

Routledge Studies in Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

THE BARD AND THE RAJ

Manojit Mandal



Shakespeare and Indian Nationalism

Shakespeare and Indian Nationalism aims to articulate the reception of Shakespeare by the 19th-century Indian intelligentsia from Bengal and their ambivalent approach to the Indian Renaissance and consequent nationalist project. Showcasing the cultural politics of British imperialism, this volume focuses on six early nationalist writers and their engagement with Shakespeare: Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891), Hemchandra Bandopadhyay (1838–1903), Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1912), Purnachandra Basu (1844–unknown), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and a host of prominent writers of cultural politics, nationalism, and Indian history, this interdisciplinary approach combines postcolonial and Shakespeare studies in an attempt to reconcile the existence of an unbridled admiration for an English cultural icon in India alongside the rise of nationalism and a fierce resistance to British rule. The book, finally, moves to re-explore Shakespeare's position in academic, political, and popular nationalist discourses in postcolonial India.

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Manojit Mandal

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1 Introduction

Beginning of Shakespeare Study in India

Glancing back at the period of which I tell, it strikes me that we had gained more of *stimulation* than of *nourishment* out of English Literature. Our *literary gods* then were Shakespeare, Milton and Byron; and the quality in their work which stirred us most was strength of passion. In the social life of Englishmen passionate outbursts are kept severely in check, for which very reason, perhaps, they so dominate their literature, making its characteristic to be the working out of *extravagantly vehement feelings* to an inevitable conflagration. At least this *uncontrolled excitement* was what we learnt to look on as the quintessence of English literature ... there was the *wildness of intoxication*. *The frenzy of Romeo's and Juliet's love, the fury of King Lear's impotent lamentation, the all-consuming fire of Othello's jealousy, these were the things that roused us to enthusiastic admiration* ... Shakespeare's contemporary literature represents the war-dance of the day when the Renaissance came to Europe in all the violence of its reaction against the severe curbing and cramping of the hearts of men. The examination of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, was not the main object—*man then seemed consumed with the anxiety to break through all barriers to the inmost sanctuary of his being, there to discover the ultimate image of his own violent desire. That is why in this literature we find such poignant, such exuberant, such unbridled expression* ... *The spirit of this bacchanalian revelry of Europe found entrance into our demurely well-behaved social world, woke us up, and made us lively. We were dazzled by the glow of unfettered life which fell upon our custom-smothered heart, pining for an opportunity to disclose itself* ... *Our minds from infancy to old age are being moulded by this English literature alone.*

(My *Reminiscences*:2019, 169–171, emphasis added)

More than a century ago Rabindranath Tagore thus reminisced on his early days' encounter with colonial Shakespeare. Today, when this book is being written, India gears up to celebrate 75 years of its national independence, and parts of the world are at war with each other, either to expand their geopolitical territory or to protect their national sovereignty. With powerful nations from both East and West, a sizable part of the earth seems to be

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engaged in a neo-national reawakening. An unearthly sense of nationalist pride appears to have gripped the better part of human existence, completely wishing away the cosmopolitan camaraderie and the coming together of nearly 200 nations in neutralizing the invisible enemy, the COVID-19 virus, which killed and affected millions of world citizens barely months ago. In such an unpredictably fluid time while writing a book on Indian nationalism, is it possible not to remember India's national poet, the 'modern prophet' of humanity, an ambassador of peace, love, and harmony, the first Indian (and non-European) to secure the Nobel Prize, and one of the most influential thinkers of Asia (Hay:1974)? The book is, however, confessedly on Shakespeare and his reception by six of the early nationalists of Bengal/India and Shakespeare's role in influencing their nationalist thought in multiple ways. It is not exactly on Tagore, though he constitutes a major part of the project, i.e., a crucial chapter in the book. But then, what Tagore was recording in his memoir at the age of 50 (*My Reminiscences* was originally published as 'Jibonshrimiti' in Bengali in 1911) may serve as a strategic launching pad for recognizing the degree of Shakespeare's penetration in the intellectual/social life of colonial Bengal/India by the last quarter of the 19th century. The long passage reveals some crucial aspects of Shakespeare and/or English studies in colonial India. First, it entered the heart of the colonial intelligentsia as an unprecedented 'stimulation', 'uncontrolled excitement', and 'intoxication' leaving very little or no space for resistance from them. Colonial writers like Shakespeare assumed the status of demigods in the minds of the educated youth. They started swearing by him and began conceiving themselves through the cultural determinants set out by the alien 'tempestuous feelings' or 'passionate emotion' borne by his plays. Consequently, Indian literature started imitating the 'war dance' or 'violent desire' of the English, which gradually but irredeemably continued to affect Indian sociocultural space: 'The spirit of this bacchanalian revelry ... made us lively'. The unquestioned significance of Tagore's remembrances of his impressionable years can be ascertained further from how three of the foremost contemporary thinkers/writers/nationalists—Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and Hemchandra Bandopadhyay—had continued to admire, eulogize, and imitate Shakespeare in their Bengali writings. Criticized mostly for his complete adherence to anglophilia by his fellow countrymen, Michael—who will be briefly discussed later in the book—proudly upheld his choice for copying the Shakespearean model in his plays instead of Sanskrit traditional drama: 'frenzy... fury ... fire' replacing 'our narrower field of activity ... monotonous uniformity'. He strongly defends his dramatic ideal, as in 'great European drama' he finds 'the stern realities of life, lofty passion, and heroism of sentiment' against 'all softness, all romance' in Indian classical drama.¹ Bankimchandra, too, a core literary figure in this book, was

avowedly unapologetic in declaring Shakespeare as an ‘immortal poet of universal human nature ... the only man in the world literature whose works hold up a mirror to every possible phases of man’s inner life’.² Hemchandra, discussed later, was in the habit of tendering unqualified apologies to the ‘blessed child of God’ even for attempting to imitate him in his ‘inferior’ mother tongue.³ Hence, acceptance of English literary texts along with their inherent cultural values, which Tagore was lamenting about, had become a common syndrome among most of the English-educated Bengali *bhadrolok*.

But was that all? Was there any attempt to counter and/or resist the obvious invasion of this colonial Shakespeare? Was Shakespeare such an inviolate icon that none could remain recalcitrant? Tagore himself, a little later in the chapter, ‘Broken Heart’ of the autobiography, arrived at a fine critique of English literature, which, according to him, could not achieve either ‘the reticence of true art’ or ‘beauty of perfect fullness’. The excitability and turbulence in their literature were a true reflection of their history, that stood in complete contrast with other European literatures, which showed well-nourished development because of ‘systematic cultivation of self-control’. Tagore himself had expressed his lukewarm boyish interests in English literature though he had to study Shakespeare, Milton, and Byron but could not attach any sense of filial feeling for them. The ‘uncontrolled excitement’, ‘extravagantly vehement feelings’ appeared to him more as ‘stimulation’ rather than ‘nourishment’. On the contrary, he had an unbridled passion for classical Sanskrit and contemporary Bengali literatures especially by Kalidasa, Vidyasagar, Dinabandhu Mitra, and, of course, Bankimchandra.⁴ Unlike most of the Bengali writers, Tagore could remain deeply recognizant of the pitfalls of uncritically/blindly imitating a foreign writer in Indian literature, especially in a colonial situation. Nonetheless, the fact of history, or the most intriguing paradox of our late 19th century interface with English literature, was that when Tagore rose to understand the problematic transactions, English literary studies, or Shakespeare had already become a dominant trend among the greater parts of Indigenous intelligentsia and rising bourgeoisie. Use of metaphors/comparisons downgrading the great Indian poet Kalidasa against Shakespeare—Kalidasa belonged to India, Shakespeare to the world (Hemchandra); or, Kalidasa was like a garden, Shakespeare ocean (Bankimchandra)—had become a fashion even for the most celebrated writers of the time. The Bard had become an amazing obsession among many of them and played the most dominant role in shaping the general consciousness of those English-educated middle-class Bengalis in many ways, corresponding to Macaulay’s infamously imagined ‘Indians in colour, Europeans in intellect’. Tagore, though, liked some English writers albeit any passion for them, was against aping or unthoughtfully

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reproducing them in his own literary utterances, or making them indispensable parts of Bengali sensibilities. He continued to reveal his anxiety about such eulogization of the representational world of Shakespeare and English culture at least till 1910 or in his pre-Nobel era.⁵ But by then Shakespeare or English literary studies had already become an integral part of not just the curricula in Indian universities modelled on the British system of pedagogy but a dominant cultural discourse and a seminal self-referential point for the prominent nationalists. We shall return to this raging debate in the next two chapters.

I have deliberately begun this project of Shakespeare's reception in colonial India with a brief outline of such engagement by one of the giants of world literature living under colonial rule in an attempt to underline the enduring significance of another great writer of the colonizing nation, whose journey to such a colony was as dramatic as some of his own plays dealing with series of mercantile expedition in the early modern Europe. In fact, to contextualize the Bard's arrival in Indian classrooms—which incidentally had remained an inseparable axis of English literary studies in India since its inception notwithstanding the brief attempts by the missionaries to resist him—one needs to at least briefly go back to the history of the beginning of English literary studies in India. However, a caveat may be added here that this book is an endeavour to reinterpret Shakespeare studies in India and their intimate relationship with emergent nationalism, not exactly a study of the vastly powerful canon of English literature. Ignoring the legitimate fear of being repetitive, history of English studies will be tangentially mentioned here merely for the purpose of historicizing one of the irrevocably powerful literary industries, 'Shakespeare' and its everlasting spell in cultural/intellectual spaces in the ex-colonial nation. Let us remind ourselves once again that Shakespeare started to make his ubiquitous marks on the Indian education system or Bengali consciousness much before Macaulay sowed his infamous 'poison tree' in 1835—not to mention Shakespeare's theatrical presence (performed obviously in English) since the middle of the 18th century (Raha:1978). The amazingly articulate Minutes on Indian Education, however, had firmly institutionalized English/Shakespeare studies on Indian soil by strongly advocating abolition of an indigenous system of learning in all its prevalent forms. It was known to be a part of an internal meeting of the Director of Public Instruction demonstrating Macaulay's close survey on the development in the natives' education after the foundation of the famous Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817, a glorious consequence of the remarkable debates and ambivalences centred on the necessity of English education in colonial India. Unsurprisingly, the iconic college also heralded the spectacular journey of a discipline called 'English literature' with Shakespeare being the most powerful commander.

Remarkable research on the two-century-long unhindered passage of English has been untiringly carried out by highly acclaimed scholars like Gauri Viswanathan (1998), Ania Loomba (1989), Jyotsna Singh (1996, 2019), Jasodhra Bagchi (1991), Rosinka Chaudhuri (2002), and a whole host of critics specializing in the area of English literary studies and British rule in India. They present primarily two strains of reading. The following paragraphs, while counting on both, shall actually plug in the holes, not exactly modify, to make the arguments appear historically more diachronic.

First, the introduction of English literary studies was a ploy of the colonial administration to generate a safety valve for greater and sustained political control over the natives and thus to perpetuate British rule in India. This fascinating weapon was rolled out not through naked brandishing but by tacitly manoeuvring the consent of the subjects so that they turned wilfully interpellated parts of the discourse. The most influential canonical study persuasively forwarding this narrative of English literature in India is *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* published originally in 1989 by Gauri Viswanathan, for whom:

The introduction of English literature marks the effacement of a sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression ... The English literary text, functioning as surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state, becomes a mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer ... The split between the material and the cultural practices of colonialism is nowhere sharper than in the progressive refinement of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature.

(Viswanathan: 1998, 20–21)

Through an extraordinarily penetrative drawing on the Gramscian notion of interrelations between culture and power on the one hand and Said's epoch-making discourses on Orientalism on the other, Viswanathan goes on to unmask English literature as 'a disguised form of authority' shrewdly planted on the natives to manipulate and secure their consent for political control. The native elites, to her, were willing/supine participants in the process. The well-known piece of history that it was a group of prominent Indians led initially by Rammohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, who had wanted English education in India around 1815, beseeched the then Governor-General Marquis Hastings through the then Chief Justice of Supreme Court at Calcutta, Sir Edward Hyde, to establish a college to impart western-style education, would appear to be a tremendous success of the Orientalist cultural imperialism. Unsurprisingly,

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for Viswanathan, the enormous success of the Orientalist project initiated since the 1780s under the leadership of William Jones and Orientalists like Henry T. Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed, and Charles Wilkins had paved the way for the Anglicists led by the Trevelyan–Macaulay duo under the active patronage of Governor-General William Bentinck, in launching their ‘civilizing mission’ for the fallen natives.⁶ Both the apparently sympathetic Orientalists and their more powerful pragmatic successors, for her, had the same goal in introducing English literary studies in India: harvesting an enduring hegemony, the imperatives of which would smoothen the passage and continuation of British rule. English literature/Shakespeare became the beguilingly powerful substitute for the Englishman, concealing the exploitative colonial agenda on the one hand and allaying fears of the ‘high’ caste Hindu conservatives about the religious back-clash owing to the missionaries’ activities on the other. One must not, however, lose sight of the history that the ‘romantic’ Orientalists were more in favour of taking the natives on board not just in the matter of education but also affairs of the government however in the lower rung of the bureaucracy. They squarely blamed the faulty exclusionary policies of the Company government for the Vellore uprising and its ghastly consequences in 1805 in southern India. Added to this was the unruly behaviour, loose morals, and mutually supportive alliance of many profligate Company officials with the exploitative *zamindars* in carrying out a repressive regime against the common subjects, which according to them resulted in occasional rebellions in Eastern India.⁷ However, following the Charter Act of 1813 debates between the Orientalists and Anglicists started to become increasingly one-sided, and with the constant pleas of the eminent Bengalis to the government for English education, it was just a matter of time for English literature to sail through and so was for the Bard of Avon.

But did he land up in the Indian classroom without any opposition? As it will be discussed in the chapter on *King Lear*, the Orientalists though did not really resist inclusion of the Bard in the curriculum, they were reluctant to teach much of him to even the senior boys of Hindu College and could succeed in keeping Shakespeare out of the school level (Mukharjee:2016). However, the stunning though short-lived resistance to the Bard, as informed by Viswanathan (1998), came from the missionaries led mainly by Alexander Duff, who, after his dramatic arrival in India in 1830 from the jaws of death, vehemently opposed the secular canon principles of education and dubbed the inclusion of Shakespeare as immoral. But the Bard, having the solid backing of the Anglicists and with his growing popularity owing to some outstanding teachers like Derozio, followed by D. L. Richardson at the Hindu College, had the last laugh and proudly survived the overwhelming spell of the Bible in India. Duff,

nevertheless, could manage to completely keep Shakespeare out of his General Assembly Institution for many years (Viswanathan:1998, 53).

Despite such open disputes on Shakespeare's inclusion and adoption of apparently dissimilar pedagogical approaches in the institutions run by the government and the missionaries, both followed, as Viswanathan informs us, the paradigm of the 'Arnoldian curriculum' (Thomas Arnold) with a heavy emphasis on classical languages, literature, and history. It prescribed teaching principles of law, government, and society and getting it balanced with romantic poetry with lessons in 'deeper relations between nature and human soul' (Viswanathan: 1998, 55). An incisive reading of the Arnoldian curriculum clearly reveals that it was designed for civil and moral training of the learners with its inherent Christian values, and thus merging education and religion. When replicating that system of learning in Indian colonial situation, Duff's strong reproach against Shakespeare began to fade on its face, considering the 'structural congruence established between Christianity and English literature' as shrewdly envisaged by Thomas Arnold. Gradually, the missionaries came to terms with the might of the Bard, reinventing deep manifestation of Protestant common sense in his plays. Finally, resolving the debate in the mid-19th century, Rev. William Keane described him in less colourful but quite significantly as a Christian with intense 'Protestant principles' and 'full of common sense principles which none but Christian men can recognize' (quoted in Viswanathan: 1998, 80). To prove her point on the Arnoldian model of curriculum in Indian classrooms, Viswanathan lists the syllabus of English literary studies followed in 1852 by these two kinds of educational institutions (Viswanathan: 1998, 54). Arnoldian curriculum was primarily prescribed for the ruling elites at home with growing 'demands of industrialization and expanding empire ... to foster leadership qualities ... of a governing elite: independent thinking, a strong sense of personal identity, and an ability to make decisions on one's own authority' (Viswanathan: 1998, 56). Quite interestingly, replication of this model of education in India might have meant teaching the natives to be independent thinkers, self-governing elites and leaders, which would have had boomerang consequences of challenging, undermining, and possibly rebelling against the colonial government. Historically, though, that was precisely happening in a more striking manner since the second half of the 19th century when many western-educated Indian intelligentsia started becoming self-righteous, recalcitrant, and defining their nationalist identity. Admittedly, this fascinatingly paradoxical consequence of English literary studies hovering around Shakespeare is the central theme of this book.

Viswanathan's tract, though remarkably groundbreaking in its own right, actually extends the epoch-making paradigms of Orientalism amazingly articulated by her famous mentor Edward Said in his 1978

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book, which draws mainly on the premise that imperialist notion of hegemony is followed by political control of the natives. It may sound somewhat tautological to elaborate on the subsequent series of critiques put forth against such ‘Orientalism’ mainly on the ground—which may not always appear quite unconvincing—that Said has glaringly kept the factual narratives of resistance struggle of the Orientalized/colonized natives against the Orientalizing/colonial domination out of the scope. Nonetheless, a book dealing largely with responses to Shakespeare by the native elites needs to briefly foreground the absent/silent voice, ‘a peculiar disjuncture in the architecture’ of Said’s book, as adumbrated so cogently by Aijaz Ahmed:

A notable feature of *Orientalism* is that it examines the history of Western textualities about the non-West quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of colonized countries: not an undifferentiated mass but as situated social agents impelled by our own conflicts, contradictions, distinct social and political locations, of class, gender, region, religious affiliation, and so on ...

(quoted in Chaudhuri: 2002, 9)

Following Viswanathan, Jasodhara Bagchi (1991) held a substantially different view relating to beginning of English literary/Shakespeare studies and laid more stress on the active role played by prominent Bengalis—both liberals like Rammohan Roy and conservatives like Radhakanta Deb—in inviting and promoting it in Indian education since the second decade of the 19th century. ‘The demand for English studies from a section of the indigenous population’, she writes, ‘gave a lie to the belief that western education was foisted on the native subject’ (Bagchi:1991, 147). According to her both the traditional and progressive strands of the Bengali elites found a mutually beneficial utility in the English or western education. For the liberals, it would serve a dual purpose: blunting the growth of Orientalism—Rammohan went to the extent of considering ‘propagation of purely Sanskritic learning as harmful’—and fighting the traditional obscurantism (quoted in Bagchi:1991, 150). Coupled with that was the purport of the conservative Hindus in stemming the flow of Islamic influences in education borne by the preponderance of Arabic and Persian studies and thus minimizing the role of the Islamic scholars/*maulavis* in the judicial and governmental functioning, and as also anticipation of a golden future in English studies in securing fortunes and means of economic power.

It is pertinent to mention here that with the turn of the 19th century, English schools started to spread in Calcutta, catering to the growing

demand of the Bengali upper classes of caste Hindu families.⁸ Gradually, these schools came over to the other side of the Ganges first in the Danish colony of Sreerampur, where William Carey, Marshman, and Ward had already started their missionaries' activities.⁹ Within a span of few years the English schools went deeper into the districts with Robert May of the London Missionary establishing one in Chinsurah (French colony); inspired by the growing popularity of this school, the local ruler of Burdwan Raja Tejendra Bahadur Singh converted his Bengali school into an English one in 1814 (Shastri:1903, 55). However, it is a widely acknowledged fact that these schools did not really impart any lessons on English literature or western philosophy/science, but the pupils were only getting to know English words and their meaning, most of the time by memorizing them by way of remarkably funny but useful limericks (Shastri:1903, 51).

These brief but crucial pieces of information regarding the inception of English have been factored in here to understand the obvious conclusion that Bagchi tries to draw about the correlation between growth of English literary studies and the rise of a new indigenous class from among the *zamindars* and *baniyas* of the East India Company. English literature turned out to be 'a crucial part of an ideological project to free the minds of the educated Bengali *bhadralok* so that they could cultivate their cultural/spiritual sphere while making a niche for themselves in the new socio-economic terrain opened up by the British' (Bagchi:1991, 148). She went on to demonstrate the effect of English education on the emergence of this new class of Bengalis within the colonial apparatus since the mid-19th century, for whom 'English literature was not merely a literature of the masters, but it was literature, a source of non-denominational spirituality, a harbinger of a secular outlook' (Ibid., 150). Equipped with this new 'mantra', Bagchi argues (much like Viswanathan) that this emerging class—at times, a peculiar blend of 'pundit' (a highly knowledgeable indigenous man in Sanskrit learning) and 'baboo' (an Anglicist Indian or Macaulay's 'brown sahibs')—could resolve the apparent dichotomy between the Orientalists and Anglicists that 'the defined parameters within which the new class of Hindu male elite was going to draw up its agenda ... form the arena of self-definition within which burgeoning nationalist consciousness found its initial ground' (Ibid., 152). By citing three prominent mid-19th century thinkers/writers—Vidyasagar, Madhusudan, and Bankimchandra—she goes on to argue that English studies, though having 'dialectical relationship' with this new class, 'played a crucial role in this process of self-definition; the predominantly literary emphasis was supposed to liberate the colonized psyche from the domination of mere "knowledge" and give free range in the sphere of imagination' (Ibid., 152). All three, according to her, attempted to revive their own brand of Orientalism within

the premise of Anglicist literature, thus giving ‘an enormous impetus to the development of Bengali literary studies’, which, in turn provided not only ‘the cultural and moral rejuvenation ... controversial “Bengal Renaissance”, but also for demarcating the terrain of the nationalist thought’ (Ibid., 152). Decidedly, Shakespeare became a huge model to follow/imitate for three of them as well as most of the English-educated Bengali *bhadralok* who sought to improve Bengali literature, especially drama, on the one hand and develop independent thinking, social activism, and cultural leadership on the other. Such endeavours, in turn, helped them begin to narrate/imagine their motherland as a nation only years after the formal cession of India to the British Empire. She concludes quite convincingly, though, by showing the deep ambivalent relationship between English studies and early nationalist consciousness among this new class and that Bengali literature, ‘itself an expression of burgeoning nationalism’ was not entirely dependent on English literature for its self-fashioning and that the ‘so-called progressive claim ... of English literature by the colonial rulers actually generated counter-hegemonic claims of an indigenous middle class’ (Ibid., 158).

