international theatre education through his participation in the "Student Exchange Programme" at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London and the UKEIRI project at Wimbledon College of Arts, London. Throughout his career, Dr. Tumu has published numerous research papers in various journals, contributing significantly to the field of theatre studies.

18. **Dr Gargi Bhattacharya** is an Assistant Professor teaching in the Department of English of Swami Niswambalananda Girls' College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta. She topped her M.A. from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and holds an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. degree from the same university. She has taught in St. Stephen's College (then DU affiliated), Shivaji College (DU), Motilal Nehru College (DU) and ARSD College (DU). She is a published poet and translator and specialises in literary theory, western philosophy and postmodern fiction. She is also a social activist and runs her own NGO—ECHOES Project—dedicated to children's education and environmental sustainability.

19. **Dr. Sobhana Laishram**, Associate Professor, Department of English, G.P. Women's College, DMU

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Subir Kumar Dhar, Ph.D, is currently Dean School of Humanities & Director School of International Languages, Former Honorary Director, Tagore Gandhi Centre, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata and Former Professor and Head, Department of English at Rabindra Bharati University. Internationally acclaimed Blake and Shakespeare expert. Author of two books and numerous papers.

Bryan Reynolds, (USA) Ph.D UCI, is Chancellor's Professor, Department of Drama Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine, C A 92697-2775.

Sheila T. Cavanagh, (USA) Ph.D, Professor of English, Emory University, Fulbright/Global Shakespeare Centre Distinguished Chair, 2015-2016. Director, World Shakespeare Project Co-Director, "First Folio: the Book that, gave us Shakespeare" and Emory's year of Shakespeare 2016-2017.

Papia Mitra Ph.D is Associate Professor, English Department, at Surendranath College for Women, Kolkata, India. She has done her research on Comparative Religion in New Zealand and is a specialist on myths and Sanskrit Literature.

The TI Manifesto

THEATRE INTERNATIONAL, EAST-WEST Perspectives on Theatre: the title tells you where we are at. This is an international journal-cum-Drama book. In the constitution of its Editorial Board, in its wide-angle global readership, in its range and scope of subject matter and focus, in its selection of experts and specialist writers this publication caters to the frontierless international communitiy of the Performing Arts and Artists.

This publication hopes to enrich the Indian theatre culture in concrete ways—for the present dramatic culture lacks a creative correlation between theory and praxis. Our connections and involvement in University Performing Arts, Drama and Literature Departments makes **Theatre International** favorably situated to bridge the grey areas between pedagogy and performance. On the other hand, theatre is ultimately performance. Hence papers and articles on the productional aspects will find valuable place in all issues of *TI*.

Moreover, the realization that the theatre cuts across both culture and history is evident in the works of our avant-garde theatre thinkers. The University Drama Departments have every access to and special avenues of communication with theatre movements throughout India and abroad. *TI* is committed to the task of making the necessary intercultural linkages and disseminating the available material to theatre enthusiasts and professionals here. Likewise, *TI* can help make the intelligentsia abroad aware of the Indian, Asian and African theatre scene. Hence *TI* can serve as a medium and forum for international cultural exchange.

Both our masthead and our readership include and span high-IQ decision makers in the performing arts spread across the five continents—University Faculty, members of Akademis and theater ensembles,

performing artists and intellectuals, the cultural avantgarde of Europe, America and Asia. The contents of *TI* will thus range from *Kathakali* to *Kabuki,* from the *Yakshagana* to the *Guerilla theatre,* from the *Peking Opera* to the performative processes of the *African folk traditions,* from Tagore to T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare to Stanislavsky, Kafka to Karnad, reflecting and embodying the creative thrust of the global theatre scene.

TI has published and will publish *Special Issues* in future on Brecht, Tagore, Folk theatre, Political theatre, Theatre and Film, Translation, Adaptation and, of course, on Shakespeare among other subject areas.

The Shakespeare Society of Eastern India, under whose aegis *TI* is being published, has helped spearhead the new resurgence of both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare that emerged from the mid-seventies throughout Bengal and India.

Editorial Note

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TI VOL. XX
Peer reviewed UGC approved Journal
Currently enlisted in UGC CARE List
Arts and Humanities Group I Journal

A Feast of Theatre and Performance, Research and Reviews, Re-looks and Re-presentations.

≡ UGC-CARE List, 2019

Sr.No.	Journal Title	Publisher	ISSN	E-ISSN	Action
1	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
2	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

≡ UGC-CARE List, 2022

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159	International Journal of Cultural Studies and social Sciences	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2347-4777	NA	View
400	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	View

≡ UGC-CARE List, 2024

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436	Theatre International	Avantgarde Press, Tagore-Gandhi Institute/Shakespeare Society	2278-2036	NA	from January - 2020 to Present	View

Website Address : www.ssei.org.in
Web Link : https://ssei.org.in/TI/Vol-XX.pdf

TAGORE GANDHI INSTITUTE / SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY

Avantgarde Press

146, Sarat Bose Road, Subash Nagar,
Dum Dum Cantonment, Kolkata - 700 065 /
6A, Maharaja Nanda Kumar Road
Kolkata-700 029 • Mob. : 98304 05624

ISSN NO: 2378-2036

23782036