While Bagchi’s views on the issue at hand are extremely valuable and adding an entirely new dimension to Viswanathan’s ‘one-way traffic’ of English literary studies, the sociocultural dynamics in colonial Bengal/India, especially since the mid-19th century, have remained so enchantingly complex that it is well-nigh impossible to have a homogenized view on the growth of the indigenous elites. The male caste Hindus of Bagchi’s articulate pronouncement were certainly not a monolith, nor could they be mechanically divided into two groups: *pundits* (offshoots of Orientalism) and *baboos* (derivatives of Anglicism). In fact, even among the conservative Hindus, there were two distinct groups, one strictly puritan (*gonra*), who rejected English studies and all of its cultural corollaries and continued with their old traditional beliefs and Sanskrit schools (*tols*) mostly in suburbs and villages. Then there were the neo-Hindus (*nabyo Hindus*) that Bagchi has eloquently designated as accepting English education largely for its sizzling market prospects. But some from this group, too, deeply tied to their traditional beliefs, mounted stiff resistance against any attempted interference of the colonial government in most of their traditional religious affairs.¹⁰ The liberals or ‘the progressives’ can be said to be working in at least three distinct groups. The first of them, closely corresponding to Macaulay’s ‘brown sahibs’, mostly consisting of the Derozians or the Young Bengal clans or their remnants, at times denouncing their own religion and embracing Christianity, were known as the avant-gardes of free speech, sternly recalcitrant to social/political set-ups based on injustice or oppression whether Indian or British.¹¹ The second set of intellectual class, equipped with western education but

deeply tied to and conscious of their own tradition and culture, advocated for strong reforms of repressive superstitious beliefs and religious practices, as could be exemplified by the pioneering figures like Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, and Bankimchandra (before his overt overtures to Hindu religious conservatism around 1875). Then there were the extremely influential and exponentially growing *Bramhos*, an emergent group among the English-educated Hindus strongly denouncing traditional notions of polytheism, redefining Hinduism essentially in line with Unitarian Protestantism but staying away from the missionaries.¹² Added to these were the new tendentious bourgeoisie avatars of the *baniyas* and *zamindars* of the erstwhile Company regime, the real compradors/brokers of the new imperial government, and those English-educated Indians totally subservient to and collaborating with the colonial government for their own growth and sustenance. However, one may have to exercise a considerable degree of caution if meticulously nitpicking the differential definitions of any of the first five classes and treating them as entirely autonomous entities having a completely separate terrain of their own. At times there can be natural overlapping of their sociopolitical ideas, activities, and behavioural patterns. One common denominator among all of them—except obviously the indigenuous agents of the Empire—was the protracted angst about the foreign rule. For many of them, as the book will demonstrate, self-assertion of their country and its liberation remained on their regular agenda, whereby western education and Shakespeare became an extremely important reference point.

This extraordinary pronouncement of India's self-definition, through 'our own' (of Ahmed's import) reception, modification, challenge, overthrowing, or reproduction of a western text in a colonial situation, may take us to Ania Loomba's scintillating sense of 'seizing the book' of *The Tempest* (*Tempest* hereafter). Consequently, it leads to the process of not just reversing the colonialist discourse but reclaiming 'our own' land. In her path-breaking book on Renaissance/early modern studies, its intimate connection with white supremacist ideology and English/European colonialism, Loomba (1989) though begins with a tribute to Said and then follows Viswanathan, goes further in charting out the responses of the indigenous intelligentsia to western textualities. By citing the late 15th-century Spanish author of the first modern grammar Antonio de Nebrija's colonialist predilection—'language is the perfect instrument of empire' (Loomba:1989, 13)—she ventures to prove that 'India was first site of British experimentation with *this* early colonialist perception ... English was not taught just as a foreign language but was *means of imposing a culture, a cluster of ideologies, a way of being and seeing, of which the literary text became the privileged signifier*' (ibid, 13–16, emphasis added).

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By extending Viswanathan's reading of the Orientalist project of formulating the ideology of subordination through English education, she refers to Charles Grant, who had ostensibly claimed that the British had already established paternalistic attachment with their Indian subjects, and hence their ensuing project (English studies) would be gratefully received by them: 'They are our own, we have possessed them long' (Ibid., 13). Then she moves beyond both Said and Viswanathan in recognizing and expanding the responses and counter-narratives by the colonized subjects to the project of imperial education, but with a caveat not to lose sight of their inherent contradiction as well:

... a desire to locate opposition is not sufficient; it is possible to romanticize the colonial subject and the site of his/her struggle against imperialism. In order to understand the authority of English text in Indian classroom and its durability, we will have to differentiate between various colonial subjects and acknowledge stances which are double-edged. For example, it is possible to argue that *Indian nationalists received the European text contrary to the intentions of their colonial masters*, since the independence struggle was paradoxically led by the Indians schooled in Britain and British system here. *But although Indian nationalism resisted colonial rule it also consolidated its own hierarchy...* ... this complicates the nationalist interaction with English literature. From the position of bourgeois nationalism, the humanistic claims of institutionalized English education could not be ... be subverted.

(Ibid., 11–12, emphasis added)

Loomba has now evidently moved to Bagchi's argument on the involvement of indigenous intelligentsia in fostering English studies, but largely on their consequential benefits. By citing Frantz Fanon, she largely concurs with her on the polarized role of these intellectuals divided between Anglicists and Orientalists—the first lot 'threw themselves in a frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and (took) every opportunity of unfavourably criticizing their own national culture', and the latter took shelter in 'setting out and substantiating the claims of their indigenous culture in a way which rapidly becomes unproductive' (quoted in Ibid., 15). On the point of the heterogeneous character of the western, educated colonized elites, Loomba more or less echoes the assumptions of Bagchi but extends her ideas about the role of English literature and Shakespeare in triggering nationalist thought in India well into the postcolonial time.

Dwelling deeply on these three renowned studies, Jyotsna Singh (1996) appears to have not just suitably expanded their position but has traced the presence of a new motif of 19th-century British 'liberalism' and its

education mission, typically demonstrated by Macaulay's brother-in-law, C.E. Trevelyan, an Anglicist but slightly less aggressive in promoting English studies among the natives. By citing from his seminal work entitled *On the Education of the People of India* (1838), she contends that Trevelyan was the first to proudly proclaim that English education was not a colonizing but 'civilizing mission' for the Indians, a beneficial intercultural exchange though only one-way traffic between the superior (British) and inferior (Indian) cultures. Warranted by the superior culture's large-hearted commitment to past history of what the Greeks had done to other inferior European civilizations, Trevelyan extolled, the British 'will end in bringing ... a decided change for the better in the character of the people' of India, resulting in a cultural transformation from barbarism to civilization (Singh:1996, 125). Though not giving much credence to Persian, Arabic, or Sanskrit, he did not outright dismiss them like his brother-in-law, but rather strongly prescribed a theory of emulation of English, the 'preeminent ... among the languages of the West' to nourish 'unscientific' 'fluid' Indian languages and develop 'new' literatures:

In Bengalee and Hindustanee nothing is fixed; everything is yet to be done, and a new literature to be formed ... to speak of the delicate sensibility of a Bengalee or Hindustanee being offended by the introduction of a new words to express new ideas is to transfer to a poor and unformed tongue the feelings which are connected only with a rich and cultivated one. It will be time enough after their scientific vocabulary is settled, and they have masterpieces of their own, to think of keeping their own language pure. When they have a native Milton or Shakespeare, they will not require us to guide them in this respect.

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 126)

Make no mistake, the last sentence, 'They will not need us ...', is not uttered as an exalted expectation of India's future autonomy to govern its literature and culture but to forecast assimilation of Indian languages with the European and, in the process, to make the Indians 'more English than Hindu ... (while) daily conversing with the best and wisest Englishmen through higher medium of their works' (quoted in *Ibid.*, 126). One can underline the parallelism that exists between Macaulay's 'brown sahibs' and Trevelyan's 'more English than Hindu' as well as their latent colonialist motifs: the first one puts it bluntly, while the latter with some eloquence. By clearly demarcating the role of English studies in formulating the ideology of the Raj, both the brothers-in-law had forecast the coming of a long imperial dominance in India. Interestingly, imperialists like Macaulay and Trevelyan provided the consequential ammunitions to flame works like *Masks of Conquest*, which would boldly lay bare English

studies as the conspicuous cultural logic of British imperialism. Colonial intelligentsia had submitted their ‘implicit consent’ to such imperial hegemony and remained largely passive onlookers to the effacement and/or hybridization of their language, literature, culture, and pristine identities. Trevelyan, though, did not stop only to reckon at the immediate fruits of English education, imagined a protractedly long future of an imperishable empire of English beyond the ‘happy independence’ of its carefully fostered future children. ‘The natives will have Independence’, he exhorted, ‘after first learning (through their Anglicization) how to make good use of it ... and we shall long continue to reap in the affectionate attachment of the people, and in a great commercial intercourse with her splendid country ...’ (quoted in Singh:1996, 127).

Singh elaborates further that Shakespeare remained the most influential replica of Trevelyan’s ‘best and wisest of Englishmen’ to the natives, first on Indian English theatre—though with a limited scope—and thereafter in both classrooms and Bengali playhouses with much wider sway. She attempts a brief recapitulation of the history of Shakespeare’s majestic foray into India and traces the beginning of Shakespearean performances in the Calcutta Theatre in 1775 or New Playhouse founded by one British auctioneer, George Williamson, under the patronage of the then Governor-General Warren Hastings to entertain ‘a large British audience of officers, merchants, clerks and adventurers associated with the East India Company and later with the civil service’ (Ibid., 121). However, a little later in the chapter she refers to the theatre historian Sushil Mukharjee, who in his book, *The Story of Calcutta Theatres 1753–1980*, draws up the beginning of theatre with the Playhouse in the modest locality of Lal Bazar back in 1753, which in all likelihood continued to exist till June 1756, when it was destroyed owing to the Siege of Calcutta.¹³ The point that, I wish to arrive at, it is highly likely that between 1753 and 1755, Shakespeare might have, for the first time, seen the light of the Playhouse theatre to entertain the beleaguered Company officers living far away from their homeland—a crucial little history of Shakespeare theatre that Singh might have oversighted. Of course, she is absolutely right in suggesting that Shakespeare productions started to happen more regularly after 1775, which became frequent since December 1780 (Lal & Chaudhuri:2001, 15). Though these theatres were mostly amateur in nature and meant exclusively for the British, the Bard started to catch regular attention of some prominent Bengali citizens of Calcutta who remained in close proximity with some Company officials in the beginning of the 19th century:

... Early in the 19th century, Shakespeare was a subject of study in the Hindu college (in Calcutta). (But) Much before that Shakespeare’s plays had begun to be staged in the theatres that local Englishmen had set up

in the city for their entertainment and relaxation. The names of David Garrick ... Drury Lane theatre ... were familiar in Calcutta among the readers of Shakespeare and lovers of theatre.

(quoted in Singh, 128)

Now, among these 'readers of Shakespeare' and 'lovers of theatre', the upper echelon of the native contingent could have been drawn to Shakespeare and English literary studies, a desire which would flame a serious passion among some prominent Bengalis in the aftermath of the Charter Act of 1813. The history of foundation of Hindu College, as briefly mentioned, suggests in deed that they wanted 'to be informed of everything (including their literature) that the English gentlemen learnt and they would take that which they found good and liked best' (quoted in Chaudhuri:2002, 12). It is also widely believed that the first Bengali translation of Shakespeare (*Tempest*) was done by one Charles Monkton, an Orientalist and teacher at Fort William College as early as 1809, which unfortunately did not go to print. But it certainly indicates a beginning of native interests in the Bard even before the establishment of the iconic college in 1817 (Gupta:2005, 171). The point is that with the advent of English literary studies, Shakespeare had unfailingly started to emerge as one of the most powerful signifiers among the English-educated Bengali *bhadralok*, who began to carve out their own hegemonic expanse more elaborately from the mid-19th century. Studying, reciting, and performing his plays both within and outside the academic space came to be held as one of the most powerful cultural achievements:

While the English playhouses ... created an appetite for theatrical performances, the foundation of Hindu college in 1817 and the teaching of Shakespeare by eminent teachers like Richardson created in the minds of the students—the intelligentsia of modern Bengal—a literary taste for drama as such, and taught them, not only to appreciate Shakespeare criticism, but also to recite and act scenes from his plays. This fashion spread to every academic institution.

(quoted in Singh:1996, 130)

Shakespeare was taught to the students, Singh continues, with more emphasis on language and rhetoric of his plays, allowing the acting skills of a teacher like Richardson to appear quite handy in making sonorous and long-lasting appeal among the learners/listeners. The well-bred tradition of Shakespeare teaching initiated by Richardson somewhat continued well beyond Indian Independence, and incidentally, majority of the highly revered Shakespeare teachers remained good actors, if not always on the stage but certainly within the confines of their English studies

departments. We shall return to this later. Jyotsna Singh, though acknowledging the definitive traces of ambivalence within the colonial transaction, finally declaims Shakespeare as the ‘colonial book’, one of the most potent tools of the British ‘civilizing mission’ and ‘a privileged signifier within colonial discourse ... , contextualized and shaped (both) the curricular and theatrical practices of the time’ (Ibid., 128). The majority of the English-educated *bhadralok*, in pursuit of a cultural identity, started imagining themselves more in affiliation with Shakespeare than Indian literary icon like Kalidasa. Number of literary societies grew, producing the mimicked version of Macaulay’s anglicized subjects, who proudly wore on their sleeves a crazy passion for the Bard—a phenomenon gradually giving moral legitimacy not just to the hegemony of English but the process of Empire building. By critically evaluating Indian love for Shakespeare as a ‘benign practice of appreciation’, Singh harps on the role of literature as an ‘ideological apparatus’ in a strict Althusserian sense: creating and manipulating the colonial discourse, the strings of which remained under exclusive control of the dominant ideology (colonizers), ‘whereby the Indian was encouraged to become a surrogate Englishman while also being reminded of his inability to fully comprehend the “truths” enshrined in the Western texts’ (Ibid., 128). She goes on to argue that ‘the colonial ideology, by projecting its viewpoint as transcendental and ahistorical, it was able to claim to represent “human nature” and to define those whom it considered to be outside the bounds of humanity’, that is, the veritable colonial other. One way of looking at such veneration and admiration for the British Bard was, of course, to escape colonial indignities, to be at par with their masters, and thus mimicry, in the sense H.K. Bhaba (1994) has used, became a positive means of defining themselves as refined and civilized natives. A remarkably complex transaction was between Shakespeare and the English-educated natives, who, by the process of imitating the works of the Bard—of course, in most cases out of their deep veneration for him—landed up quite paradoxically, creating an image of an ‘Indian Shakespeare’ and thus dethroning the colonial icon from its imperial seat. The plethora of translations, adaptations, and appropriations of his works done repeatedly since the mid-19th century suggests the obvious success of the colonizing mission as well as the natives’ dissolution of high-browed image of the Bard.

Rosinka Chaudhuri (2002) broadens the trajectory of Indian engagement with English literary/Shakespeare studies by focusing more intensely on the colonial intelligentsia’s active responses (in Ahmed’s sense) to western texts to their own advantage and thus curving a distinct latitude of their own to give fullest expression to their creative oeuvre. ‘Gentlemen poets in colonial Bengal’ is a candied way of classifying these English-educated Bengali writers who were producing their poetry in class English with ‘an unabashed

admiration for Romantic and Victorian England while extolling the splendours of ancient and medieval India ... as conscious, if incipient, acts of an emergent nationalism and creating the context for such a nationalism, decades before it came into political existence' (Chaudhuri:2002, 2–3). She has found a discourse of a nascent nationalism in the first Indian writers in English, consequent to the beginning of English literary studies at the Hindu College. It began, according to her, in the hands of the famous Eurasian Henry Derozio—who took unflinching pride in calling himself an Indian—and continued regularly through the likes of Toru Dutt, R.C. Dutt, and Madhusudan Dutta till the 1870s, when literature produced in the vernacular took over the noble task of defining India with more vigour and enthusiasm. There can be disagreement regarding the range and impact of these early Indian poetries in English, as, since the middle of the 1850s, some of the prominent writers like Vidyasagar, Ishwar Gupta, Dinabandhu Mitra, and even Madhusudan started producing outstanding writings in Bengali with a discernible sense of what she calls 'incipient nationalism'. Nonetheless, Chaudhuri's thesis convincingly configures what Partha Chatterjee has classified as 'hybrid nationalism', regularly articulated 'in theory, into carefully demarcated zones of taking and leaving; of retaining the spiritual inner substance of "Indianness" while acquiring the material, the "outer" domain of Western knowledge' (quoted in *Ibid.*, 12). In other words, she attempts to demonstrate the responses of the colonial poets articulated in the language of the colonizers, whereby there remains a fascinating 'confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized in which the voices of the colonized were already engaged in the formulation of an Indian identity through a unique use of indigenous heritage and history' (*Ibid.*, 17). Quite interestingly, Chaudhuri's 'Gentlemen poets' can be said to be echoing the idea of resistance and struggle many great ex/colonial intellectuals had so passionately imagined by appropriating the first dramatic representation of the colonized subject in Caliban in Shakespeare's iconic play: 'You taught me language and my profit in it I know how to curse you'—a classic way of venturing to dismantle the master's house by using the master's tools.¹⁴

Such early attempts by a group of colonized writers to imagine a pristine pre-colonial India by way of the ammunition supplied by English literary studies remained, on the one hand, a way to forget colonial indignities and mount cultural resistance to colonialism on the other. Nonetheless, they were undoubtedly fostered by English education and remained confined only to the elite corners of the erstwhile colonial capital. The limited appeal of these incipient nationalists in general indicated their inability to make any considerable impact on colonial discourse and, quite ironically, signalled a glaring failure of Macaulay's 'downward filtration' policy of English education. Asok Sen (1977), though on a different note, has offered an

authoritative socio-economic perspective on the serious lack of vision and means among such early elite nationalists of the mid-19th century:

By its very history then, the province of Bengal in the 19th century, generated neither the resources, nor the social leadership for the expansion of elementary education among the masses. Time and again, an irony of British imperialism in India was reflected in the tenuous objective of the rulers to attain through education what had been denied to the country primarily because of their very system of economic exploitation. *Bound in the nexuses of subordinate activities and wealth of the colonial economy, the new Bengali middle class offered little support and initiative for mass education, particularly when it would be encouraged at the cost of their own facilities for English learning, the only means of living and respectability to them.*

(Sen:1977, 41, emphasis added)

We shall return elaborately to this issue in the next chapter while deliberating upon Vidyasagar's tryst with English studies. The point, however, is that accounts of English studies in India such as those given by Chaudhuri (2002), fascinatingly facile as they are, may also have serious pitfalls, whereby the possible justification of colonization—as in Shakespeare's *Tempest*—can be potentially deduced. In such a situation, the national elites and their resistance to colonialism appear to be an offshoot of the colonial discourse itself, leaving little or no scope for their own autonomous entity to emerge and develop a powerful narrative of decolonization (Mandal:2002). Even if they demonstrated occasional dissents to British rule, the 'surrogate Englishman' continued to function with greater ascendancy through English canonical texts unmistakably dominated by Shakespeare from the mid-19th century to the time the conception of the instant book. It is well documented, and we shall return to this in the chapter on *King Lear*, how the Bard started to dictate terms of English literary studies since the early days of our formal classroom engagement with him at the iconic Hindu College.¹⁵ A section of the colonial intelligentsia would be vying for a seat in the college to listen to the enthralling lectures on Shakespeare delivered by successive generations of astute Shakespeare teachers, starting from David Laster Richardson to Prafullachandra Ghosh. As mentioned later in this chapter and discussed in the last chapter of this book, Shakespeare/English literature started to witness an unprecedented growth among the educated caste Hindu Bengalis owing to Trevelyan–Macaulay's powerful analysis of the indigen-ous bourgeoisie's fond inclination towards a utilitarian educational system on the one hand and well-articulate teachers like Richardson on the other.

Thus, after Macaulay's prescription of 'all-English' or a project to produce 'brown sahibs' and colonial clerks, it was Shakespeare who had played the most important role in hastening the birth of a new discipline, i.e., English literary studies in India (Viswanathan:1998, 2–26). For the last two centuries, we have been ceaselessly continuing with our task of uncritically—some exceptions notwithstanding—accepting Shakespeare as the unchallenged, undisputed, and universal genius on whose empire the sun never sets. Till the turn of the present century, popular criticism of Shakespeare in Indian academia predominantly followed the critical paradigms set by Captain D.L. Richardson (Das:1997). The sterling de-colonizing readings by Viswanathan (1998), Loomba (1989), or Singh (1996) would only be occasionally taken to evolve a distinct Indian response by locating a text like *Tempest* or *Othello* in the fascinatingly complex cultural condition we belong to. Unhindered eulogies for the Bard on the part of the Bengali elites for nearly two centuries are a testament to the enormous success of the colonial state apparatus that these cultural theorists have so passionately critiqued and commented upon. The indigenous intelligentsia had largely failed to offer much resistance to the colonialist policies entrenched in English literary studies and their intrinsic cultural values. On the contrary, a large section of the indigenous intelligentsia believed that English studies in particular and British rule in general to be the only civilizing forces for the 'barbaric' natives (Viswanathan:1998, 54–60). Quite intriguingly, it is also true that since the mid-19th century, one can clearly discern what Gauri Viswanathan has brilliantly called 'the failure of English' (1998, 142–165). Or, to be more precise, the desired plan of Trevelyan–Macaulay to draw a class of their colonial subjects nearer to them by way of secular liberal English education and thus, to keep them oblivion of their state of servitude for inconceivable time to come, had not quite worked for long. Recognizable resistance to the imperial regime and simultaneous nationalist re-awakening began to grow since the mid-19th century. Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 being the first major political jolt to the British, followed by, as is discussed in the next chapter, the rise of nationalism since the 1860s, would thus take India's history to a completely different trajectory than anticipated by these two brothers-in-law. Government-sponsored English/Shakespeare studies undoubtedly played a critical role in building up that narrative of Indian history, so much so that in a permanent critique of government secular learning, Alexander Duff even went on to blame it for the 'mutiny' (Viswanathan:1998, 144). The university system of education in India was established in 1858. It strongly emphasised on utilitarian principles in imparting education to the natives to make them efficient clerks or parts of the lower bureaucracy. This was however, a last ditch attempt to salvage the colonizing (and not the earlier civilizing) mission of

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English education in India. But by then, English literary studies or Shakespeare had already started to be viewed as a naturalized part of Indian middle-class consciousness and a major inspiration to narrate India as a nation (Bagchi 1989, 150; Singh:1996, 133). Prominent poets, writers, educationists, and social reformers like Vidyasagar, Madhusudan Dutta, Hemchandra Bandopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Girishchandra Ghosh, and a whole host of English-educated early nationalist thinkers began to define themselves and their motherland by way of suitably appropriating English education (Figure 1.1). Quite paradoxically, they continued to admire Shakespeare and imitate him in their writings in Bengali or non-colonial languages, but rose to fight their

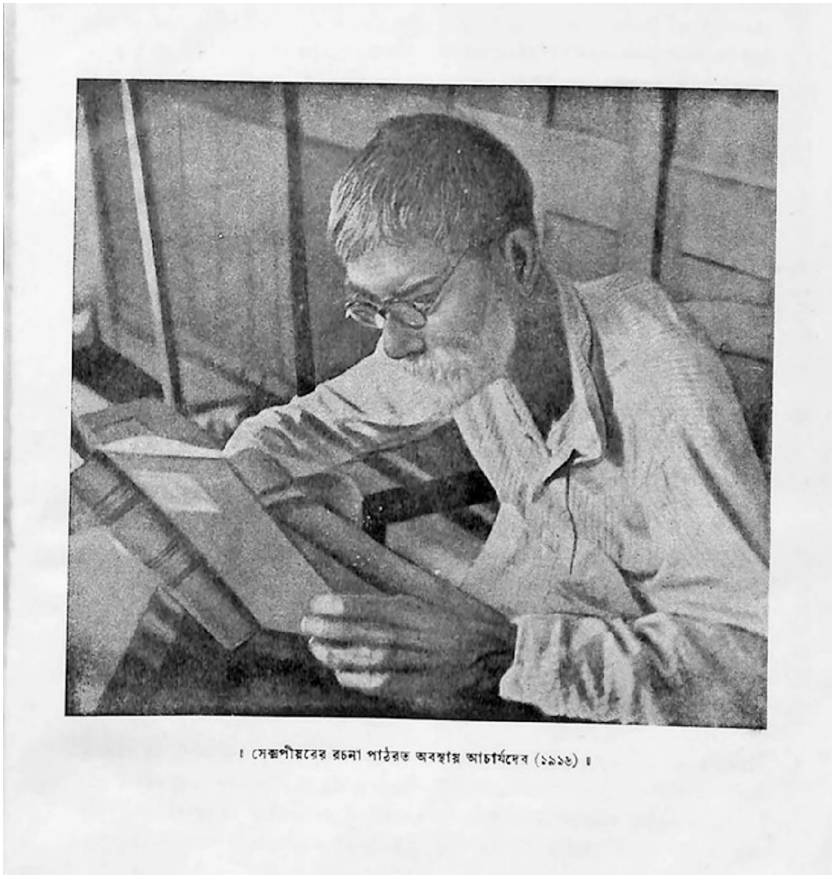


Figure 1.1 Famous Indian scientist, Prof. Prafullachandra Roy reading Shakespeare intently in 1916, suggestive of the Bard's impact in Indian consciousness (Kapotakkha, 1986).

colonial masters at the same time. They started imagining Indian nationhood and its liberation by act of writing and thus began preparing the groundswell for the larger Indian nationalist movements that would start engulfing the entire country since the turn of the 20th century and continued unabated till the end of the Raj.

Indian Nationalism and Shakespeare

W.B. Yeats, in one of his essays, reputed as *Letters to the New World* written between 1888 and 1892, while demonstrating the confluence of culture and nationalism, ruminated, ‘there is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature’.¹⁶ As we move to the genesis of the book, let me admit that this book will not—in fact, it cannot—really endeavour to chronicle the history of Indian nationalism per se, which has remained arguably one of the most deeply problematic studies world historians have ever had to deal with. Nor does it deliberate upon the pitfalls of nationalism that Yeats’s future friend Tagore rose to condemn vociferously *in his post-Nobel era* (Mandal:2017). Instead, this book considers nationalist sentiment asserted largely through human utterances, or, simply put, ‘literary nationalism’, which remained syncretic with anti-colonialism and a growing ideology to critique and fight imperialism. Furthermore, drawing leads from Yeats’s earnest observation, it is an attempt to candidly imbricate literature with nationalism, to bluntly merge culture, history, and politics, especially in a pervasive colonial context like India. It was nearly impossible for any good indigenous writer not to think of/refer to directly/indirectly to the excruciating reality of colonial servitude. India in the 19th century has remained so remarkably riddled with a diverse range of texts/sub-texts, narratives/meta-narratives that South Asia/Asia studies centres mainly across the United States and Europe are still engaged in unfolding many new facets of it. In fact, the 19th century itself in the history of Europe and its problematic proximity with the rest of the world, especially the colonies established effectively on every continent, makes perhaps the most absorbing phase of world history. It began in the backdrop of American liberation and the French Revolution, followed by the devastating Napoleonic Wars, English victory in it in 1813 signalling the era of British dominance not just in Europe but in the world.¹⁷ India, being the richest colony of Britain, remained the pivot of the Empire, with parts of its history getting naturally assimilated into it, including, ironically, its nationalist struggles.

The task of writing that history of Indian nationalism has uninterruptedly been vested in so many highly acclaimed writers/scholars/historians, both from India and abroad, for over a century that no list of them can be adequate. Here, I wish to make special mention only of some

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prominent pre-Independence Indians' efforts, who were not just writing passionately about their motherland and her national reawakening but were active agents of the same in their own right. One may go back to an early attempt by a well-known Bengali nationalist, Chandranath Basu (mentioned above), way back in 1891, who ventured to write *Hindutwa: A True History of the Hindus* in the vernacular. Some ten years later, one of the highly revered Indian nationalists, an erudite thinker, the first Asian to be elected in the British Parliament, Dadabhai Naoroji, produced his classic critique of the colonial regime, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, along with *Economic History of India* (in two volumes). *History of India* was produced by another renowned nationalist Ramesh Chandra Dutta, followed by Vinayak Damodor Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence 1857* (1909) and M.K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909). *A Nation in Making*, by another prominent nationalist, Surendranath Banerjee, came out in 1925. And who can leave out Tagore and his series of essays written both in Bengali and English, variedly commenting on the history of India and its national culture? I wish to end this tradition of revered writers/activists/nationalists of colonial India with Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, written during his incarceration between 1942 and 1945 by the British.

The instant book, however, bases its theoretical structures relating to the rise and nature of Indian nationalism, borrowing extensively from two fascinating postcolonial studies successively done by Partha Chatterjee (1986) and Tapan Raychaudhuri (1988). Other notable historians dealing with 19th century studies of Bengal/India from a postcolonial perspective shall also be relied upon. But the book intends to derive the argument primarily from these two apparently dissimilar but mutually conclusive views on the extraordinarily complex relationship between colonial narrative and emerging nationalist consciousness in 19th century India. Indian nationalism, for Chatterjee, was a 'derivative discourse' of European and mainly British colonialism. The principal leaders of the nationalist movement, who mostly remained by-products of western education as elaborated above, formulated their vision of India through the nuances of colonial modernity transmitted largely through western texts, and thus it was a hybridized, if not almost an insipid version of nationalist discourse:

Nationalist opposition to European rule is driven by a faith in theory. Yet the theory itself, indeed, the very attitude of faith in theory, are gifts of Europe to the rest of the world ... But in the very conception of its project, it remains a prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashion ... From such a perspective the problem of nationalist thought becomes the particular manifestation ... of bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge, established in the post Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly

universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real not merely, metaphorical sense, a colonial domination ... *Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become 'modern', accepts the claim to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge. Yet it also asserts the autonomous identity of a national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture.*

(Chatterjee:1986, 11, emphasis added)

Raychaudhuri on the other hand differs with his younger friend, arguing that the incipient nationalist consciousness in colonial Bengal/India did not always depend on the imported colonial epistemology for their self-definition. Rather, they formulated their own ideas and perceptions about the western enlightenment 'adopted the heritage of Hindu culture as the focus of its identity and gloried in the Hindu past' (Raychaudhuri:1988, 3). Whenever they derived their ideas from the western textualities, they could suitably modify/reproduce/challenge them, resulting in the form of fascinating critique/question of the colonial rule as also those aspects of their indigenous tradition known as superstitious/irrational/oppressive:

A selective veneration for elements in the Hindu tradition was thus the cultural bedrock of the nationalist awareness. It co-existed, but not very easily, with at least an equal veneration, also selective, for the civilization of the of the master race ... The excitement over literature, history, and philosophy of Europe ... was deep and abiding, even though any intimate knowledge of western learning was really confined to the few with access to higher education. Macaulay's theory that education would filter down from the privileged few to much larger social group did not quite work. But the knowledge acquired by the few provided the basis for admiration by many. In a culture which had always admired scholarship, the pundits of new learning were objects of awe. And as to the new knowledge itself and its source, the civilization of Europe, an acceptance of their superiority informed cultural stereotypes widely in vogue.

(Ibid., 3-4)

Chatterjee's assertion following Elie Kedourie (1960) that nationalism cannot be a rational self-conscious idea by the weak to fight against the strong, rather, 'Nationalism as an ideology is irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive ... a doctrine invented in Europe ...' (quoted in Chatterjee:1986, 7-11), an evil export of Europe to the rest of the world—has been emphatically refuted by Raychaudhuri that 'the very first generation of western educated Bengalis felt attracted to the ideals of national liberation and post-enlightenment rationalism, which were by no means the only components of the 19th century European tradition'

(Raychaudhuri:1988, 4). On the contrary, he goes on to argue that colonial expansion and wars, the most prominent enterprises of aggressive European nationalism, were ‘universally detested in 19th century Bengal’ albeit with a ‘genuine sense of wonder about the British empire as a marvelous feat’ (Raychaudhuri:1988, 4).

The nucleus of this book is evidently tied with six nationalist writers/thinkers/activists in the second half of 19th century Bengal—Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891), Hemchandra Bandopadhyay (1838–1903), Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1912), Purnachandra Basu (1844–unknown), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)—and their diverse responses to Shakespeare, colonial modernity, and the nationalist project. It can, in many ways, though not entirely, be studied from the two apparently dissimilar but mutually sustaining discourses of Indian nationalism set out by these two renowned historians of post-Independence India. In fact, in consonance with the five renowned cultural theorists discussed earlier, the book seeks to use/expand/modify the scope of this remarkably erudite debate and intends to demonstrate how one of the most impactful imports of colonial modernity, Shakespeare, had been received by these six writers and how their engagement with him had influenced their nationalist thought. Percival Spear (1990, 166), who published his “History of India” originally in 1965, even went to the extent of attributing the very conception of ‘nationalism, civil liberties and constitutional self-government’ to the study of English literature by the native intellectuals. ‘No one could be in contact with Englishmen at that time for long or read Shakespeare’, he extols, ‘without catching the infection of nationalism’ (Ibid.). English literary studies or Shakespeare had, in deed, notwithstanding the apparent sense of condescension in Percival’s averment, remained one of the engaging occupations for the leading exponents of nationalism in India. At the same time, it had also generated a negative reaction among the native intelligentsia inspiring them ironically to assert themselves in terms of their own cultural ethos. The subsequent pages of this book intend to argue that Shakespeare impacted nationalist thought primarily in two such different trajectories. Most of the indigenous intelligentsia started assimilating him into their sociocultural space, considered him their own, and engaged themselves in a ‘collaboration’ with him, ‘whereby artists at a historical remove from Shakespeare regard themselves as cooperating with, and therefore recovering Shakespeare for (their) modernity’.¹⁸ Such attempts resulted in the consequential benefit in the form of an extraordinary literary nationalism articulated largely in the vernacular, paving way for further assertion of their own national rights from the rulers of the Bard’s own country.

Second, there were also some writers—quite lesser in numbers though—who remained extremely critical of Shakespeare, rejected his

hallowed greatness, and treated him as an alien writer and the values transmitted through his writings as unsuitable to India. They endeavoured to rediscover their own glorious past by constant revisits to the great classical writers, and the world represented through their writings got reimagined from the present and thus grew a sense of national self-awakening. Such attempts cannot always be labelled as a primordialist invocation of India's 'long past' or 'deep nation' or, 'a hysterical form of politics ... derived from modern lineages of European irrationalism'.¹⁹ Rather, they were steeped in a thoughtful revival of the best from their glorious past to consciously counter the cascading effect of 'European irrationalism' or, the *extravagantly vehement feelings, uncontrolled passion, violent desire, bacchanalian revelry* of the British in Indian culture (Tagore, qtd. in the epigraph). Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, Girishchandra, and Bankimchandra, as the book will demonstrate, will supplant the first strand of the nationalist narrative, and Purnachandra and Tagore will figure in the second.

However, it must be made clear here that the distinction between these two trends of nationalist thoughts cannot be treated as hundred percent sacrosanct. Considering the intense complexity of the subject, they may, at times, overlap in their intersections with Shakespeare, making it absorbingly ambivalent. What remained a common denominator among them was their unflinching commitment to their motherland, suffering under an offshore domination. Another commonality, of course, was that all of them were English-educated scholars, either self-taught, as in case of Vidyasagar and Tagore, or had an institutionalized training in English literature. Hemchandra, Bankimchandra, and Purnachandra studied at the iconic Hindu/Presidency College; Girishchandra studied at English Hare School and continued with English lessons even after dropping studies early in his life. Except Purnachandra, the other five writers were highly popular and remained instrumental in forming the backbone of Bengali language and literature at a crucial juncture. Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, Bankimchandra, and Girishchandra were the pioneers of Indian modernity and the pillars of what we know as Indian Renaissance. In addition, Hemchandra's deep connect with contemporary politics helped him conceive his idea of radical nationalism quite early (Chaudhuri:2005). Tagore does not really need any further introduction to the world as the threshold of this book has already indicated the stature of the versatile genius, a myriad-minded man, and one of the most powerful writers/thinkers of all time. To me, history of modern India and its nationalist discourse could not possibly be conceived without him being an integral part of the narrative; his influence continues unabated even today.

The book, as suggested earlier, also draws on the classic applicability of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as astutely appropriated by Viswanathan—that cultural dominance works by implicit consent, often preceding political conquest—in an Indian colonial situation. However, it goes

beyond demonstrating how cultural logic (English studies) of British imperialism could not always produce the intended results and started generating a fascinating counter discourse to colonialism, inspiring indigenous elites to conceive Indian nationalism in the long run. The book attempts to comprehend this eerily equivocal situation embedded in the nationalists' responses to Shakespeare and the British Raj. How most of them revealed unbridled admiration for the British Bard on the one hand and continued to critique and fight the imperial rule on the other—a classic paradigm of decolonization: dismantling of the master's house by borrowing the master's tools. Some illustrations may be quite handy. When Rosinka Chaudhuri (2002, 16) decisively argues, 'Henry Derozio or his radical young students in early nineteenth century Calcutta were also directly or indirectly involved in representing the predicament of the colonized subject against the colonial power', she actually refers to the English-educated Indians at Hindu College in the 1830s and their attempt to define India against the British. Some of these young men of the college mostly known as 'Young Bengal' lost hope in the Hindu tradition and embraced Christianity but continued to articulate their resistance to colonial oppression. Sisir Kumar Das (1991, 80) points out Krishnamohan Banerjee as one such young radical who was 'one of the firebrands, brought out a journal, *Enquirer* (1831), and wrote a play *The Persecuted* (1831) dealing with the problems of Hindu orthodoxies and moral crisis of an individual who lost faith in Hinduism'. He goes on to suggest that 'the first English play (*The Persecuted*) by an Indian may not bear any major literary merit but introduced a new literary form different from the plays written at that period ... in Sanskrit ... Moreover its theme is so relevant that one is tempted to claim that the Indian writer of English showed a greater concern for contemporary social problems than his counterparts in Indian languages' (Ibid., 80, emphasis added). Das then puts out an amazing instance of Indian patriotism flaunted by another student of the college, Kylash Chunder Dutt in his fictional work, 'A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945' written in the year of Macaulay's infamous Minutes:

It is a story of imaginary armed uprisings against the British rule. The passionate speech of the leader of the rebels before his execution reminds one of the freedom fighters yet unborn. When one remembers the series of uprisings in India—Garo movement in Mymensingh, Nayeks insurrection, Paik insurrection in Orissa, to mention a few, and also the attitude of the Muslims towards British rule—the story appears as a formidable document of distrust and hatred against the British rule.
(Ibid., 80)

It is deeply ironic, Das continues, that such 'glowing expression of patriotism as well as hatred for the British rule' so early in the history had

to be accomplished in the colonial language. Nonetheless, it bears tremendous significance in charting out what Edward Said (1994) has so eloquently classified as resistance to imperialism by an act of writing and by borrowing from the intruder, and how vulnerability of the colonized remains tied with his recalcitrance or his ‘cultural dependence and antagonism together’ vis-à-vis the colonial apparatus:

Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; *there was always some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.*

(Said:1994, xii, emphasis added)

Such insightful observations on the dynamics of culture and its relationship with imperialism made by one of the most influential contemporary critics of the Empire will be suitably applied as the book progresses. To return to Das’s scrutiny about colonial language being the only vehicle of incipient insurrection against colonialism is spot on, though not entirely true, especially if we take into account some early attempts of self-assertion in the vernacular. When Bharatchandra Ray (1712–1760), the last famous voice of old-styled Bengali poetry, passed away, he did not have to negotiate with English, Persian being the official language of governance. As pointed out earlier, English started to be recognized as the language of the privileged/powerful even within the natives only after the turn of the 19th century. Ramnidhi Gupta (1741–1839) aka Nidhubabu, a younger contemporary of Bharatchandra and extremely popular singer/lyricist had to, however, deal with gradual rise of English along with the existing dominance of Arabic and Persians in Bengal.²⁰ Nidhubabu can be considered as one of the first acutely conscious Bengali writers to assert themselves in their mother tongue quite early. He had left his Persian *Ustad* (a maestro of Hindustani classical music) to start a new musical *gharana* but made it a point to compose and sing only in Bengali as he was deeply anxious about the intrusion of foreign languages in Bengali. Following him was a remarkable Bengali poet, Ishwarchandra Gupta (1812–1859), credited with modernization of Bengali poetry both in theme and linguistic stylization.²¹ He inspired the native Bengalis—including the future greats like Bankimchandra and Hemchandra—to write poetry and vent ire against detrimental policies of the colonial government. His Bengali newspaper, *Sambad Prabhakar*, founded with famous Jotindramahon Tagore of Hindu College in 1831, became a mouthpiece to express their dissent.

Coming back to Kylash Chunder, one does marvel at the fact that the highly incendiary nationalist document, howsoever fictional, was

published by an English teacher and a government servant like Richardson in his *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. Richardson's deep allegiance to the government was well known, so was his opposition to any kind of political statement against the British made by the young radicals during those furious debates held in and around the Hindu College. S.C. Sannial's account of a recollection made by an anonymous student of Richardson, who was reported to have narrated a heated exchange between a well-known alumnus of the college, namely, Dakshinaranjan Mukharjee, and their famous teacher in a meeting of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge held in Sanskrit College Hall on 8 February 1843, may validate the contention:

Richardson had come as a visitor on one occasion. The late Raja Dukshinaranjan Mukharjee, in his youthful effervescent spirit, happened to say something against the Government. Not only as the Principal of the College but as a well-wisher too, Richardson rose to say that he could not "allow the hall to be made a den of treason." There followed a regular explosion, and the proceedings abruptly came to an end with Dakshinaranjan saying in reply that the Hindu College was not a Government but a Native foundation.

(Sanial:1906, 77)

Veracity of this remarkable narrative is unflinching, as the event and the relevant essay presented by Dakshinaranjan (*Present Conditions of East India Company's Courts and Police under the Bengal Presidency*) had been carried by the famous English daily of the time, *Bengal Hurkaru* on 2 March 1843:

The delivery of the essay was interrupted, as our readers will recollect, by the Principal of the Hindoo college, on the ground of its seditious and treasonable tendency. The attempts made to throw ridicule upon the intelligent natives of their country, for their laudable efforts to acquire knowledge of the government under which they live, and to aid in the removal of its abuses, appear to us as most ungenerous and illiberal.

(quoted in Sengupta:2002, 282)

Some interesting facts emerge from this narrative. The obvious one was the account of the 'rebel' among the English-educated 'intelligent natives' firmly validated by both Kylaschandra and Dakshinaranjan: they were deeply disturbed about the 'abuses' of 'their country' by the colonial government and vested 'laudable efforts' to remove them. Secondly and importantly, the attitude of the most respected contemporary English/Shakespeare teacher appeared to be 'most ungenerous and illiberal' even to

an English newspaper.²² More significant was Dakshinaranjan's disregard for such uncourteous/authoritative interjection from the college principal and his continuance with the speech claiming that the college was a 'Native' and not 'Government' foundation. Was not it a fascinating way of showing dissent against your master? One might be tempted to call it a classic paradigm of counter discourse to colonialism by articulating/reclaiming the native possession/identity in the language taught by the masters themselves. This has undoubtedly remained one of the major theoretical issues of this book concerning the discourse on Shakespeare and Indian nationalism.

However, despite such apathy to political recalcitrance, 'DLR' as affectionately styled by the followers of Richardson, had, as mentioned earlier, created a sensation with his teaching of Shakespeare at the Hindu College. Who exactly was this magician of an English teacher? A man with his natural flair for literature and writing poetry, Richardson, after his tumultuous army job in the Company owing to frequent travels to England on account of poor health, got appointed as the Professor of English Literature at the Hindu College from January 1836.²³ He was elevated to the post of the principal in 1839 with the strong recommendation of none other than the chief architect of English education in India, Thomas Babington Macaulay, who is also believed to have played a seminal role in his first appointment in the college (Sanial:1906). In fact, the impact of Richardson's teaching was so huge even among the expatriates that no less a pragmatic bureaucrat like Macaulay before leaving his favourite hinterland forever in 1839, extolled him, 'I can forget everything about India but your teaching of Shakespeare, never' (quoted in Tarak Sen:2016, vii). Poor health compelled him to sail again to his homeland in 1843, came back in January 1845 to become the principal of the newly formed Krishnanagar College and then Hoogly College at the end of the year. In 1848, when he was again appointed as the principal of Hindu College, a whole new chapter of controversies began in the life of one of the most celebrated English teachers ever. On the charge of dereliction of duties, Richardson was 'compelled' to resign from the college by the President of the Council of Education, none other than the famous philanthropist, educationalist, and a friend of India, John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune. The incident triggered huge outrage among not just Richardson's followers but upper circles of Hindus. For nearly three months, all the newspapers of Calcutta started carrying variety of news capturing the public mood and all condemning Bethune and his associates as to 'why such an excellent Principal should ever have to retire and why such a President as Mr. Bethune was allowed to remain in the Council of Education' (Sanial:1906, 81).

Richardson though had to leave the college but had a 'chance' to get back at Bethune with 'sweet' revenge for the 'outrageous' disciplinary action against him. In the beginning of 1853, there was a serious incident involving

the admission of a meritorious son of a well-known courtesan, Heerabai into the Hindu College at the instance of Bethune. This set off a fresh row among the caste Hindus who refused to seat their wards with a ‘bastard’ son of the concubine. A series of protests were held, and batches of cases were filed against the college as Richardson, then out as his favourite hunt, was merely acting as writer and editor of *Bengal Hurkaru*, took side with the Hindu orthodoxies and ‘instigated many guardians to strike off wards’ names from the college’ (Kanjilal:2020). Such dangerous mischiefs at the behest of a highly reputed ‘liberal’ English teacher against his own dream institution on the issue of the admission of an ‘illegitimate’ child of a helpless mother, notwithstanding his own questionable genealogy, are quite startling.²⁴ The row between a liberal Bethune and the conservative Hindus came to such a pass that the famous Rajendra Dutta, leading the movement, broke away with a good number of Hindu babus to form the Hindu Metropolitan College, where none other than Richardson became the first principal. The scared Hindu College authorities had to finally buckle down and ask Heerabai’s son to leave the college, seeking an apology from the general public that ‘the governing body was not aware of the boy’s antecedent’ (Ibid.). During the ‘new’ British regime after 1857, Richardson finally returned to Hindu College, already rechristened ‘Presidency College’, as the principal appointed by the then LG of Bengal, J.P. Grant, in 1859, from where he honourably retired in February 1861, with a roaring emotional farewell from hundreds of his students and admirers.²⁵

The principal purpose of such an elaborate retelling of DLR’s life in Calcutta is certainly not to score any points by referring to his genealogy but to demonstrate the long-lasting legacy of ‘such’ English/Shakespeare teachers in Indian classrooms. As suggested above, the craze for Shakespeare and English literature among the educated Bengalis grew exponentially, owing largely to Macaulay’s blunt but articulate attempt to anglicize governmental functioning/job on the one hand and well-articulate teachers like Richardson on the other. These influential teachers were also responsible for making English literature and Shakespeare, in particular marker of prestigious cultural symbol among the Bengali elites. An eloquent memoir by one of the prominent Bengali writers/intellectuals and an avid admirer of Richardson, Shibnath Shastri (1903), may validate our contention:

He was so effective and powerful as a teacher that his students came to believe firmly that there was no poet equal to Shakespeare and that English literature was best in the world.

(Shastri:1903, 104, translated)

Undeniably, Richardson’s role in setting off the bardolatry in India was less than phenomenal, and the legacy continued unhindered even 100 years

after Richardson's departure from India. In the *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* (first published in 1966), the sublime quotient of the glorious quarter-centenary celebration of the Bard at Presidency College in 1964, edited by one of the most revered Shakespeare teachers of the post-Independence era, Taraknath Sen, paid a glowing tribute to DLR in the introduction of the book by calling him a 'genius' of a teacher. He goes on demonstrating how, owing to Richardson's glorious beginning, a long list of remarkable Shakespeare teachers was produced from the college. Sen herein implicitly merges the indomitable journey of the Bard with the legacy of the first 'hero' of a Shakespeare teacher in India. Without any doubt, the survival of Macaulay's Anglicist project—of course, in changing *avatars*—beyond the colonial era also depended on the smooth passage of English studies successfully carried forward by the great tradition of English teachers/critics, as discussed in the final chapter of this book. It may be said, at the same time, that it was Shakespeare who played the most important role in sustaining the new discipline called English literature in India, which in turn produced the most enduring ideology of the Empire, giving much credence to Singh's contention about the 'colonial book'.

Under these facts and circumstances, there is no prize for guessing why, for the last 200 years, we have been uninterruptedly continuing to accept this alien writer as the unchallenged, undisputed, and supreme genius on whose empire the sun never goes down (Mandal:2002). As elaborated in the last two chapters of the book, till about the turn of the present century, popular criticisms of Shakespeare in Indian circles, especially in the gloried institution, predominantly followed the critical paradigms set by Richardson and his followers, focusing primarily on the issues of Shakespeare's universality, characterization, plot, style, rhetoric, good-evil, or moral conflicts intrinsic to his plays. Quite astonishingly, they remained the exact motives of Samuel Johnson, too, way back in 1765, when he had read the Bard as 'a poet of nature' whose 'characters are not modified by the customs of particular places unpracticed by the rest of the world ... they are genuine progeny of common humanity ...' (Jonson, 2018, 3). Such an old pedagogic formula was followed to create an image of the Bard in India, and with little or no hesitation, one can say that it was largely an elitist exercise performed in those institutions of higher learning. Shakespeare was predominantly taught in an exclusive English language, thus keeping the Bard inaccessible to the vast contingent of the natives incapable of communicating in that language. Das (1997, 42–43) has pointedly suggested that there was an obvious failure of classroom teaching in promoting Shakespeare to the larger frame of indigenous literary reproduction, which to him was being successfully carried forward by the lesser known creative writers mostly writing in Indian languages, though unorganized at times, but with greater measure of liberty in

experimenting with the Bard. For him, the factor that distinguished two kinds of reception, solid academic discourse and unorganized creative venture, as well as the common reader and the theatre, was the employing of language: ‘English and exclusively English in the former and Indian languages in the latter’ (Ibid.).

Without any doubt Das’s revelations appear somewhat unfailingly true when one considers the abundance of adaptations and appropriations made of Shakespeare since the middle of the 19th century in Bengal (and elsewhere), and as on many occasions these ‘loose’ but ‘free’ attempts were being initiated by uncelebrated writers. However, one must be reminded, and as this book also showcases, that the major writers/thinkers, too, were actively engaged in what could be potentially termed as ‘domestication’ of the foreign writer or more suggestively, ‘appropriation’ of the colonial writer as a cultural capital and a valuable import to be utilized for the cause of native literature. It is also ironic that most of these writers either remained former students of institutionalized English studies or had trained themselves in English at home. The argument presented in the following pages, in many ways, will also draw us nearer to the highly insightful adumbrations of both ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’ arrived at by Thomas Cartelli (1999), who has eloquently mentioned ‘Shakespeare’ ‘as the repositioned product of a complex of social, cultural, and political factors that variously combine under the pressure of colonial, postcolonial, and more narrowly national imperatives’ (Cartelli, 1). By stressing more on the exploits of appropriation, especially in a colonial situation, he goes on to argue that ‘as a selectively predatory act, appropriation, unlike adaptation, does not seek to reproduce in any faithful or sustained way what it “abducts” from its objective’ (Cartelli, 17). Of course, for Cartelli, the final goal is to achieve a ‘decolonized or decommissioned Shakespeare, relieved of his obligation to circulate as fixed object of scorn or emulation in the orbit of postcolonial applications’ (Cartelli, 4). But as the book will show that even during the bid to ‘appropriate’, the Bard was largely emulated, barring some exceptions, by the colonized intelligentsia out of their deep veneration for him. It might have turned out to be an ‘abduction’ owing to the severity of transculturation involved in the process, but it was not quite a conscious ‘abduction’ or ‘theft’ every time. Nevertheless, Cartelli’s theory of repositioning Shakespeare will find some remarkable resonances among the mid-19th-century Bengali *bhadralok*, who, howsoever unconsciously, did manage to decolonize/decommission the Bard, making him appear as an India’s *Shekkhyopeor*.²⁶ Lawrence Venuti’s illuminating idea of ‘domesticating a foreign text’ involved in the process of translation shall also be tangentially taken up: how some of the responses to the Bard, even while imitating him, could actually reproduce him into their own cultural

discourse. Pioneer in the field was, though a lesser-known English-educated intellectual of the mid-19th century, Harachandra Ghosh, whose remarkable but less recognized endeavour to indigenize *The Merchant of Venice* as *Bhanumati Chhitabilas* accomplished in 1853 was arguably the first complete recreation of Shakespeare in South Asia. This maiden adaptation of Shakespeare was significant in opening the floodgates for what could possibly be called 'India's Shakespeare' transmuting him as an inspiration for nourishing and maturing the native dramatic tradition and literature. One cannot lose sight of this remarkable run of parallel discourses being generated within few decades of the beginning of English literary/Shakespeare studies in India. Transposed into the native conditions, the offshore Bard began to be visualized as one of their own by the colonial intelligentsia: the 'colonial book' started to be 'seized' by them in a beguiling fashion of self-assertion, slowly but surely inspiring a well-defined nationalist consciousness to emerge.

However, the single biggest riddle/paradox of that nascent nationalism was that most of those seizers/adapters/appropriators of Shakespeare have wholeheartedly/uncritically accepted his supremacy over any Indian writer living or dead. They remained oblivious of the pitfalls of endorsing the 'colonial book' or subordinating their own classical literature to colonial hegemony transmitted through Shakespearean texts; Hemchandra will be discussed as a classic case in point in the next chapter. Understood also with him are Girishchandra and Bankimchandra, who, too, out of their unflinching admiration for the Bard, went on to imitate him but with more conscious interventions into Shakespeare to enhance the quality of their own literature. Vidyasagar remained slightly ahead of all three as far as his privileging of both Indian literature and Shakespeare was concerned. Without really limiting the appeal of either, he could modify/mould/reproduce Shakespeare with an exceptional ease and attain an extraordinary model of self-fashioning.

Direct defiance to such bardolatry, howsoever marginalized, had also grown towards the end of the 19th century. This book proceeds to recognize two such remarkably formative attempts at checking the 'infiltration' of the alien Bard into the Indigenous culture: Purnachandra Basu's reading of *Othello* in *Sabitye Khoon* ('Murders in Literature', 1891) and Rabindranath Tagore's reading of *Tempest* in his essay *Sakuntala* (October 1902). Unfortunately, we have shown little or no enthusiasm in responding to the near-obscure Purnachandra's scathing indictment of Shakespeare for employing mindlessly violent dramaturgy. But Tagore's insightful analysis of *Tempest* as a colonialist text, which I had taken up to some two decades ago, has been discussed recently by some genuine Tagore enthusiasts, albeit with some degree of misreading of the remarkable comparative methodology employed by him in order to privilege *Sakuntala* over *Miranda* or *Kalidasa* over

Shakespeare (Mandal:2002). Suddhaseel Sen (2021), in a very recent book, has made a notable attempt to nearly break that 200-year chain of colonialist reading of Shakespeare by tracing a ‘trenchantly anticolonial’ reading of *Tempest* in both Bankimchandra and Tagore, and ‘in Bankim’s case proto-feminist as well, and that their responses anticipate, in respects, the political readings of *Tempest* from the 1960s and after’ (Ibid., 22). Furthermore, Tagore’s sterling critique of the Shakespearean text is also dubbed as cosmopolitan, or rather, according to Sen, both nationalist and cosmopolitan together making what he quite interestingly calls ‘nationalist cosmopolitanism’ (Ibid., 16). While welcoming Sen’s novel venture in recognizing Tagore’s evaluation of *Tempest* as an amazing prototype of postcolonial criticism, this book will argue that Tagore actually positioned himself more as a nationalist than a cosmopolitanist in this essay, in particular, and during that time of his life, in general, when beleaguered Bengalis were preparing for a series of showdowns with the then Governor-General Curzon for his repressive policies, including his contemplation of dividing Bengal.²⁷ Though infusing refreshing information into the field of postcolonial Shakespeare, this recent study, however, appears to have given less emphasis on Tagore’s extraordinary resistance to the colonial writer so magnificently articulated through his privileging of *Shakuntala* against *Tempest* and recognition of the Bard as inferior to Kalidasa. ‘There is not a single play in the anthology of Shakespeare’, Tagore passionately writes, ‘which can match the immeasurable depth and serene vision of *Shakuntala*’ (Mandal:2002). Tagore, in his critique, went on to consciously dismantle the traditional narrative around *Tempest* by boldly flaunting *Shakuntala* and her cultural norms over that of *Miranda*. Bankimchandra, on the contrary, appears to believe in and admire certain sets of values subscribed to by *Miranda* and privileges them over those of *Shakuntala*. The chapter on *Tempest* will demonstrate further that Tagore was actually adding a conscious rejoinder to Bankim’s loose reading of Kalidasa and Shakespeare undertaken in ‘*Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona*’. His uncritical acceptance of *Miranda* and *Prospero*, the play’s central cultural values, or Shakespeare’s supremacy typifying the obvious outcome of the deeply entrenched cultural politics of British imperialism that Tagore attempts to demolish in his response to *Tempest*. Yet, Tagore did not receive any accord as a Shakespeare critic in world academia. Is it because he was producing such an insightful anticolonial reading of the play in Bengali or non-colonial language? Sisir Kumar Das (1997) regrets that it was somewhat an academic practice with us to *not read Tempest as a colonialist text* until the end of the last century or till some western criticism directed us to ponder over its political implications. Even subversive readings, at times, must await green signal from the western academia.

Purnachandra, too, had completely questioned/undermined/overthrown the canonical standing of the Bard, revealing a deep sense of consternation

on his rising influence in indigenous literature and culture. He remained deeply engaged in reviving India's past glories through literature, though at times more as a staunch conservative than a prudent liberal like Tagore. One may be tempted to find shades of primordial revivalism in his endeavour, corresponding to the indigenous intellectuals classified above as the English-educated but conservative Hindu nationalists. Their attempts may appear, as will be discussed in the chapter on *Othello*, quite close to what 'nativism' was for Ceasare, Sengore, or Nugi. Nonetheless, many such conservative Hindus like Purnachandra continued to apply far more insightful readings of the Bard, stumbling upon the most damaging aspects of his/English (colonial) culture, compared those darker sides of British civilization with the glories of India's past patrimony. One might tend to call it a conscious move of what can be intellectually designated as 'reverse Orientalism' or, 'Occidentalism', notwithstanding that their consideration of the West was certainly not based on an a-historicity or limitless spirit of imagination but was informed by a palpable sense of reality experienced under an oppressive colonial regime. We shall return to the issue later in the book.

In the end, one has to concede that such remarkable oppositional narratives—Tagore or Purnachandra—to the bardolatry remained regrettably disenfranchised, failing to cause any real churning to 'the colonial book' and his unbeatable dominance in India. The real political Empire of Britain crumbled in 1947, but Shakespeare's Raj continued unshaken through his smooth journey into postcolonial India. In a stunning huddle with the colonial intelligentsia—obviously without the urge to fight the colonizers—the post-Independence English-educated elites, too, shall continue to find a new tool of hegemony, control, and social discrimination in Shakespeare in particular and English literary studies in general (Singh:1996, 143). As will be discussed in the final chapter of the book, these high-browed middle-class intellectuals behaving like neo-Macaulayan 'brown sahibs' shall re-draw the existing bourgeoisie space for their hegemonic niche, in conformity with decolonized power corridors, and carry forward the predominantly colonial modes of pedagogy for Shakespeare or English literary studies. While doing so, they continued to depend on the paradigm of British criticism institutionalized by Dr. Samuel Johnson, successfully carried forward by the likes of Lamb, Coleridge, Dequincy, not to forget his friend Richardson himself, and last but not the least, the unputdownable A.C. Bradley.²⁸ Rare attempts were made to initiate the process of historicizing the reading of one of the greatest playwrights ever until the arrival of the cultural-materialist and new historicist schools of critical engagement in the 1980s.²⁹ As I arrive at the concluding part of this long introduction, let me make this humble assertion again that this book has been conceived by drawing first on an unrecognized but startlingly perceptive 'Shakespeare critic' in Tagore

(which struck me first back in 2002) and then from these highly acclaimed new modes of critical enquiries doing rounds in world academia since the 1980s. Obviously, the book does not have the scope of recounting in great detail these varying degrees of Shakespeare criticisms, but they needed to be tangentially brought in to comprehend what Chris Baldick had famously studied as ‘social mission’ of English literary criticism.³⁰

Finally, a brief recap of the primary objective of the book is to articulate the problematics involved in the reception of Shakespeare by the 19th-century Indian intelligentsia from Bengal and their enormously ambivalent approach to the Indian Renaissance and consequent nationalist project. Now, I think, it is proven beyond reasonable doubt that two-century-long uninterrupted Indian engagement with Shakespeare has been less than innocuous or literary. However, while remaining concerned with the cultural politics of the Empire, it ventures also to deal with the role played by Shakespeare in giving rise to fascinating counter-narratives to imperialism by the six early nationalists of Bengal/India. The nature of their transactions, as understood by now, is largely academic except in the case of Girishchandra Ghosh, who was not just a writer but an iconic actor, director, and producer, who pioneered the nationalist theatre movement in Bengal in the 1870s. Furthermore, as mentioned before, it attempts to comprehend the enchantingly ambivalent position vis-à-vis the nationalists’ responses to Shakespeare and the British Raj: how, on the one hand, they revered the most coveted English cultural icon via repeated translations/adaptations, critical essays, memoirs, novels, plays, and poems and, continued, on the other hand, to resist the British rule. With these foundational premises in focus, the book intends to ponder over the following critical questions as well: Was the classroom teaching of Shakespeare merely a well-wrought plot by the imperial educationists? Or were there shades of grey in this teaching? Was it a confirming of the canonical greatness, or instead a hijacking, an attempt to beat the colonizer at his own game by integrating the great British Bard into the nationalist framework that was building towards founding a new India? How did they come to terms with the pitfall of colonial modernity transmitted through Shakespeare studies in order to subscribe to the emerging nationalist discourse? Could the early nationalists—both known and lesser known—gauge the cultural politics of the Raj and offer resistance to it?

The book in the end moves beyond the nucleus to briefly connect it with the postcolonial Indian polity and recognize the roots of the post-Independence elites and rulers as often traced in the English/Shakespeare studies of colonial era and its inherent contradiction. The Bard, who had played a remarkable role in formulating the ideology of the Raj, continues to live through the post-Independence incarnations of the colonial

bourgeoisie or a transmuted version of Macaulay's 'Indians'. They continued to hold sway over the newly decolonized nation-state till new political formations began to emerge since the mid-1980s, who, by taking a completely opposite turn, started reviving the primordial past or a deep nation which, for them, existed in the pre-Mughal era. The final chapter of the book intends to understand how the postcolonial Indian political theatre or narrative of Indian nationalism has fundamentally remained an ugly contest between these two ideologically antagonistic dispensations: the high-browed English-educated elites and the overwrought primaevial plutocrats.

Last but not least, a confession. This book has many limitations. The most glaring being the absence of responses of many other major nationalist writers to Shakespeare, especially those who had produced some extraordinary writings in other Indian languages or even in Bengali. The second is the lack of any women writing to the Bard. On this count, my research has not come across any major women translating or appropriating Shakespeare to assert themselves or their national identity until the beginning of the 20th century—the core corpus of the book. However, it is interesting to note that some of the female characters created by Tagore, especially Bimala in *Home and the World* ('Ghare Baire', 1916), are seen to be reading Shakespeare. I am sure there are major female protagonists in the nationalist arena of colonial India reading and commenting on Shakespeare, especially after Annie Besant became the President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, and once women on a large scale started to be drawn into the Indian nationalist movement after Gandhi's sustained agitations ('charka', 'salt' appealing domestic sphere remarkably) against the British in the 1920s and 1930s. I sincerely believe, this will make another remarkable book on the reception of Shakespeare by women in the 20th century India.

Chapters

The first three chapters constitute the genesis of the argument presented in the book, with the first one examining the diverse range of responses to Shakespeare by three important writers, activists, and cultural icons of the Renaissance Bengal, namely, Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, and Girishchandra. By discussing the significance of their appropriations, adaptations, and translations of Shakespearean texts in a colonial context, this chapter attempts to understand the unseemly negotiations between an offshore culture and the indigenous society and the possible consequences/hazards involved in that transaction. The second chapter holds the most important debate about Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal, a debate that used to ostensibly generate an unlikely comparison

between Shakespeare and the classical Indian writer Kalidasa. By focusing on two seminal nationalists, Bankimchandra and Tagore, and their absolutely oppositional readings of *Tempest*, it sets out to elicit the exceptionally perceptive Tagore, who, while dismissing the worth of *Tempest* and its creator, upholds Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* and its cultural norms. The next chapter is a rediscovery of a sensational critique of *Othello* and Shakespeare by a forgotten intellectual of late 19th-century Bengal, Purnachandra Basu, who was way ahead of his time in gauging the racial misrepresentation of the eponymous character by the Bard and blamed it on the taste of early modern England. By underlining his severe indictment of Shakespeare for portrayal of gory violence and simultaneous appreciation of classical Indian literature, the chapter finally attempts to establish that despite the play's obvious racial/cultural politics, very few attempts were made to unfold the problematics of receiving *Othello* both in colonial and postcolonial India till the end of the last century.

The fourth chapter dealing with the anxiety of the Raj in teaching *King Lear* to the natives may not appear quite in tune with the core object of the book, i.e., Indian nationalism and Shakespeare studies in colonial India. But it actually does segue with it by presenting an entirely different picture of the gloriously formed discipline of Shakespeare/English literature: the fear of the colonial educationists in teaching a sublime play when the other three major tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*—had been regularly taught since the inception. When English-educated Bengali intelligentsia showed unbridled enthusiasm for translating/adapting/appropriating Shakespeare, they did not touch *King Lear* throughout the 19th century. Was it owing to the fear of being exposed to the natives as the play was entrenched with scenes of extreme barbarity? Or was it a legitimate apprehension that the teaching of the 'immoral' or 'difficult' play could have defeated the purpose of instilling superior 'English morals' among the colonized subjects and signalled the failure of the civilizing mission?

The final chapter of the book, by briefly considering Shakespeare's unhindered foray into the 'postcolonial' world after formal dissolution of the Empire in 1947 and giving thumping approbation to the profoundly proleptic utterances by the likes of Trevelyan and Carlyle in England on the longevity of the Bard in India, goes beyond its nucleus to re-explore the position of the Bard in contemporary Indian academia, politics, and popular culture. What is the status of the 'colonial Bard' now? How does the old colonial pedagogy replicate in Indian classrooms now? Finally, the role played by the 'colonial book' in formulating one of the most challenging issues of postcolonial India, the narrative of nationalism and its manifestation in Indian cinema.

Notes

- 1 Michael Madhusudan Dutta's letter written to his friend Rajnarayan Basu in 1860, quoted in Das (1997), pp. 44–45, op. cit.
- 2 See 'The Confession of a Young Bengal'; 1873, Can be accessed at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Confession_of_a_Young_Bengal
- 3 Hemchandra Bandopadhyay, 'Preface' to *Romeo o Juliet* (an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet) 1893. Das (1953), Vol. II, op. cit.
- 4 See, Chapter XVI marked as 'Studies at Home' of the autobiography, op. cit. Tagore recollected with great joy how he used to score highest marks in Bengali.
 Tagore's instinctive urge and genuine love for literature of any kind written in the vernaculars would let his mind to be not just 'stimulated' but 'nourished' with innate filiation for the writers. See Mandal (2022), op. cit.
- 5 I have discussed elsewhere (Mandal:2018, 2022) how the fervent nationalist in Tagore, the undisputed leader of the anti-Partition movement, was progressively transforming into a composite cosmopolitan/internationalist after 1910 and more pronouncedly in his post-Noble era. The high nationalist phase of Tagore combating imperialism in all its forms started diminishing when he began translating his Bengali poems (*Gitanjali* included) into English, subsequently publishing them as *Song Offerings* (September 1912), and heralding an 'English Tagore' in world literature (Chakraborty:1998, 33). Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2011) has astutely argued that Tagore had an active public life from 1891 to 1910 (in his 30s and 40s), which coincided with the most prolific period of his career, his *anus mirabilis*, whereby he was fascinatingly imbricating his creative oeuvre and politics of the day.
 The issue shall be more comprehensively discussed in the chapter on Bankimchandra and Rabindranath.
- 6 The establishment of the Asiatic Society in 1782 in Calcutta by Jones under the patronage of Governor-General Warren Hastings is a landmark in the history of Indo-British cultural transactions.
- 7 These rebellions were based largely on agrarian exploitation, heavy taxations, and forcing farmers into indigo plantations. Syed Mir Nisar Ali (1782–1831), better known as Titumir, was foremost among such Bengali freedom fighters who developed a strand of Muslim nationalism coupled with agrarian and political consciousness.
- 8 For example, Sherburne founded an English school where famous D.N. Tagore studied; Martin Bowle and Artoon Peters, too, had run schools in central Calcutta, where the number of students increased every year.
- 9 It is curious to know that the East India government, largely following the Orientalist policy, did not allow Calcutta to be used by the missionaries, and hence, Carey, the Baptist missionary along with his family (sans wife), was forced to leave the city to safely settle in the then Danish colony, where he performed the first recorded conversion on one Pitambar Singh, an 'upper' caste, *Kayestha*, in 1802.
- 10 Examples were prominent scholars like Chandranath Basu, Akkhaychandra Sarkar, Haraparasd Shastri, and Indranath Banerjee and eminent nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak who were English educated but vociferous against the British government's attempts to tamper with their traditional Hindu religious rites.

- 11 The likes of Michael Madhusudan Dutta or Dukhinaranjan Mukherjee could prominently be listed as approximating these early liberals of India.
- 12 Keshab Chandra Sen and Debendranath Tagore were said to be typical examples of this new class of Bengali *bhadralok*.
- 13 The famous Siege of Calcutta took place on 20 June 1756 under the military leadership of the last independent ruler of Bengal Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah to capture the unauthorized construction of the Fort William by the Company under Robert Clive. The impact of the garrison attack was so devastating that the Playhouse, situated nearly half a kilometre away, was razed to ground. It is quite possible that by the middle of the 18th century the British started to have a considerable presence in Calcutta under the leadership of Clive, who though had to concede temporary defeat during the Siege but within a year took 'sweet revenge' by treacherously winning the Battle of Plassey against the last independent ruler of Bengal to establish full-swing Company regime in this part of India.
- 14 See Thomas Cartelli's Introduction to *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (1999), referring to various appropriations of *Tempest* starting from the earliest ones, *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) by Ben Jonson and *The Enchanted Island* (1667) by Dryden and Davenant to the canonical postcolonial readings, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) by O. Mannoni, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) by George Lamming, *A Grain of Wheat* (1968) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *A Tempest* (1969) by Aime Ceasar.
- 15 Arguably the first college textbook in India Richardson's *Selections* (1840), op. cit., prescribes all the four fabulous tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear* plus *Midsummer Night's Dream* and one scene on John Falstaff from *Henry IV* Part I, along with 15 sonnets and 3 poems from *Passionate Pilgrim* and *Rape of Lucrece*. Even today in all the major universities in India, Shakespeare is allocated one paper each from both undergraduate and post-graduate courses. A detailed discussion follows in the chapter on *Lear*.
- 16 W.B. Yeats's *Letters to the New Island* are quoted in Oliver Hennessey (2014), p. 1, op. cit. Yeats' articles written between 1888 and 1892 for the *Boston Pilot* and the *Providence Sunday Journal*, mostly from London, had gone a long way in igniting the English and Irish literary life of the late eighties, formulating the ideas in Yeats's later works and the Irish Renaissance in general. The letters charmingly suggest how a young Yeats, full of race and vision, was beginning his own work and, at the same time, was dreaming of how he might rebuild the literature of a nation.
- 17 By 1913 Britain held sway over 412 million or 23% of the world population then, and conquered over 20% of the earth, making it the most powerful empire when the First World War began.
- 18 See Oliver Hennessey (2014) has employed concepts of 'collaboration' and 'appropriation' to show how Yeats drew on Shakespeare as capital for the Irish Revival and to brace his own artistic standing, thus became one of many writers of the modern age who had "wrestled with the relationship between Shakespeare's modernity and historicity". See Hennessey (2014), pp. 6–7, op. cit.
- 19 Aijaz Ahmed (2007) argues about 'primordialist invocation in Hindutva modes of mobilisation' in contemporary Indian politics, which, according to him, was actually derived not from traditional Hinduism but from 'modern lineages of European irrationalism'. See Ahmed (2007), p. 45, op. cit. However, the national revivalism of late 19th century India did not always

- follow this line of argument as they had genuine urge of rediscovering their glorious past.
- 20 Ramnidhi Gupta was a fascinating but lesser-known creative writer/singer/lyricist who invented his own genre of Bengali music known as *tuppa*, following the North Indian semi-classical musical tradition. In his incredibly long 98 years of life he saw it all, learnt English from Englishmen in the mid-18th century, served the East India government as a clerk in the 1770s in Bihar, and left it to settle in Calcutta to explore his musical talent. He started training in Hindustani classical music but was not satisfied with his Persian *Ustad* and left him to start a new musical *gharana* but made it a point to compose and sing his songs only in Bengali, as he used to repeatedly reveal anxiety about the intrusion of foreign languages in native literature. By the beginning of the 19th century Nidhubabu was a household name in the newly invented Bengali musical genre *tuppa*.
 - 21 Ishwar Gupta was a vociferous critic of the ‘Young Bengal’ group and dedicated himself for the improvement of Bengali poetry not just by writing some fascinating satirical verses, but also by encouraging and publishing young writers like Bankimchandra and Hemchandra. Their future articulation of nationalism in Bengali can be said to owe much to Ishwar Gupta’s deep-rooted early nationalist consciousness chronicled in the vernacular.
 - 22 One of the oldest newspapers in colonial India *Bengal Hurkaru* (1795–1866) used to be run by the British mainly to cater to the interests of the government officials.
 - 23 Richardson, after his early entry into the service of the East Company as an ensign on 13 November 1819, became lieutenant in 1823, but with his natural flair for literature, was more interested in writing/publishing poetry when he went back to England in 1825 owing to ill health. Returning to Bengal in 1829 he was made a Captain on 29 October 1832, but was declared infirm for the job next year, which in many ways turned out to be a boon to the teaching legacy of the iconic college.
 - 24 Michael Hancher informs us that Richardson’s father, Captain David Thomas Richardson, a Scottish officer in Bengal, left Calcutta for London in poor health in early 1799. On 15 August 1800, “according to a notice in the Scots Magazine, he married ‘Miss Violet Oliver, daughter of William Oliver of Dinlaybyre, Esq.’ (‘Lists. Marriages’ 575). The following year, on 15 February 1801, his son David Lester Richardson was baptized at St. Marylebone, Middlesex. The mother is identified by the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (which does not mention the Oliver marriage) as “his wife, Sarah, nee Lester.” A London historian has traced the birth to 22 January 1801, in London, and stated that it was illegitimate”. Captain Richardson evidently returned to Bengal and served in various capacities in East India Infantry services till 1807. See Hancher (2014), pp. 553–572, op. cit.
 - 25 Before Richardson finally left India in February 1861 his old pupils presented him with an address and a testimonial consisting of a purse of Rs. 4000 in those days, and the legendary teacher followed it with a moving speech. See S.C. Sanial (1906), pp. 70–89, op. cit.
 - 26 ‘Shekkhlopeor’, Indianized/indigenized way of addressing Shakespeare, was used by many 19th-century Bengali writers, including Bankimchandra.
 - 27 Curzon’s revival of the old plan to partition Bengal in a big way in the early part of 1902 followed the policy decision taken on 1 September 1901 in the famous Shimla Conference with a motive of curtailing autonomy of the

- educational institutions by setting up a committee for university reforms. Indians, especially the Bengalis who were already fuming after Curzon's new Municipal Act, were inflamed to organize themselves gradually leading even to the formation of radical secret societies by a few. Tagore who had already reacted sharply against Curzon for the enactment of the law in April 1899 curbing the powers of the elected local representatives had his first direct attack on the arrogant racist in the essay, *Atyukti* ('Exaggeration'), published in September 1902 (*Bangadarshan*) on his proclamation of the notorious 'Dilli Durbar' to be held on the New Year of 1903 in honour of the new King of England, Edward VII. His vociferous anger was also directed against Curzon's address at the Convocation of Calcutta University on 15 February 1902, where he had publicly belittled the Indians. See Chapter III for more on this discussion. Also Sumit Sarkar (2011), pp. 8–10, op. cit.
- 28 A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) was arguably the most popular and influential Shakespeare criticism throughout the last century. It saw a series of reprints and editions throughout the last century and even in this century, the last one by Palgrave, London, in 2007. Students/scholars even at the beginning of this century found an overwhelming number of teachers strongly recommending *Shakespearean Tragedy* as the foundational critical text for their understanding of Shakespeare.
- 29 Since the publication of Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984) and Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988, op. cit.), Shakespeare studies have opened up many new frontiers which are mostly postulating alternative discourses on the plays of Shakespeare. Both the Cultural Materialist and the New Historicist, the former being a British phenomenon and the latter an American, played ground-breaking roles in successfully challenging the century-old, powerful critical canon and adding an entirely new dimension to Shakespeare studies across the globe. Stephen Greenblatt (1988) and Louis Montrose, the pioneers and the most renowned of the New Historicists, have very powerfully argued as to how a Shakespearean text can be read to make an intriguing and subtle 'negotiation' between the present and the past in which it is produced, and how social energy of Shakespeare's time has been reproduced in his plays to lay bare shades of history that were not quite written by the historians themselves. Simultaneously, the New Historicists stress on the unceasing exchange between the history that goes into the making of a text and the text itself, and, in the process, how both get determined by each other. The Cultural Materialists, especially Jonathan Dollimore, Alan Sinfield (1985), and John Drakakis (1985), on the other hand, considered to be the most influential in the field, advance the Marxist theory of social production while examining the Shakespearean texts. They have argued that a Shakespearean text, like any other product in the society, depends on certain means of production where the relationship between them remains quite complex to label the text merely as 'literary' or 'artistic'.
- 30 According to Chris Baldick, the development of English literary criticism as a social mission started taking place at the time of Matthew Arnold, since the mid-19th century, exactly the time when English literary studies started to grow as a formal discipline in India following the establishment of three universities in 1857. See Baldick (1983), pp. 59–75, op. cit. Chapter III titled as "Civilizing Subject".

2 Imperfect Interfaces

Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, Girishchandra, and Their Shakespeare

Different languages of different countries,
How can my wishes be fulfilled
Without the language of my own country?
If there is no rain,
Can all the rivers and ponds quench a thirsty Jacobin cuckoo?¹
Ramnidhi Gupta

The name Ramnidhi Gupta, alias Nidhu Babu, is familiar among the practitioners of semi-classical music in India owing to his *tuppa* (popular Bengali semi-classical) compositions. However, the lyrics of his compositions have not received much critical attention. As early as in 1837, in his songs Gupta chose to articulate his deep-seated anxiety about the future prospect of his native language. It is remarkable that at the age of 96, Gupta, through the lyric poem, was contemplating the threats posed by English language. One may find in this an articulation of a Bengali nationalist sentiment which seeks to uphold the *Swadeshi Bhasha* (mother tongue) against the domineering course of the colonial language.² This chapter dealing with three early Indian nationalists—Vidyasagar, Hemchandra, and Girishchandra—and their responses to Shakespeare will aim at exploring similar contemplations on the predicament of the Bengali language and literature since the mid-19th century. However, unlike Nidhubabu, these three authors considered English studies or western education as a shaping influence upon the Bengali middle-class consciousness. Instead of considering this as an oppressive instrument of the empire, they found useful cultural capitals in it to be suitably appropriated for the betterment of their own language and literature carving out, finally, a definitive space for the larger nationalist discourse to emerge. English literature became a recurring reference point in their writings, with Shakespeare occupying a position of cultural authority. However, they sought to de-westernize/de-anglicize

Shakespeare by accommodating him within their own contemporary cultural reservoir. Speaking of Shakespeare's contemporaneity, Diana Henderson (2006, 2) pertinently suggests that Shakespeare, the man, died, but "Shakespeare" lived on and kept growing, becoming, as centuries passed the bearer of English history, an encyclopedia of phrases, a source of profound inspiration a fodder for many professions'. Motivated by such discovery of a strand of modernity in Shakespeare, this chapter also argues that these three writers sought to instill the same in their own culture. The fact that Shakespeare seems to exude a similar influence upon colonial discourses across cultures has also been pointed out by Oliver Hennessey (2014), who, while reassessing Shakespeare's formative role in Yeats's cultural politics and the Irish Literary Revival, enquires:

How had Shakespeare come to occupy such position of cultural authority? How were his name, plays, and his reputation mythologized by men and women promoting a diverse array of political agendas: adult literacy, women's rights, the moral development of children, nationalism, and cultural and racial chauvinism?

(2014, 4)

The probable reasons for Shakespeare's identification as a symbol of cultural superiority and his metonymic relationship with the canon of British literature have already been charted out in the introduction of this book. Other issues, especially how Shakespeare was mythologized and how his name, fame, and plays were 'used' for political agendas, women's rights, and nationalism in the context of mid-19th-century Bengal/India, shall be the major points of contention in the subsequent pages.

Nonetheless, when comparing Yeats's situation with that of the Bengali writers, one needs to carefully remember that, unlike the Indian writers, who aimed at a trans-cultural appropriation of Shakespeare in their own (Bengali) language, Yeats could not appropriate him in Irish but had to limit himself to Shakespeare's own (colonial) English, spoken by a small population of Anglo-Irish Protestant community which he himself was a part of. The Bengali writers were (unwittingly at times) dethroning the colonial Bard, not necessarily from his position of superior cultural authority but from his position of being an instrument of colonization, and thus made him appear an indigenized writer, a rising reserve for rich Bengali drama and literature. This denotes their stunningly imperfect interfaces with the Bard, considering the design of colonial education in the post-Macaulay era, as discussed in the introduction. The English preface to *Bhanumati Chittabilas Natak*, arguably the first full-length reproduction of Shakespeare (*Merchant*) in India,

accomplished by Harachandra Ghosh back in 1852, may be a pointer to our argument:

In presenting this piece of dramatic composition ... I would observe that at the suggestion of a European friend of native education ... I had originally undertaken the *translation* of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* ... *But the plan was abandoned* before I had distanced the flight of Jessica, some of my learned friends having surmised that *my performance was not likely to be popular unless the mode in which it was done were altered*. I took their advice and undertook to write it in *the shape of a Bengali Natuck or Drama, taking only the plot and underplots of the "Merchant of Venice", with considerable additions and alterations to suit the native taste, but at the same time losing no opportunity to convey to my countrymen, who have no means of getting themselves acquainted with Shakespeare, save through the medium of their own language*, the beauty of the author's sentiments, as expressed in the best passages in the play in question.

(emphasis added)

The motives are abundantly clear: Harachandra wanted to consciously collaborate with the Bard to modernize Bengali drama, took his narrative but by means of transculturation, it reached him to 'my countrymen, who have no means of getting themselves acquainted with Shakespeare' in Bengali.³

Harachandra's work remains outside the scope of this present book, but at the onset, it needs to be brought in for being the maiden adaptation of the Bard. With this, I think, it would be quite apt to briefly understand various types of literary transculturation—collaboration, adaptation, appropriation, and translation—often confused with or interchangeably used for each other, and what special significance they bear in colonial writers' transactions with Shakespeare. Henderson (2006, 18–19) defines 'collaboration' as an act of engagement of modern/contemporary writers with Shakespeare from a historical remove from where they willingly cooperate with him in an attempt to rediscover him for modernity. Socio-economic and political changes over the years, Henderson argues, 'affected the conceptualization and representation of Shakespeare ... in the service of the imperial nation-state'. The point is, in India Shakespeare, though at one level, was deployed to serve the overt political purpose of imperial Britain, the indigenous writers were smart enough to quickly redeploy the Bard for their own dividends. Here, Harachandra may serve as a pilot project for such 'collaboration' in Henderson's sense. Adaptation, as discussed by Thomas Cartelli (1999), is primarily an emulative act 'interested merely in adjusting or accommodating the original work to the tastes and expectations of their own readership or audience ... feed off the fame or prestige of their originals, they also may be

said to exist in a consciously tributary relationship with the work they enlarge upon, reorient, and emulate' (15). Quite obviously, an act of adaptation, much like 'collaboration', is an imitative act, whereby the individual adapting willingly surrenders himself to live on the reflected glory of the adapted, leaving marginal space for productivity. Hemchandra's *Nalini-Basanta Natak* (from *Tempest*), discussed later in this chapter, may fit into this category. 'Appropriation', on the other hand, as defined by Jonathan Bate (1989, 2), 'suggests greater activity on the part of the appropriator ... and has stronger political overtones'. Taking similar route, Jean Marsden adds further radical motives to an act of 'appropriation', a kind of 'abduction, adoption and theft', a 'desire for possession', it is neither dispassionate nor disinterested; it has connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own use (Marsden:1991, 1). For Bate, as for Marsden, appropriation is also a form of interpretation, a self-conscious act carried out for a specific political purpose.

Quite cogently put rationale as these adumbrations are, the contention about the appropriator's voluntary involvement with Shakespeare for a pre-determined purpose may not entirely be applicable to the three writers in this chapter. The nature of their engagement is a transaction, an exchange, involving both-way traffic, whereby the appropriator is likely to be unconsciously sucked into the dominant ideology of Shakespeare in a colonial context like India. As, concurring largely with Bate, Michael Dobson (1992, 12) suggests that in the process of such appropriation 'the hegemonic discourse of the ruling oligarchy appropriates both Shakespeare's texts and his readers, effortlessly co-opting all concerned in the interests of the state ...'. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (1999) inform us how Shakespeare studies in contemporary time gets determined by a kind of psychological riddle in line with Harold Bloom's quasi-Freudian 'anxiety of influence', an inexplicable state of interface between modern writers and the Shakespearean works they negotiate with. Drawing on Marsden's abduction analogy, 'appropriation', thus for them, 'implies an exchange, either the theft of something valuable ... or a gift, the allocation of resources for a worthy cause' (Desmet:1999, 4). However, unlike Bate, Desmet and Sawyer remain silent about the self-conscious engagement on the part of the appropriator while 'stealing' the 'valuable gift' for his own benefit. Agreeing largely, Thomas Cartelli (1999, 17) calls it a 'selectively predatory act' and, 'unlike adaptation, does not seek to reproduce in any faithful or sustained way what it 'abducts' from its objective'.⁴ Finally, the theoretical principles of translation, depending largely on the distinction drawn by Lawrence Venuti (1995) on 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating', shall also be applied to understand Girishchandra's *Macbeth*, perhaps the only faithful translation of Shakespeare in 19th-century Bengal.

However, while understanding the three writers' engagement with Shakespeare here and that of Bankimchandra next with these theoretical

formulas, one has to exercise a fair degree of caution as they may not always appear quite faithfully applicable in their cases. Issues of ambivalence, ambiguity, or opacity are so very complex in the actual colonial transactions that it is impossible to fix them with any particular set of theories. Conscious reverence and both conscious/unconscious resistance to Shakespeare might have been at play in such a negotiation with the colonial Bard. Moreover, one major critical distinction in their transaction is, unlike the examples cited by Cartelli, these Indian appropriations are accomplished in a non-colonial language, Bengali. Added to such complexities was the ambivalent relationship of these writers with the colonial administration. For long, Vidyasagar was considered to be their ally by the British government, a virtual crisis manager when it came to implementing certain policies, and yet, he could see into their eyes, rendered his service by holding his head high with his impeccable moral standing. Hemchandra, on the other hand, remained a dangerous child of the Empire, occasionally participated in anti-colonial movements, produced incendiary nationalist poetry that propagated even united armed resistance against his rulers, and yet served the government later. Girishchandra Ghosh remained largely distant from any direct political contact with the government, though he remained a pioneer in infusing nationalist sentiment into Indian theatre, transformed it into an extremely popular art, and, towards the end of his career, writing/producing some exceptionally brilliant nationalist plays.

Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891)

Three years ago, amidst the scorching hot summer in the middle of May most Indians suddenly woke up to a series of furious debates centred around a remarkable son of India, whose extraordinary contribution to India's nation-building remained nearly unknown to common people outside Bengal.⁵ An extraordinary polymath, a Sanskrit scholar par excellence with a sane head on his shoulders, Vidyasagar was quick to understand the utility of Western learning in a superstition-driven Indian society where women were perennially oppressed. A man with endless human compassion he was instrumental in convincing the Company administration in its last days to enact the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 and even went on to marry his son to a widow to roll the same in reality. However, what is also remarkable, he never turned himself into a 'brown Sahib' like many of his famous friends and compatriots from the Hindu College. He learnt his English and Shakespeare largely by himself at home in his typical loin cloth with the customary Bramhminical thread wrapping the upper portion of the body and the long top knot on his head—perhaps the first perfect example of a man advocating the confluence of East and West in a pluralistic universe. Rabindranath Tagore, while attempting a brief bio-sketch of Vidyasagar, put him alongside another

great reformer, Rammohan Roy, as both could judiciously amalgamate the Indian ethos with the derivatives of colonial modernity:

On the one hand they (Rammohan and Vidyasagar) were (evidently) Indians but had close similarities with the Europeans on the other. However, these similarities were not results of their imitation of the Europeans. They were true Bengalis in terms of their attire, culture and behavior; they were instrumental in establishing the principles of educating their countrymen in the mother tongue. But their courage, truthfulness, determination, self-righteousness and zeal for public welfare, were comparable to the great European minds.

(Tagore:1986, 769, translated)

The amazing journey of a young lad from a remote village (in today's East Midnapore District) to Calcutta in the late 1820s is widely known.⁶ Herein lay the role of his parents which, I feel, needed to be spelt out in some detail to study the indomitable spirit, ardour, and energy of this great Indian with short height and vulnerable health.⁷ Vidyasagar's father Thakurdas Bandopadhyay had come to Calcutta with his father Ramjoy Bandopadhyay at the age of 15 in the year 1804. He did not have the financial means to go to those few English schools to learn English, which he knew would be quite handy to secure a job in those days (Bandopadhyay:1914, 10). With the help of a close relative, Sabharam Bachospati, he could arrange a well-trained retired Bengali naval officer to teach him English and within a year with tremendous hardship, at times even without any food, Thakurdas could learn some English. Initially, he worked as a caretaker of a rich man's house, and a year later in the office of a kind-hearted businessman with monthly salary of two rupees. Owing to his good nature and perseverance his salary started increasing every year, and when he started earning eight rupees per month, was married off to Bhagabati Devi (Chattopadhyay) in 1813 at the age of 24, but continued to stay in Calcutta with regular visits to his native village. A remarkable woman of courage, love, and compassion, Vidyasagar's mother, Bhagaboti Devi, had received an elementary education from her Sanskrit scholar father. 'The people of the native village (of Vidyasagar)', Tagore continues, 'used to remain gratefully soaked into Bhagaboti's limitless compassion. Nursing the sick, serving food to the starving and showing empathy with the bereaved were among her daily activities' (Ibid., 772). And if that was not all, consider the audacious disposition of such a large-hearted, simple woman living in a far-flung countryside to a British official serving the Empire. Bhagaboti Devi once wrote a personal letter inviting Mr. Harrison to her place and played an extremely caring and courteous hostess.⁸

One wonders with awe how, in the mid-19th century, an old Hindu lady without any formal training in western education could bear such a modern

outlook on life, especially when many of us even in the present century would remain passive witnesses to an array of gender discrimination, caste oppression, and communal conflicts. Providence! Perhaps the Almighty had dispatched her with a specific purpose to India when the hapless nation needed such noble ladies the most. Most of us in India may not even be aware of this divine mother on earth who, sitting in a remote village, could inspire her prodigious son to fight for women's education, empowerment, and equal rights at a time when even the so-called western-educated high liberals in the metropolis would not dare to send their daughters to schools. In fact, it was Bhagaboti Devi who, out of her sheer empathy for the young widows living a hapless life, first motivated Vidyasagar to do something to find a suitable means for their remarriage. The passage of the Widow Remarriage Act—how Vidyasagar had to wage an intellectual war with his fellow Hindus, the conservatives, or the western-educated 'liberals', and how a castigated, condemned, and ostracized warrior remained unfazed even under palpable threat of assassination—are well-known facts of history. But the role of Bhagaboti Devi in all these is not really chronicled more often. Rabindranath Tagore found in her an embodiment of reason, sanity, and humanity, a living example of the original Scriptures conceived of by the Almighty:

When many men opposing the movement for widow marriage wanted to kill Vidyasagar, when the (Hindu) pundits from their reading of the Scriptures found heresy in Vidyasagar's argument, started hurling abuses on him, this noble lady did not require to demonstrate or study any suitable *slokas* from the Scriptures, as it were, she herself was an epitome of the original Scriptures written by the Creator.

(Ibid., 773, translated)

It may not be an exaggeration to state that if Vidyasagar owed his education, knowledge, recognition, and life in Calcutta to his father, Bhagaboti Devi was the principal force behind his social activism, zeal, and unflinching spirit. Brian Hatcher (2014), in his very recent atypical biography of Vidyasagar, points out with deep dismay that world academia is yet to recognize this great South Asian, which, according to him, owing to the absence of any comprehensive and critically informed biography written in English:

It is true that Vidyasagar's 'name recognition' is rather limited beyond India; he never achieved the international stature of a Gandhi, Nehru or Tagore. And yet both Gandhi and Tagore looked up to Vidyasagar, and it is safe to say that even today many Indians would place him on the same level of greatness.

(Hatcher: 2014, 10)

This part of the chapter in that sense may be considered as a brief attempt to pay our long-due obeisance to one of the first unrecognized nationalists who could understand the value of education in bringing social revolutions and build a strong nation based on the principles of morality, equity, and justice. Perhaps this was why, despite being friends to many of the colonial educationists, Vidyasagar could not endorse the colonial top-down model or ‘infiltration’ theory of education adopted by many. Instead, he had emphatically endeavoured to establish a system of education starting from the elementary level, catering to the bottom of the social ladder and then to the higher echelon of the society. Much like Tagore in later years, he was quick to comprehend that the nature of our problems was social to begin with, and only the largescale spread of education could change our society and further the goal of nation-building. Undoubtedly, his own personal experiences of hailing from a poor family at a remote village had propelled such vision, not to forget how he could not afford formal training in western education despite his father’s wish to admit him in the Hindu College. Asok Sen (1977) had a comprehensive analysis of how the Anglicist model of English education as envisioned by Macaulay, apart from imparting the Western Enlightenment to the natives, would have the trading potentialities of creating consumers of British imports in India.⁹ It is ironic, he argues, that Vidyasagar though remained less vocal against colonialism, knowingly or unknowingly for him ‘his crisis had its roots in the overall dimension of colonial rule and the economy thrust upon the country by that order’ (Sen:1977, 4). But he was acutely aware of the failing consequences of colonial education howsoever romanticized vision of liberation some of his English-educated compatriots especially from the iconic college might have nurtured. To put the issue in perspective Asok Sen (*Ibid.*, 5) ruminates by referring to Sumit Sarkar: ‘Thus “Young Bengal” cried in the wilderness, often with a fanatic frenzy of their own alienation, to form a protest which would remain unborn in the society of their circumstances’. Quite ironically, he argues, the same crisis caught up with ‘a lonely soul like Vidyasagar, whose bold programmes of education and social reforms, fearless struggle against the irrational and the inhuman and endless compassion for the poor and the distressed, were largely frustrated by the absence of any social force to work for the relevant goal’ (*Ibid.*).

While Sen may be entirely right on the failure of the Young Bengal movement, Vidyasagar had not given up his desire for social changes and India’s reconstruction. Much like Tagore in his post-Gitanjali era (discussed in the next chapter), he could realize the futile bombardment of the early nationalists in offering anything to the suffering sections living on the margins. Vidyasagar, too, at the age of 50, left the ‘civilized’ corridors of the metropolis and started living more with the ‘primitive’ tribals of Karmator (a small village in the present-day state of Jharkhand), some 200 km away from Calcutta.

Reflections of such disappointment, especially with the pretentious intellectual class, could be traced in a scathing but undated letter to his old friend Dr. Durga Charan Banerjee (1811–1870), who, incidentally, was the father of the famous future nationalist Surendranath Banerjee. Written at a time when most of his friends who had supported the widow marriage movement deserted him:

Supporters of widow marriage had promised to contribute fund. But most of them had refused to provide the money. The costs of such marriages are increasing day by day. I am in deep danger now. If those men were to keep their promise I would not be in such crisis ... you too, have stopped the monthly contribution after some instalment ... I am trying my level best to repay the loan I have taken for the matter ... if needed by selling all my belongings ... *If I were to understand that the people of our country were so incompetent and ineffective I would not have interfered in the matter of widow marriage.* At that point of time all of you encouraged me so much that I dared to get involved in it; *otherwise I would have restrained myself after campaigning for the law and the marriage. I have lost everything and become totally bankrupt by relying on the (false) promise of these 'great' men...*

(Vidyasagar *Rachanabali* 2, p. 603, emphasis added, translated)

Vidyasagar was drowned in debts for incurring the cost of such marriages.¹⁰ It is reflected in another desperate letter to the famous philanthropist queen of Murshidabad Rani Swarnakumari in November 1869:

You are aware that owing to my involvement in widow marriage I have been under severe debts and trying to repay them in instalments. But two such money lenders are not ready for the instalments and are insisting for one-time repayment which I am not in a position to meet now. But I have to oblige them and hence, I appeal to your Highness for a loan of Rs. 7500/. I shall write a note with the undertaking that I shall repay the same in next three years.

(*Ibid.*, 599)

Around the same point in time, Vidyasagar got involved in an unseemly family dispute. Alienated from his family and friends along with unpaid loans he was gradually turning bitter about his own life and the world around him; the thought of leading an ascetic life first struck him during that time. In November 1869, he wrote a compelling letter addressed to his first guru, his father:

For various reasons the thought of a life of secluded quietism has struck my mind. I have no more interest in any familial matters or keeping any

such relationships. Especially, the way my mind and body have recently been affected if I remain involved in such familial matters I won't live long. That is why I have decided to lead the rest of my life as far as possible in a quiet seclusion ...

(Ibid., 574)

This was the time Vidyasagar started engaging with Shakespeare's *Comedy*. As a matter of fact, Asitkumar Bandopadhyay (1970, 94–111) has discussed the nature of his engagement with English studies as well. This needs to be discussed here in some detail. That Vidyasagar had an unfulfilled wish to study in the Hindu College was well known to us. In Sanskrit College, he used to miss the English lessons as it was abolished since 1835. In 1839 he along with his friends had petitioned the then Secretary of Education Council, G.T. Marshal, for reinstating English in their college in order to train them in European art/culture as also to prepare them better for government jobs (Ibid., 39–40). Though English came back to the college in 1842, it did not produce any fruitful results, owing largely to the apathy of the pundit-dominated college administration. Consequently, as a teacher of Fort William, Vidyasagar had quite diligently improved his English on his own initiatives and with English-educated friends turned teachers.¹¹ He started to master the colonial language within the next few years could be evinced from his first major work of translation of the *Biographies* by Robert and William Chambers done in 1847, followed by Marshman's *History of Bengal* a year later. By the time he was recommended by the Education Council for the post of Principal of his alma mater in 1851, the government was pleased to note, 'on the hand he is adept in English language and a first class pundit in Sanskrit on the other' (Ibid., 40). The point that Bandopadhyay (1970) has made, and I concur with, is: Vidyasagar, despite translating certain western texts quite early in his career, did not feel any urge to take up the 'greatest poet of the world' or the British Bard till 1869, when he had already bid farewell to teaching, was writing very less, and was on the verge of quitting active Calcutta life as well. This may also explain the fact that he had regarded the Marshman's or the Chambers' more useful for the students in his time.¹²

Hence, while laying seminal importance on his proto-feminist inventiveness in *Bhrantibilas*, a transculturation of *Comedy*, one must consider that during that point in his life, Vidyasagar had already started showing signs of disappointment about the 'greatest human act of my life', i.e., the widow marriage.¹³ The preface to *Bhrantibilas* gives further indications about the occasion and nature of his transaction with the Bard:

After having gone through *Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare the greatest poet of England *few days ago* I had realized, if the core narrative of the

play could be *compiled* in Bengali, (our) people could be immensely *amused*. Accordingly, the narrative of the farce is being compiled in Bengali and circulated as “Bhrantibilas”. Shakespeare had become memorable and world famous by writing 35 plays. Excellence of his poetic oeuvre and narrative skills has been demonstrated in his plays ... Many argue that he was not just the greatest poet of England but no poets in the world so far could equal him. However, it would be only impertinence if a person like me even engages in judging whether *this claim is correct or unbiased*. *Comedy* in its poetic quality is inferior to many other plays of Shakespeare; but its principal narrative is extremely hilarious. He has employed tremendous skills in evoking laughter in this farce. One may choke his breath with limitless laughter while reading the play. However, *Bhrantibilas* does not possess that unique skills of Shakespeare and hence, there is no possibility of people getting similarly amused by it. In Bengali books European names do not sound good; especially for *those not familiar with English language they become quite annoying to hear*. To avoid such frailty Indian names have been used in *Bhrantibilas*. There cannot be any harm in adopting such changes in case of a fictional narrative. In fact, in a history or biography there is definite significance of (real) names but not in a work of fiction ...

(*Rachanabali II*, 129, emphasis added, translated)

The preface reveals many significant issues. First, for Vidyasagar it was a ‘compilation’ (the Bengali word used by him was *sankalon*) of the principal narrative of the *Comedy* into Bengali. Second, it was purely for entertaining the Bengali readers untrained in English; third, despite being an inferior play by Shakespeare’s standards, the extreme hilarity prompted him to recreate it. Fourth, the European names needed to be completely discarded and indigenized for familiarizing them with Bengalis; fifth, the play was preferred as a narrative rather a dramatic representation. Finally, and very importantly, Vidyasagar was visibly reluctant to enter into the debate about the Bard being the greatest poet in the world. Undoubtedly, these vital points reveal the authorial intent in the rework as also unlock many keys to the problematics of transposing the Bard in colonial India. The next few pages tend to lay more stress on such process of the transaction between a ‘colonial book’ and an important member of the indigentous intelligentsia. Of course, the derivative of that transaction, the actual rework, and its relation with the source work is a serious text to study, which being already done quite proficiently by Suddhaseel Sen (Sen:2021, 156–162), my job has been somewhat limited as well as less elaborate. A brief list to understand the corresponding changes in names and contexts in both the works, however, is necessary to repeat for the benefit of the readers:

<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	-----	Bhrantibilas
Syracuse	-----	Hemkuta
Ephesus	-----	Jayasthala
Aegeon	-----	Somdutto
Solinus (Duke of Ephesus)	-----	Bijayballabh (Ruler of Jayasthala)
Aemilia (wife of Ageon)	-----	Labonyamoyee/Head of the Sanctum
Antipholus of Ephesus	-----	Chiranjiv of Jayasthala
Antipholus of Syracuse	-----	Chiranjiv of Hemkuta
Dromio of Ephesus	-----	Kinkar of Jayasthala
Dromio of Syracuse	-----	Kinkar of Hemkuta
Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus	----	Chandraprobha
Luciana	-----	Bilasini
Angelo	-----	Basupriayo
A Courtesan	-----	Aparajita
Pinch	-----	Bidyadhar

Complete indigenization of the foreign names/characters is apparent in the recreated narrative, and we are informed that he had taken 15 days, sparing only 15 minutes a day, to accomplish the task (Bandopadhyay:1970, 96). The astonishing claim may be right considering Vidyasagar's mastery over both the languages and his already achieved excellence in the field of such 'translation'. Furthermore, the adoption of his favourite narrative form and making it look like a short new fiction renders Vidyasagar's work more of an 'appropriation' than 'adaptation'.¹⁴ Vidyasagar calling it a 'compilation' indicates his humility on the one hand and also the fact that his engagement with *Comedy* might not have been *as intense as it had been with the Betal stories, the Ramayana or Mahabharata (1860)* and of course with *Kalidasa*. The argument gets revalidated from the fact that it was done purely to entertain the Bengali readers.

Then, the curious question: why, in such a serious, crisis-laden time of his life, thoughts of such casual merriment struck him? Some answer to this could be found in the well-known fact that Vidyasagar remained an incredibly jovial man with a remarkable sense of humour, even while discussing issues like religion, god, or divinity.¹⁵ That does not, however, suggest in any way that he was not serious about reading and appreciating English writers, including Shakespeare. Even in his regular conversations,

informs another of his brothers cum biographer Chandicharan Bandopadhyay (1895, 191), Vidyasagar ‘used to discuss the relevance of writers/thinkers like Scott (Walter), Shakespeare, Milton, (John) Tyndall (the Irish philosopher/physicist), (J.S) Mill and (Herbert) Spencer’. It, indeed, happens with such great men carrying the burden of an entire epoch that at times they seek solace in such unadulterated mirth to cheer themselves up, at least momentarily. Brian Hatcher (2014, 158), too, seems to have maintained a similar position by considering *Bhrantibilas* as a ‘delightful work both in terms of Vidyasagar’s translation strategy for indigenizing Shakespeare dramatis persona and the testimony it gives to Vidyasagar’s love of humour and farce’. He appears to be spot on in arguing that Vidyasagar, choosing an unremarkable comic play by Shakespeare, was merely trying to delight himself with the narrative, in his own words, of ‘limitless laughter’.¹⁶ It is not difficult to see the effort, Hatcher continues, as ‘a kind of commentary on the challenges faced by a very public man in changing world where personal, social, religious and political identity were the topics of continual debate. Perhaps, the best a man like Vidyasagar could hope for was to hide in plain sight’ (Ibid., 160). Therefore, Suddhaseel Sen’s articulate argument that Vidyasagar’s engagement with women’s rights activism may have influenced his negotiation with *Comedy* in ‘identifying and systematically subverting the gender biases that he found in an early Shakespeare play ... and its retelling in Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales* ...’, and that in his *Bhrantibilas*, he ‘seeks to create a compelling, resistant female figure’, sounds quite novel but less convincing (Sen:2021, 162–163). It is also not quite clear how Sen finds a greater feminist figure in Adriana’s Bengali counterpart Chandraprobha in ‘systematically – and successfully – challenging in measured tones the kind of patriarchal discourse endorsed by her sister (and in *Comedy* by Luciana and the Abbess), she ventriloquizes, so to speak, the voice of Vidyasagar the activist himself’ (Ibid., 163). Let us remember that the two texts are situated at a historical distance of nearly three centuries, coupled with their completely unfamiliar linguistic/social/cultural conditions. Hence, playing down Adriana’s ‘shrewish’ venting as less feminist against spicing up Chandraprobha’s ‘measured’ challenge may not reflect the true nature of their character. In fact, showing a bad temper or using intemperate language can also be found in Chandraprobha in the fourth chapter. After having ‘discovered’ his amorous overtures to her sister Bilasini, she describes her ‘husband’ Chiranjiv (of Hemkut) as a lowly, barbaric creature with no human affections. Hence, shrewishness or tantrum, if at all, considered to be an expression of typical ‘feminine jealousy’ or ‘suspicion’, is present in both the characters. Instead of castigating them one may wish to problematize them as feminist remonstrance notwithstanding the authorial intent. Further, Vidyasagar certainly depended on the first complete translation of *Tales from Shakespeare* in Bengali (1852), but

for its precise and lucid narrative techniques; simple story telling had remained his favourite forte since his recreation of *Sakuntala* (Bandopadhyay:1970, 45).

In the matter of reception and popularity of *Bhrantibilas* it was treated at par with the extremely popular novels produced by Bankimchandra during that point of time. 'Bhrantibilas has turned out to be an excellent Bengali novel', informs another of Vidyasagar's younger contemporaries and biographers, Biharilal Sarkar (1895, 465). Its appeal did not dip even a century later in the postcolonial India; its Bengali filmic adaptation by Manu Sen in 1963, *Bhrantibilas* remained an extremely hilarious popular comedy for a long time to come. The Hindi version *Angoor* (1981) by a very popular and respected Bollywood writer/director/lyricist Gulzar, whose Bengali connections were too well-known, though following a slightly different narration depended to a large extent on the original Bengali remake. Interestingly, and Sen (2021) is quite right here, Manu Sen referred only to Vidyasagar as the original source of the narrative. Gulzar, in contrast, did not mention Vidyasagar but—and (Sen:2021, 170) might have glossed it over—began with a glowing tribute to Shakespeare and his *Comedy*. We shall return to this in the final chapter.

Be that as it may, one assertion can be safely made that Vidyasagar had not really looked up to Shakespeare's *Comedy* to achieve some sort of cathartic effect on his deep but increasingly despairing attachment to women's rights movements, neither was it a fresh stimulation for him to go further with the cause; his disillusionment, as discussed, was telling. That does not, however, mean that readers equipped with more comprehensive feminist critical tools at present may not be able to trace proto-feminist trends in *Bhrantibilas*. What is really problematic, I think, is to ascribe such unambiguous motive as the *only* auctorial intent in the writing. Neither does my argument tend to suggest in way that Vidyasagar had not imbibed the values of the Western Enlightenment. It has been demonstrated by Tagore and by a host of acclaimed scholars that Vidyasagar was deeply influenced by western science, philosophy, and intellectualism in his formative years, especially in his highly convincing interpretations of Indian *Sastras* and their suitable use to blunt regressive social customs (Sen:1977; Hatcher:2014; Sen:2021).

What does, then, *Bhrantibilas* imply in Vidyasagar's negotiation with the colonial Bard? This will take us once again to the issues emerging from the preface. For the author, it was a 'compilation' which, in this situation, can bear a standard definition as 'an action or process of producing a collection of items, especially pieces of writing, taken from different sources/places and put the information together for the benefit of the readers'. Quite evidently, Vidyasagar's recreation, with all the radical alterations/interventions to *Comedy*, cannot simply appear as a laborious act of assembling pieces of

information together taken from the Shakespearean play. Did he, then, use the term ‘compilation’ owing to lack of a better word? Whatever could be the reason, *Bhrantibilas* was something extraordinary than this, and readers are at liberty beyond authorial dictate to interpret the same. Both Bandopadhyay (1970) and Sen (2021) have meticulously discussed how Vidyasagar at times has deliberately ignored/alterd the core narrative of the original play. Deliberate omission of the uncharitable, if not sexist jibe, by Antipholus of Syracuse and his attendant Dromio on the maid’s looks is one such glaring instance. Despite being not against any discussion on eroticism, Bandopadhyay (1970, 107) argues that Vidyasagar found the conversation quite crude and ineligible to put forth. Another fresh incorporation beyond the scope of the play happens while recreating the scene (Act III Sc ii, ll. 125–134) where Balthazar advises Antipholus of Ephesus not to breaking his own door:

If by strong hand you offer to break in
 Now in the stirring passage of the day,
 A vulgar comment will be made of it,
 And that supposed by the common rout
 Against your yet ungalled estimation
 That may with foul intrusion enter in
 And dwell upon your grave when you are dead;
 For slander lives upon succession,
 For ever housed where it gets possession.

Check how Vidyasagar reproduces it:

Now you will do this work (breaking the door) in a fit of anger; but once the anger subsides you will repent too much for it. Without thinking of the consequences we should be advised not to perform any act. If in this time of the noon you proceed to break open the door, people on the street will gather to talk ill of it; it would be difficult to hide the shame. Humans habitually like slanders; and people will concoct all kinds of story in order to malign; to make the imagined stories more appealing they add plenty of rhetoric to them. *Even if someone has hundred qualities to be praised most of the people will deliberately ignore them; but they will run after an iota of information even if it remotely contains ingredients of slander. You are really naïve; you think, you have not harmed anyone; have tried your best to help others and so, nobody is against you or has hatred for you; and that all are your friends and well-wishers. But your thoughts are completely erroneous. Most of those people for whom you have done your best to help, are actually your opponents and they regularly engage in maligning you.*

(Vidyasagar *Rachanabali II*, 145–46, emphasis added, translated)

This had actually been the reflections of Vidyasagar's own life, argues Asitkumar Bandopadhyay (1970, 109), as 'at that point in time he was deprived of many things owing to his involvement with widow marriage; even friends turned enemies. And because of such bitterness (in his own life), he has intensely exaggerated the subject of human ingratitude, which did not though figure much in the original play' (translated).

Considering such comprehensive restructuring of *Comedy*, both formal and thematic, *Bhrantibilas* appears less as a 'collaboration' or 'adaptation' and more as an 'appropriation' as the terms have already been discussed at length above. There is a scope for us to retrospectively reckon it as an 'abduction' or 'theft' of the cultural capital from Shakespeare to assimilate the same into colonial India's own. It might have worked in quasi-Freudian fashion, probably beyond Vidyasagar's own cognizance. A visible sense of epistemic rupture is naturally caused when the original international/English play gets radically recreated in a provincial/Bengali culture. The hegemonic, here, gets transmuted into the subordinate or the colonized with such overwhelming ease that the outcome starts assuming a clear autonomy with the potential to generate counter-hegemony and, finally, intersecting with the original work and the culture it transmits. Vidyasagar consciously transposing Shakespeare into the native socio-cultural space for the consumption of the Bengalis may also indicate another unique phenomenon at work. The highbrow symbol of colonial authority associated with Shakespeare and its corollary in the English-educated Indians began to be diluted as the Bard of Avon gradually started reaching the wider Bengali audience.¹⁷ Furthermore, the lucidity of Vidyasagar's enunciation in *Bhrantibilas*, mostly in a language of common conversations, also enriched the Bengali prose at a time when Bengali literature started moving in a more fastidious fashion, and so was the articulation of early nationalist consciousness through such improved vernacular.¹⁸

Let us, finally, consider Vidyasagar's own assessment about Shakespeare and his considered reluctance (reflected in the Preface) to enter into the debate about him being the greatest in the world. We know, Vidyasagar was extremely fond of his works and held tremendous regard for him. Did he really intend to accede higher accord to the Bard than Kalidasa? Let us see how he described Kalidasa in a very short advertisement to his recreation of *Sakuntala* (1854):

Abhijanam Sakuntala is the most outstanding play written in Sanskrit by the greatest poet of India Kalidasa. The principal narrative of this marvellous play has been compiled in this book. But in this narrative one must not expect replication of the supernatural magnificence of the original play. Those who have read *Abhijanam Sakuntala* and will be reading this narrative, will easily understand the huge gaps between

the two. *I may be reprimanded hundred times by those Sanskrit pundits for presenting Kalidasa and Abhijanam Sakuntala in such a manner. In fact, by compiling this work in Bengali I have diminished Kalidasa and Abhijanam Sakuntala. Dear readers! This is my humble prayer that by reading my Sakuntala, please do not judge the excellence of Kalidasa's Abhijanam Sakuntala.*

(Vidyasagar *Rachanabali I*, 349, emphasis added, translated)

We have not seen any such sense of guilt or unqualified apology in the case of *Comedy* for reproducing it in the same language. It assumes special significance when we find, seeking forgiveness from the Bard in such endeavours by others like Hemchandra was common in those days. Undoubtedly, Vidyasagar's *Sakuntala* has been received generationally as a literary piece par excellence, and yet the hesitation, humility, or the anticipated anxiety he demonstrated proved beyond the argument in whose favour he had tilted. We shall return to this in some detail while deliberating upon Hemchandra next. Suffices it to say here that Vidyasagar had strongly preferred the national to the international. That does not, however, mean (as mentioned earlier) that he completely rejected western culture. The great man, instead, attempted an organic synthesis of East and West—eastern civilizational values blended with the Western Enlightenment, whereby both determined each other by a fine finesse of intersectionality. None dictating the terms, and yet, both would together create an eclectic and mutually beneficial pluriversal world order.¹⁹ Asok Sen (1977, 28) makes a near perfect analysis of this motive which, according to him, had helped Vidyasagar take a resolute stance against irrational orthodoxy by admitting first the Kayasthas and then the Vaisyas and Sudras in Sanskrit College:

What made the position of Vidyasagar even more significant was his concern for the reception of modern knowledge and rational thought through the medium of Bengali, the language of his own people. While appreciating the rational content of western learning and its usefulness, Vidyasagar realized that for wider impact, the same knowledge has to spread beyond the limits of the Anglicized system of education.

(Ibid.)

By application of his sixth sense or what Tagore has reverentially referred to as *kandogyan* (extra sense), he could meaningfully use the fruits of western modernity against the regressive rituals of the Hindu tradition without forfeiting his attachment to its glories.²⁰ Curiously, similar such attitudes had also remained one of the major trends in the nationalist discourse of the time, whereby many of his compatriots—Hemchandra and Bankimchandra being the pioneers—‘adopted the heritage of Hindu culture

as the focus of its identity ... It co-existed, but not very easily, with at least an equal veneration, also selective, for the civilization of the master race' (Raychaudhuri:1988, 3–4). In the next section, I will discuss what really this much maligned term 'Hindu Nationalism' (especially in today's context), which had its definite beginning in the 1860s, meant for Vidyasagar's contemporaries. Whether Hindu or not, Vidyasagar had indeed thought of a nationalist platform way back in 1860 (A. Sen, 132). As early as 1858 he along with his friend Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan (1819–1886), a Professor of Sanskrit College, started *Somprakash* one of the first major newspapers dealing with explicit political subjects most of the time venting ire against the discriminatory/faulty policies of colonial government. It was also responsible for publishing literature replete with nationalist sentiment. Nevertheless, Vidyasagar's conscious propagation of a cultural nationalism, if one calls it so, does not suggest in any way that he had very high regard for the emerging nationalist leaders in Indian politics, especially after 1870. We know how terribly disgusted he was with some such friends. Even when the Indian National Congress was gathering momentum towards the end of his life, he did not really change his opinion. He was reported to have vociferously derided them during the second session of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1886:

Babus are holding their Congress. They are bragging, making speeches and thus liberating India. None has concern for the thousands of daily victims of death by starvation. What is the use of this politics?

(quoted in Sen:1977, 133)

The compassionate soul, after having witnessed life of the poor hapless tribal villagers of Karmator, could not pretend to be with the English-speaking, privileged leaders of the National Congress. Neither were his hopes fulfilled by the middle-class Indian intelligentsia who could not use western education as a vehicle of social revolutions. 'Whatever else I may not do for my children', he bitterly retorted, 'I shall never teach them English; nothing succeeds more in making them worthless and arrogant' (A Sen, 131).

Whether the failure of the contemporary nationalist leaders in addressing the real issues or their loyalty to the British prompted Vidyasagar to dissociate himself from active nationalist politics would be a pointless debate. But one thing is certain: 'we'—this includes all of us—have miserably failed to understand the mammoth vision of India this great man had nurtured. Present-day India, despite its increasing growth, has yet to reach the fruits of liberty for the millions living in the peripheries, most of whom belong to the socially and economically depressed classes of India that the large-hearted man had thought of so early. I began this discussion on Vidyasagar with some sense of atonement for not duly recognizing this remarkable son of

India, and as I wrap up, it turns to be a deep penance for each one of us for failing this incredible modern Indian, ‘the first man among us’.²¹

Hemchandra Bandopadhyay (1838–1903)

Younger to Vidyasagar, earned fame as an early proponent of radical nationalism, Hemchandra began imagining freedom from colonial regime quite early in his career. The act of writing for him was a vehicle to articulate India as a Mother and as *swadesh* (‘one’s own country’). His idea of nationalism, as narrated in one of his famous poems, *Bharat Sangeet* (‘Song for India’, 1870), also involved armed insurrection by his countrymen against the tyrant rulers. The poem with such radical sentiments and its rising popularity had prompted none other than the then Governor-General to seek explanation from the famous Bengali editor of the government-sponsored Education Gazette, where it was first published.²² One of his early writings, *Birbahu Kavya* (‘An Ode to Birbahu’, 1864), too, was replete with nationalist sentiment. Now, can one believe that the same unwavering nationalist used to bow to Shakespeare as a symbol of cultural authority by brazenly privileging him over Kalidasa? Was in the habit of issuing unqualified apologies to the Bard for his impudent attempt to transpose him into his mother tongue (Bengali)? This part of the chapter seeks to understand the apparent ambivalence of the incipient Indian nationalist discourse with special reference to Hemchandra’s engagement with Shakespeare in the second half of the 19th century. To that effect, it is imperative to have a brief relook at the beginning and nature of such nationalism gradually emerging after 1857.

As it has already been suggested in the introduction, a nascent sense of nationalism started affecting a section of indigenous intelligentsia mostly among the western-educated Bengalis, since the 1830s. However, such a novel idea, articulated mainly through their fictional writing or contemplative poetry produced primarily in English, far from being organized, was limited to the elite circles of Calcutta. During the three intervening decades between Macaulay’s *Minutes* and Hemchandra’s first nationalist poetry (*Birbahu Kavya*, 1864), India had witnessed a slew of sociopolitico/cultural upheavals which got intensified since the late 1850s: the beginning of university education (University of Calcutta, 24 January 1857), Sepoy Rebellion (February–June 1857) followed by the Government of India Act of 1858 ceding India to Britain, the introduction of Indian Civil Services, and the fierce indigo resistance movements of 1859–60. Added to these was the beginning of a native political platform, the British India Association, in October 1851, with Radhakanta Deb and Debendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath Tagore) at helms, with constant demands for the removal of the Company trading monopoly, the spread of education, and the inclusion of Indians in the civil service. To lend voices to them as well as pester their

rulers, two remarkable indigenous English political periodicals, *Hindoo Patriot* (1853) and *Bengalee* (1863) by the journalist Girishchandra Ghosh (1829–1869, not to be confused with the playwright discussed next) and Harishchandra Mukharjee (1824–1862) came up. They championed the cause of the *raiya*s and small farmers during the indigo agitations of 1859–60. Other major social phenomena like widow marriage, women empowerment, spread of literacy and vernacular education, and Vidyasagar’s superhuman efforts have already been discussed. On the literary/cultural fronts after Vidyasagar’s seminal endeavours, we see pioneering works like *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1857, arguably the first Indian novel) by Parichand Mitra (1814–1883), and *Padmini Upakhayan* (1858), the first major Bengali poem with nationalist sentiment, by Rangalal Banerjee (1827–1887). With the demise of Ishwarchandra Gupta (1812–1859)—whose role through his newspaper *Sambad Probhakar* in making literary greats has already been mentioned—the mantle to carry Bengali poetry would largely fall on Hemchandra and his famous friend Michael Madhusudan Dutta.²³ This was also the time when Bengali drama was evolving and fast emerging as the channel to communicate nationalist sentiment to middle-class Bengalis, as discussed in the next segment of this chapter. The rise of novels in narrating nation and Bankimchandra’s phenomenal role in it is quite well known. The point is: since the mid-1850s, with the growth of Bengali literature, writers/thinkers/activists started pitching for a cultural rejuvenation by deliberately writing in their mother tongue virtually in all the major genres—poetry, play, prose, and novel—phenomena often collectively called the ‘Indian Renaissance’. By propagating what has been termed ‘literary nationalism’, i.e., by using their artistic oeuvre as an instrument to transmit anti-colonial sentiment, though at times borrowing forms/materials/techniques from the colonizers, these writers were unmistakably impacting the emerging nationalist discourse and gradually making it more structured and nuanced.

How, then, these events shaped the Bengali intelligentsia? To begin briefly with the single biggest political jolt of the century for the British, namely, the Sepoy Rebellion (1857), quite ironically, it had negligible positive resonances in the contemporary Bengali society or literature.²⁴ Rather, the middle-class Bengalis of colonial Calcutta remained deeply repulsive to the ‘mutiny’ happening a few miles away at Barrackpur (now in North 24 pgs). ‘The Sepoy Mutiny, particularly in Bengal’, recounted one of the foremost revolutionary nationalists Bipinchandra Pal (1858–1932), ‘left the general population of the country absolutely cold’:

They had belonged to a generation that had seen and suffered from the *anarchy and disorder of immediate pre-British rule* Along with these material advantages secured to them by the administration of the East India Company, new intellectual and moral forces came into operation

through the introduction of English education, to create a new intellectual and spiritual bonds between the generation of English educated Bengalis and their foreign political masters *This is the real reason why not only the “Mutiny” did not touch our people at all in Bengal, but the suppression of it and the returning prospect of a settled government was hailed with universal delight by them.*

(quoted in Chaudhuri:2002, 129, emphasis added)

There is no compelling reason to disbelieve such commentaries on the ground that the author of these disquieting accounts was not an eyewitness to the same. Shibnath Shastri (1847–1919) provides chilling narratives from witnesses of the rebellion: barbaric killings of British citizens, including women and children, followed by more brutal suppression of the rebels by the British, and the ghastly aftermath:

... Today we hear that liberty of indigenous newspapers will be taken away; next day, we came to know, if anyone goes out to the ground after 8 in the evening will be shot at; markets used to shut after evening; not a single necessary item could be available; even people inside home did not dare to discuss politics and the affairs of the state freely; they used to feel as if the walls were listening to their conversation. If anyone were to pass by the big ground (Maidan) in front of the Fort (William) armed security forces used to ask, ‘*hukumdar*’ or, ‘Who comes there’. And we had to say, ‘*rioyat hay*’ or ‘I am a servant’ (of the government) or else, they used to apprehend us, and would release only after thorough scrutiny. Thus, a sense of fear and terror kept all of us disturbed for few days.

(Shastri:1903, 143–144, translated)

Popular Bengali middle-class sentiment started getting reflected in the *Hindu Patriot* with serial publications of reasoned articles condemning the ‘mutiny as an act of some (misdirected) superstitious sepoys’ and ‘the people of this country have no connection with it; they still remain grateful, loyal and allegiant servants of the British’ (Ibid., 144, translated). Such reassurance from the faithful subjects of the Raj moved the ‘Clemency Canning’ so much that he had apparently refused to implement the repressive measures against the natives, contrary to the advice given by many British bureaucrats (Ibid.). Among the reasons behind such negativity against what would prospectively be known as the First War of Indian Independence, Bipinchandra’s account brought to the fore two curious issues: role of English education in the moral upbringing of the natives and the ghost of the ‘immediate pre-British’ or Islamic regime. The news of a march of a few hundred sepoys from the epicentre of the rebellion in Meerat to Delhi to reinstate the old, ineffective last ‘emperor’ of the Mughal, Bahadur

Shah, reached Calcutta, fueling fire to the already suspicious atmosphere in the then capital of British India, dominated by the Hindu Bengalis (Shastri, 142).

These two interesting accounts of the ‘mutiny’ by two revered Bengalis lead me to some crucial aspects of the contemporary political context. First, how the advance of the British Empire was perceived/received as the beginning of a new dawn of peace and prosperity by the indigenous Hindu intelligentsia, a constituent of the emerging bourgeoisie of Bengal. This may explain why ‘political consciousness in Bengal up to 1875 had no conception of independence for India from British rule, a demand which was not clearly articulated by Indians even after the formation of the Indian National Congress let alone the disturbances of 1857’ (Chaudhuri:2002, 128). Chaudhuri’s contention seems tenable when one discovers that the popular anger and Indigo agitations in Bengal were largely directed against the officials of the erstwhile Company and their Indian collaborators, not really against the newly recruited officers of the Empire²⁵. Further, the Indian Councils Act of 1861, introduced by Canning with provision for nominating Indians in the affairs of the government, though without any executive powers, was seen as further confidence-building measures from the rulers.

But despite bids by the ‘new’ regime to heal the wounds inflicted by the erstwhile Company rule on their ‘favourite’ children of India, the dynamics of colonial politics were so very fluid and self-negating in our country that it was well-nigh impossible for the natives to continue to remain pacified for long. Giving a lie to the narrative about the absence of any conception of freedom among the educated Bengalis was a remarkable poem *Padmini Upakhyan* fascinatingly articulating the idea of liberation as also lamenting its absence.²⁶ The educated Bengalis started to be drawn into such nationalist literature, argues Manmothnath Ghosh, the most elaborate biographer of Hemchandra, with regular chanting of its emotive lines (Ghosh:1919, 21). Deeply influenced by Rangalal, Hemchandra, too, in his *Birbahu Kavya*, attempted to narrate the roles of contemporary Indians by a metaphoric reimagining of how ancient Hindu warriors used to protect their motherland (Ibid., 148). Following that was the incendiary nationalist fervour in *Bharat Sangeet* and the pinching condemnation of British rule and its repressive apparatus in his *Bharat Bilap* (‘Reproach of India’, 1870). Interestingly, Chaudhuri (2005) herself, in her later article, has quite cogently considered Hemchandra as a poet of early nationalist consciousness and placed him in the context of what is often controversially defined as an exclusive ‘Hindu nationalism’.²⁷

What was, then, the nature of the nationalist discourse steadily emerging from the 1860s, and more importantly, what really Hindu nationalism meant for its early proponents? Undoubtedly, it laid deliberate stress on the revival of the traditional Hindu past. But in most cases, its intersectionality

with the unavoidable derivatives of (colonial) modernity was so rampant that an eclectic, if not hybridized, form of nationalism started taking shape, which quite ironically took the sheen off the sectarianism it was often accused of. Let us remember that one of the pioneering nationalist tracts, the *Prospectus of a Society for Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal* (1866), often dubbed as the beginning of Hindu nationalist thought, was written by an erudite scholar/thinker of both oriental and western learnings, Rajnarayan Basu (Chaudhuri:2005, 225–226). This fascinating document, while revealing deep anxiety for complete debunking of Indian heritage by ‘a band of young men’, or the followers of the Young Bengal, did not denounce all aspects of western culture, especially English education.²⁸ ‘The Nationality Promotion Society shall’, he exhorts, ‘try firstly, to prevent the introduction of evil foreign customs into educated native community’. But then it shall endeavour:

to introduce such foreign customs as have a tendency to infuse national feeling into the minds of its members, thirdly, to give, if possible, to foreign customs already introduced a national shape, fourthly, to aid social reformation by citing old precedents in its favour; and fifthly, to prevent the abolition of such old customs of the country as are beneficial in their nature.

(Basu:1866, emphasis added)

Rajnarayan’s deliberate choice of English to communicate such national feeling, despite his profound erudition in Bengali, is the first testament to his openness to receive the benevolent aspects of European enlightenment. He strongly advocated for certain manners and customs to be suitably utilized in his scheme of Indian nationality, including, ironically, the very idea of a nation.²⁹ His prescription for giving national shape to education was that children should begin taking lessons in their mother tongue and then be initiated to English, and thereby both to continue together. Rajnarayan’s idea of nationalist rejuvenation, in a nutshell, stood for a considered revisit to the India’s ancient glories—like Sanskrit tradition, Hindu gymnastics, Hindu music, Hindu medicine, and women education/empowerment—and simultaneous rejection of its darker sides by way of appropriate application of the tools of colonial modernity. The immediate impact and popularity of Rajnarayan’s homily could be ascertained from its widely publicized Bengali translation, followed by the beginning of National Gathering or more popularly known ‘Hindu *Mela*’, in 1867, by Nabagopal Mitra in alliance with the famous Tagore family of Calcutta. By 1875 when a 14-year-old Rabindranath—who had, incidentally, been briefly tutored and influenced by Rajnarayan in his formative years—was attending the Hindu *mela* with his tributary poem, the fair could successfully infuse a national feeling in the

line with the tract. Apart from forming native social cohesion, the principal aim of the fair was to generate ideas of self-empowerment, exhibiting and selling of various indigenous products and artisanries, cultural regeneration to counter British hegemony. Quite curiously, the fair remained largely apolitical, prompting many middle-class educated Bengalis like S.N. Banerjee and Anandamohan Bose to form a bigger and more pronounced political platform like the Indian National Association in 1876, which, incidentally, replaced the old British Indian Association and anticipated the bigger pan-Indian political platform of 1885.

The saga of Indian nationalism from this point to the formation of the Indian National Congress (1885) and thereafter is too widely documented to attempt any repetition here. However, the role of Rajnarayan's crucial piece and the Hindu *mela* in giving birth to an organic nationalist thought was needed to be brought in for two specific purposes. First, to understand the complex social/cultural dynamics of the time in which four major figures of the book, Bankimchandra, Hemchandra, Girishchandra, and an emerging Tagore, along with the lesser known Purnachandra, were writing and second, to negotiate with the common accusation of bigotry against the nature of such nationalist discourse. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the principal architect of the Hindu *mela*, Nabagopal Mitra, himself was widely known to be positively obsessed with invoking the spirit of *Bharat*, or *swadesh*. He used to define every aspect of life as 'national', so much so that he was humorously referred to as 'a national Nabogopal' by his friends and followers (Chaudhuri:2005, 227). Interestingly, the leaflet for the introductory meeting written in English by Nabogopal did not call it a Hindu *mela* but 'A National Gathering', with the objective 'to unite in one tie of brotherly love union the various races and tribes of people, who though living in one common soil, having one common interest, feel themselves so many different nations' (Pal:1982, 74, emphasis added). It is pertinent to point here that the old British Indian Association had failed in catering to the needs of the heterogeneous colonial subjects, especially the Muslims. Dissatisfied Muslim intelligentsia, consequently, formed a Muhammadan Literary Society in Calcutta in the year 1863 by Nawab Abdul Latif, chiefly with the purpose of imparting English education to the Muslim youth in order to make them compete with their English and Hindu counterparts. The annual meetings of this Society, however, used to be attended by leaders of other communities. Concurrently, Nabogopal's honest call for a greater unity among 'various races and tribes of people', too, denoted the holistic character of the national gatherings. An emotive song composed by Rabindranth's elder brother and the first Indian to pass the Indian Civil Services (1863), Satyendranath Tagore (1842–1923), gave a call to unite 'all children of Bharat, in heart and mind and sing victory to Bharat'.³⁰ Now, does this song emerging from the fair and being embraced as the first

national anthem of India, suggest anything partisan or schismatic? (Pal:1982, 84). The recollection of famous nationalist painter/writer and Rabindranath's nephew Abanindranath Tagore (1872–1951), credited with the maiden portrayal of *Bharatmata* ('Mother India') during the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, too, is useful to validate our contention:

Nabagopal Mitra laid the foundation stone of a new age. All round us, was Bharat, Bharat; the paper *Bharati* began to be published. Nobody used the term *Banga* in those days. *National feeling was initiated from that time onward, and it was from that time that everybody learned to think of Bharat.*

(quoted in Chaudhuri:2005, 227, emphasis added)

Last but by no means least, a prodigious talent Rabindranath presenting a remarkable poem, *Hok Bharater Joy* ('Victory to Bharat', 1875), by exhorting feelings of unity, fraternity, and nationality among Indians, validates further that the National Gathering or the Hindu *mela* was not conducted with any sectarian motive, howsoever misleading its alternative name, 'Hindu *Mela*', seemed to be (Pal:1984, 74–75). Nonetheless, it was quite possible, and which, in fact, was the case at times, that there would always be some few with divisive sentiment in such large gatherings (Pal: 1984, 74–75). But then, sectarian feelings of both communal and regional colours, sense of discontent among certain communities, had remained a regular feature even among the larger nationalist movement initiated by the Indian Association as also in the Indian National Congress. But the attempt to achieve a larger national unity in fighting the common enemy in imperialism had, nonetheless, remained genuine among most of the members.

Coming back to Hemchandra, his literary world and nationalist commitment, I believe, ought to be understood keeping in mind such complex historical context he found himself in. Born in the outskirts of Calcutta (Hoogly) in a relatively poor but revered lineage, Hemchandra started living in the metropolis at the age of 9, got admitted into the prestigious Hindu/Presidency College in 1853, and spent the formative years of his life during the most eventful period of the century.³¹ Hemchandra, an extremely meritorious student, was a favourite among the teachers of English like Mr. Jones and Mr. Hand for his uncanny knack in English language and literature which had fetched him a special certificate of honour within a year and scholarship in 1857.³² Often accused of imitating/copying from English/American writers like Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Shelley, Byron, and Longfellow, he had, nonetheless, had a genuine love for Indian literature, notwithstanding his scant knowledge in Sanskrit.³³ The influence of Indian *puranas* and mythologies, including the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and poets like Mukundaram, Bharatchandra, and Ishwar Gupta on Hemchandra was recurrent, and like his

predecessor Rangalal Banerjee, he, too, could transmute western learning to evoke nationalist sentiment. His biographer Manmothnath Ghosh writes:

When the fiery speeches of nationalist Ramgopal (Ramgopal Ghosh, leader of the Young Bengal) and the writings of Harish (Harishchandra Mukharjee, mentioned above), Girish (Girishchandra Ghosh, the journalist mentioned above) and Krishnadas (Krishnadas Pal, editor Hindu Patriot) were trying to articulate the political rights of Bengalis; when pundit Bajendralal (Bajendralal Roy writer/historian) and Ksrshnamohan (Krishnamohan Banerjee discussed in the introduction) were trying to revive the past glories of the country; when Mahorshi Debendranatha Tagore by following Rammohan (Roy) was trying to spread the essence of Hinduism; when Vidyasagar and Bhudev (Bhudev Mukharjee) by engaging with the scriptures were trying to understand the real vision of our ancient sages; when Kaliprasanna (Kaliprasanna Singha, famous satirist) was laboring to circulate the ‘puranas’, *Bengal in that transformational phase was waiting for the nationalist poet (Hemchandra) of Bharat Sangeet*.

(Ghosh:1919, 34–35, emphasis added, translated)

Hemchandra’s deeper engagement with his most favourite English poet Shakespeare began with a widely known comparison with Kalidasa, whereby the Bard was revered as a universal genius and Kalidasa (only) an Indian great: ‘Kalidasa belongs to India, Shakespeare to the world’. This line appeared in the title page of his recreation of *Tempest* as *Nalaini Basanta* (1869), arguably the first such complete attempt to adapt one of the most enduringly discussed plays of the Bard by an Asian. It largely follows the paradigm set by his predecessor Harachandra in re/naming the original, who incidentally, by then accomplished the first adaptation of *RJ* as *Charumukh-Chittahara* (1864, Juliet as Charumukh and Romeo as Chittahara). Quite curiously, these western-educated Bengali writers were deliberately making the title of their reproductions lead by the female protagonists which symbolized the centrality of the heroines of those recreations. Undoubtedly, the occasion was owing to the gradual awareness about women education and empowerment attempted under the leadership of Bethune and Vidyasagar. However, literary impact of these recreations remained quite limited in comparison with Vidyasagar’s own *Bhrantibilas* and that was largely owing to their less imaginative interventions into the Shakespearean world, like in the instant case of *Nalini Basanta*:

Dramatic persona

The Tempest-----*Nalini-Basanta*

Alonso, King of Naples-----Chitradhwaj, King of Gujrat

Sebastian, his brother-----	Kripa, his brother
Prospero, the right Duke of Milan-----	Baijyanta, King of Kankan
Antonio, his brother, the usurping Duke of Milan---	Ananta, his brother, usurping King of Kankan
Ferdinand, son to the King of Naples-----	Basanta, the Prince of Gujrat
Gonzalo, an honest councilor-----	Pracheta, an old minister of the Gujrat King
Adrian and Francisco, lords-----	Bharot and Bijoy, courtiers to Gujrat King
Caliban, a savage and deformed slave-----	Barbot, a slave to Baijyanta
Trinculo, a jester-----	Tilok, a servant of Gujrat King
Stephano, a drunken butler-----	Uday, a storehouse keeper from Gujrat
Master of a ship-----	Absent
Boatswain-----	Absent
Mariner-----	Absent
Miranda, daughter to Prospero-----	Nalini, daughter to Baijyanta
Ariel, an airy spirit-----	Sumali, principal nymph
Iris, Ceres, Juno, Nymphs, Reapers spirits ---	Sachi, Lakshmi, Chapola and others disguised nymphs

The original plot remains largely untampered. Changes are made only to suit an Indian context. Names and contexts are completely indigenized with Gujrat and Kankan replacing Naples and Milan, respectively, though the actual action happens on an unnamed island of India, with the Duke Prospero transposed as King Baijyanta. First scene of *Tempest* and the shipwreck has not been played out but narrated through conversations between Miranda-Nalini and Prospero-Baijyanta in the first scene of the rework, hence the absence of those three original, insignificant characters in the adaptation. Another significant departure from Shakespeare is the addition of a prologue capturing the whole action of the play in a short, brilliant poetic rendition by the poet persona:

Baijyanta the King of Kankan
 Because of his relentless pursuit of magic,
 Lost kingdom to his brother's treachery;
 Floated on the sea, reached a forest shoal;
 With his daughter for twelve years
 Lived unknown after his plight,
 Then by using the power of magic
 Tamed the opponents to return to his country.
 Listen to this tale with your deep ears
 To entertain yourself with the humours.

(Das:1953, 4, translated)

Obviously, to communicate the faithful observance of the original plot, the prologue has been added. Contemporary localized Indian situations with specific reference to Varanasi's sewage smell and the scent of the Sundarbans in the conversations between Sebastian-Kripa and Antonio-Ananta (Act II, Scene i) have also been incorporated to give it a local flavour. Even direct references to Indian mythologies and allusions to three crore Hindu deities and the beautiful dancers of the King of Gods, Indra, have been made while recreating the nymphs and fairies of the original text (Act IV, Scene i). The most controversial aspect of the original play—Prospero's usurpation of Caliban's land and its obvious colonial overtones—has been replicated through a local version of Caliban-Barbot's servility to Prospero-Baijyanta without really problematizing it.³⁴ Rather the racist undertone of Sycorax's character as black/evil in *Tempest* has been simplified in its Indian equivalence of Trijata as a local version of 'witch' in *Nalini-Basanta*.

How, then, was *Nalini-Basanta* received by contemporary Bengali readers? Though not an exact translation of *Tempest*, Manmothnath Ghosh (1919, 174–175) informs us, *Nalini-Basanta* could skillfully capture the excellence and essence of the original, and contemporary Bengali readers sans knowledge of English were pleased with the Shakespearean flavours. Tapati Gupta (2005), on the other hand, while considering *Nalini-Basanta* as a transcreation, writes:

Shakespeare's blank verse becomes in Hemchandra's hands a monotonous undramatic rhymed verse. The sentimental-lyrical-poetic disposition of Bengal was imposed upon the robust mature blank verse of Shakespeare. The reason perhaps was that because Hemchandra was primarily a poet, the theatrical potentialities of *Tempest* attracted him less than its lyrical richness, its political symbolism less than its romance.

(Gupta:2005, 173)

The argument here is quite compelling, and I would like to largely concur with Tapati Gupta on her analysis of *Tempest/Nalini-Basanta*, as there is no evidence to suggest that the recreation had any major theatrical success in contemporary Bengal. However, while she is right about Hemchandra's 'monotonous undramatic rhymed verse', it may be slightly over-simplistic to regard it as a result of his conscious imposition of the 'sentimental-lyrical-poetic disposition of Bengal'. Some answer to this may lie in the fact *Nalini Basanta* despite its poetic beauties, had failed to really make any major critical impression even among his friends, as his original poetry like *Bharat Sangeet*, *Bharat Bilap*, or *Britya Sanghar* did. In other words, Hemchandra could not achieve the excellence in 'abducting' or 'stealing' the rich cultural capitals in *Tempest* to recreate it as a Bengali text of seminal importance. It remained an uncritical work of adaptation performed out of his veneration for the Bard and a voluntary subordination to the authority of the 'colonial book' (Singh:1996, 128). Here lies the significance of the epigraphic statement Hemchandra made in the preface/advertisement of *Nalini-Basanta*, which, quite astonishingly, was not taken up for discussion by Tapati Gupta. We shall return to this following our analysis of Hemchandra's recreation of *Romeo and Juliet (also RJ)*.

One of the most popular Shakespeare plays among the mid-19th-century Bengali middle-class *RJ* story happens to be the first available narrative in Bengali attempted by one Gurudas Hazra from the *Lambs' Tales from Shakespeare* in 1848 as *Romeo O Juliet-er Manohar Upakhyan* ('Engrossing Tale of Romeo and Juliet'). After him and before Hemchandra there were at least three other complete recreations of the play.³⁵ Hemchandra had attempted it first in 1888. One of his close friends, Umakali Mukherjee, who was known to have heard the original draft, informs Manmothnath Ghosh, (1923, 177) commented that it 'will require to be abbreviated to make it suitable for our stage. He has rendered it excellently ... The fifth act impressed me much and I had to shed tears over several passages ...'. However, despite such appreciations and also requests from publisher, Hemchandra did not allow it to go the press, kept it untouched till the first half of 1894, and then started revising it drastically. The final version came out in July 1895 which in comparison with the original looks like this:

Characters in the plays

Romeo and Juliet-----*Romeo O Juliet*

Escalus, Prince of Verona-----King, Varonanagar,

Mercutio, kinsman of the Prince and friend of Romeo---Morkesh, King's relative, Romeo's friend

Paris, a young count, kinsman of the Prince and

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Mercutio and a suitor of Juliet-----Parash, a young aristocrat,
King's relative

Page to Count Paris-----Two servants of Parash

Montague, head of Veronese family at feud
with the Capulets-----Montago, an aristocrat, enemy to Capalot
family

Lady Montague-----Wife of Montago

Romeo, son of Monague-----Romeo, son of Montago

Benvolio, Nephew of Montague and friend of Romeo and Mercutio
-----Benubol, Montago's nephew and Romeo's friend

Abram, servant of Montague-----Abhiram and Raghob's,
Montago's servants

Balthasar, servant of Montague attending on Romeo----Ballobh, Romeo's
servant

Capulet, head of a Veronese family at feud
with the Montagues-----Capalot, an aristocrat, enemy to
Montago family

Lady Capulet-----Wife of Capalot

Juliet, daughter of Capulet-----Juliet, daughter of Capalot

Tybolt, nephew of Lady Capulet-----Taibol, nephew of Capalot's
wife

Follower Cousin Capulet, and old man
of the Capulet family-----Capalot's friend

Nurse of Juliet, her foster-mother-----Nurse of Juliet

Peter, servant of Capulet attending
on the Nurse-----Bhuto's father, attendant on the
Nurse

Sampson, Gregory of the Capulet household-----Shambho and Giri, two
infantries of Capalot

Friar Laurence, a Franciscan-----Madhuranada, the head
of the Shrine

Friar John, a Franciscan-----A Caveman, a monk in
the Shrine

An Apothecary of Mantua-----A Gipsy Woman
Fiddler and Musicians-----Musician and Folk singers
-----A friend of Montago
-----Mother of Capalot

- Among the extras and civilians the Bengali play includes Sohag, Sutar, Subhash, and other women relatives of the Capalots

Attempt to Indianize the original Shakespeare play is obvious. Italian Verona has become imaginary Indian city of Barananagar and Mantua has become Manchua. The names of the principal protagonists remain unchanged, but quite interestingly, names of the other main players (the Capulets-Capalots, the Montagues-Montagos, Mercutio-Markesh, Benvolio-Benubol, Paris-Parash, Tybalt-Toibal, Abram-Abhiram, Balthasar-Ballobh, and Sampson/Gregory-Shambho/Giri) have been adopted as though they appear to be their simplified Indian derivatives with common sonority with the original European. The Abbey has been turned into a Math or Shrine to suit the enactment of Hindu rituals in the marriage ceremony or the last rites of the dead, with Father Lawrence-Madhuranada as the head monk and Friar John-Caveman as his follower. The Apothecary's role is being accomplished by Bedini, a gipsy woman quite familiar with rural Indian conditions even in the last century. Montague-Montago's friend is a new addition, playing his friend and counsellor. Fiddlers and musicians have been transposed as music arrangers and folk singers to complement an Indian atmosphere. But the most significant invention in the recreation is the mother of Capulet-Capalot acting as a typical Indian grandmother to advise and at times chastise Juliet to follow the age-old patriarchal dictates, especially on the issue of marriage. This has been deliberately done to make further interventions into the exclusive European set-up of the original with obvious additions of fresh scenes in it. Like *Tempest/Nalini-Basanta* a prologue has been added, narrating the action of the play to the readers/audience in the form of a beautiful poem, crux of which goes like this in English:

The play happened in flat beautiful Barananagar where
Two equally rich aristocratic families used to live.
For long they had hatred, jealousy and enmity against each other.
At times violence used to erupt, blood used to spill
At last fate had its way and two lovely lovers born in the two families.
Ridden with pains of love they killed themselves to end the family feud.
(Das:1953, 8, translated)

It is quite clear that Hemchandra has taken the exact plot of *RJ*, but prefers to call his play a ‘shadow’ and not a ‘translation’ for the reasons, he himself elaborates in the introduction of his play:

Bengali and English languages are characteristically so different from each other that mere translation of an English play cannot contain the beauty or aesthetic value of it; in addition to that, owing to the dissimilarities in manners, convention and religious custom, it becomes so harsh to native ears and eyes that it (translation) remains absolutely unpalatable to Bengali readers or audiences. Hence, based on the *shadow* of original *Romeo and Juliet*, I have taken to publish this play. *I have changed or altered few scenes of the original, added few new ones into it. Names of the dramatic persona and their conversations have been indigenized*, except in the cases of the hero and the heroine, whose manners and characteristics have been kept true to the original as far as possible. In fact, *I have taken the effort of gleaning the essence of Shakespeare’s plot and main characters, inducted it into native mould to make it palatable to our own readers.*

(quoted in Ghosh:1923, 178, emphasis added, translated)

What was the reason for such radical relocations of the original? Hemchandra explains, ‘if this process is not adopted, no foreign play can be meaningfully assimilated into Bengali literature, and if that does not happen Bengali literature cannot be nourished nor can its nature be improved’ (quoted in *Ibid.*, 178). An English letter dated 1 October 1894 to his friend Umakali revalidates his contention as he refused to call it a ‘*translation of RJ ... but an adaptation of it keeping only the best portions of the original as possible and in my power and circumstances ... if by doing so any service in any way is likely to be rendered to the cause of the literature of my country*’ (quoted in *Ibid.*, 180, emphasis added).

The intent of the author is unambiguous: he was consciously emulating and reworking the Shakespeare play to enhance the quality of Bengali literature, and the attempt was genuine despite being aware that ‘public generally has very little appreciation specially in works of this kind’ (*Ibid.*). To a large extent, we may agree that it was an act of ‘adaptation’. He used the term as he might have understood it and as it remained a conscious, uncritical task. Nonetheless, attempts are being made to ‘steal’ the rich cultural capitals from the Bard to integrate it into his own ‘undernourished’ literature. Hemchandra’s recreation, howsoever good it was, was starkly disappointing to know that it did not really catch the attention of the audience or readers. This was regardless of the fact that, unlike the earlier one, it had fairly good degree of spicy dramatic elements of family feuds, romance, and violence—all recast into familiar local Indian

situations. One major reason, Ghosh (Ibid., 181) contends, could be visible signs of Hemchandra's waning poetic powers. Behind the failure of such a good rework could also be the changing tastes of the audience during the 1890s. They had, by then, seen the remarkable dramatic recreations from their own Hindu past (discussed next). In fact, contrary to Hemchandra's own considered opinion, by the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century original, Bengali literature, including drama, was not just maturing but started peaking the scale of excellence. Who could match the popularity of plays like *Neel Darpon*, *Sadhobar Ekadoshi* by Dinabandhu Mitra, and *Sarmistha or Krishnakumari* by Madhusudan Dutta? Last but not least, the arrival of the great Girishchandra, who along with some of his highly talented friends started experimenting with plays taken from Indian myths, folklore, and history? Rabindranath Tagore, too, chipped in with the first edition of a very popular play like *Bisarjan* in 1891. Thus, signaling death-knell to imitation plays, Bengali dramas with original Indian content were gradually taking the centre-stage though the dominance of Shakespearean dramaturgy (not really his plots) continued to remain for a very long period to come.

To return to our initial discussion about ambivalent nationalist trends in Hemchandra, let us first turn to his epigraphic statement to *Nalini-Basanta: bharater kalidas, jagater tumi* —'Kalidasa belongs to India, you (Shakespeare) to the world'. The apparent comparison between Shakespeare and Kalidasa, subtly nuanced with privileging of the Bard over the Indian classical poet, remained one of the major talking points since the 19th century. As a matter of fact, the Shakespeare–Kalidasa comparison dates back to the late 18th century, when the most influential orientalist, William Jones, had attempted the same (Bandyopadhyay:1970, 42). Reignited by Hemchandra nearly a century later he took it to an entirely new dimension, causing great discomfort to the revivalists, be it the conservatives, liberals, or hybrids. None other than Vidyasagar had to intervene and dismissed Hemchandra quite annoyingly, 'Hembabu (Hemchandra) has no right to say this; he does not know Sanskrit' (quoted in Ibid., 44). Nevertheless, the issue could not be brushed aside with another great Bankimchandra authoritatively extending Hemchandra's position by likening Kalidasa with garden (smaller) and Shakespeare with an ocean (wider), followed by a remarkable rejoinder from Rabindranath (both discussed in the next chapter).

Despite admitting the indictment against him by Vidyasagar, Hemchandra seemed to have continued with his passionate panegyric for the Bard juxtaposing him with the Sanskrit writer. In one of his lesser-known poems published in 1882, *Indralaye Saraswati Puja* ('Offering Puja to Goddess of Knowledge in Heaven'), he audaciously imagines Kalidasa and Shakespeare offering puja together to Indian Goddess of Knowledge (Saraswati) in Heaven (the Place of King of Gods, Indra). Pleased with

both of them had the Goddess blessed one (Kalidasa) with a priceless lyre and the other (Shakespeare) with immortal poetic prowess and sent them to their respective countries to do what they did:

Pore advut prani dujan Ayilo pujite Saradacharan-	Later two strange people Came to worship the Goddess of Knowledge,
Khiti, bom, tej, samudra, paban, Sakali tader kathay bosh! Dakila Sarada anande dujane Basailo nija kusum-asone; Amulya binati dilo ekjone, Dila anyo jone abodha ras! Jadukar-beshe chamki bhuban	Earth, Sky, Fire, Water, Air All are tamed with their words. Pleased Goddess called the two Sat them in Her own flower-seat; Priceless lyre was gifted to one, Poetic prowess to the other. By charming the universe like magicians
Nija nija deshe firila dujan,	Both came back to their respective countries,
Ekjan tar se binar sware, Meghe kari dut priya manhare,	One with the tune of the lyre Creates cloud messenger for the lovely beloved
Ekjan bosu Avoner tire Amrit bitare amar nare!	The other sitting at the banks of Avon Spreads nectar to immortal humans ³⁶

The fine distinction between ‘priceless lyre’ of Kalidasa and ‘poetic prowess’ of Shakespeare gets intensified in the former’s composing songs for cloud messenger to be sent to his distant beloved and the latter’s rolling out immortal poems to all humans of all ages everywhere. What is at play here is the extended poetic version of the epigraphic line in *Nalini-Basanta*: Kalidasa’s spell remains enchanting but limited only to India, Shakespeare excels universally. The following couplet addressed to the Bard in the beginning of his *Romeo O Juliet*, however, may surpass all:

bani-bar-putra tumi, deb abotar!	Blessed son of goddess Saraswati, you’re an incarnation,
khoma aporadh, pada parashi tomar!!	Forgive me for (daring) to touch your feet.

(Das:1953, 2, translated)

Hemchandra’s unqualified apology to Shakespeare for transmitting him in Bengali, his uninhibited adulation for him, and undiscerning acceptance of his supremacy over the Indian writer effectively reconfirm the obvious

outcome of the deeply entrenched British cultural dominance in colonial India. His reactions were not untypical of the self-negating trend among the majority of English-educated Indian intellectuals to the cultural imperialism, and even the towering nationalist of the late 19th century, Bankimchandra, as we shall see, could not avert it. One may find the fine traces of Gramscian idea of hegemony at work in such a colonial situation: of how cultural dominance worked through the implicit consent of such Indian intelligentsia and how it preceded greater political conquest for a long time to come (Singh:1996, 123). Shakespeare undoubtedly functioned as the book of the empire, as argued by Jyotsna Singh (Ibid., 127) and discussed in the introduction of this book, to morally and intellectually manipulate the dominant section of the colonized intelligentsia, of which the likes of Hemchandra or Bankimchandra were significant components. Some members of the Indian intelligentsia even went on to accept the apparent generosity of some select Viceroys and treated them with glowing adulatory. Lord Rippon's intent for famous Ilbert Bill was reciprocated by a 'Rippon festival' organized by many Indian nationalists in January 1884, giving him a standing ovation at the end of his Viceroyship, whereby Hemchandra himself had dedicated a poem *Rippon Utsav-Bharater Nidrabhonga* ('Rippon Festival—An Awakening of India') to the departing 'lord' (Ghosh:1923, 33–38). Such jubilation by the Indian nationalists for some of the 'benevolent' colonial rulers re-validates the common accusation against them of being perfect collaborators to Raj and its cultural politics, as anticipated by Macaulay. Quite naturally, the disappointment on the part of the radical nationalist thinkers, be it conservative Hindus like Chandranath Basu, Akkhaychandra Sarkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, or liberals like Rabindranath, Aurobindo Ghosh, or Bipinchandra Pal, led to serious discontent against the Indian National Congress, and cracks started emerging within the solitary pan-Indian political platform from the turn of the century. However, without being too harsh to these early proponents of Indian nationalism, one may have reasons to take a middle path and, borrowing from Partha Chatterjee, may call them hybrid nationalists. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the concept of *swadesh*, patriotism, or nationalist feeling roused by Rangalal, Dinabandhu, Hemchandra, and Bankimchandra through their creative writings (literary nationalism) since the early 1860s, had doubtlessly caught the popular imagination of the time. They should always hold a place of seminal importance in the history of Indian nationalist discourse.

Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1912)

Girishchandra Ghosh, the genius actor, playwright, and director leading a dramatic life himself, was largely credited for his untiring act of perfecting

theatrical art, for introducing famous female actor Binodini Das on stage, and for infusing intense nationalist sentiment in Indian theatre within the fast-growing framework of European or Shakespearean dramaturgy. When Girishchandra started his association with theatre as an actor in his 20s, Bengali drama was still evolving in the hands of Dinabandhu and Madhusudan, though it had some beginnings in the 1830s.³⁷ As it has been suggested in the introduction and as elaborately narrated by a number of Indian theatre historians, Shakespeare remained a dominant influence on the Bengali intelligentsia's engagement with theatre ever since he was introduced in the Hindu College curriculum.³⁸ In December 1822, informs Sanatkumar Mitra (1983, 27), some students at the famous Drummond's Academy in Dharamtola (Esplanade now) had few piecemeal performances from Shakespeare's *Merchant* in its own theatre hall, where Derozio as a boy of 13 played a remarkable role of Shylock. A flamboyant Derozio famously getting into Hindu college as a teacher at the age of 17 (May 1826) and teaching Shakespeare along with others had a tremendous influence in the minds of his Bengali pupils. From the following year, performing Shakespeare plays like *Julius Caesar*, *Merchant*, *Henry IV*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Henry VI*, *Cymbeline*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* became a routine annual affair among the Bengali students of the college where future greats like Ramtanu Lahiri, Dakhsinaranjan Mukharjee, and Madhusudan Dutta used to play parts. The culture caught up fast with other schools and colleges like David Hare Academy, Oriental Seminary as well. Since then, commemoration of the Bard through performances from his plays by Indian students within their college/university premises has remained a permanent affair. In spite of carrying tremendous significance these early performances in the schools/colleges were not really meant for outsiders, though they were undoubtedly raising curiosity for the theatre among the educated Bengali *bhadralok*. An inspired Prasannakumar Tagore began arguably the first Indian playhouse named as 'Hindu Theatre' in his Narkeldanga garden house on 28 December 1831, with a performance of *Julius Caesar*. Much later came up Jorasanko Theatre in the vicinity of famous Tagore family in north Calcutta in May 1854, where, incidentally, the same play remained the curtain raiser (Ibid., 34). Curiously, Prasannakumar was also responsible for performing the English version of Bhavabuti's *Uttar Ramcharit* translated by Prof. Wilson of Sanskrit College in 1832 (Gangopadhyay:1977, 46). The Bengali theatre venture with Shakespeare during that point of time was few and far between, owing obviously to the flourishing British theatres and lack of good Bengali actors with fine enunciation in English. Greats like Baishonb Charan Addhyo, whose role of Othello cast opposite to the daughter of famous Mrs Leech (the late owner of Sans Souci), remained phenomenal but rare in the history of

Shakespeare performances during that time. However, enthusiasm for the Bard never went down, could be ascertained from the active role played by prominent Bengalis like Radhakanta Deb, Baidyanath Roy, and Raja Protapchandra Singha in organizing that iconic event at Sans Souci on 17 August 1849 with a jam-packed audience started clapping for the ‘Hindu Othello’ in Addhyo the moment he entered the stage (Mitra:1983, 17).

The post-Hindu College Shakespeare performances undoubtedly provided the real impetus to the popularity of the playwright, though remained obviously restricted only to the English-educated elites of Bengal. As a matter of fact, the first original play by a Bengali, *The Persecuted* by Krishnamohan Banerjee, had also been written in English with intense influence of Shakespeare, as mentioned in the introduction of this book. To witness the direct/indirect influence of Shakespeare on Bengali plays, we needed to wait until the mid-19th century, with Taracharan Sikdar’s *Bhadraarjun* (1852) widely considered as the first original play in the vernacular. In the playwright’s own admission, it was produced in the tradition of European drama, especially Shakespearean, borrowing heavily from its structure, plot construction, and characterization (Ibid., 68). However, months before Sikdar, Jogendrachandra Gupta had sat to write a tragedy called *Kirtibilas*, a loose dramatization of the popular tragic narrative of ‘Bijoy-Basanta’, whereby he took much from *Hamlet*, though curiously the play did not end with the death of the protagonist Kirtibilas. The following year, as already discussed, saw the first complete Shakespeare adaptation in Bengali *Bhanumati-Chittabilas* Natak (*Merchant*). Arguably, the first successful original Bengali tragedy in Shakespearean mould was accomplished in 1856 by Umeshchandra Mitra in his sensational *Bidhoba-Bibaha* (‘Widow Marriage’), dealing with the most happening social revolution of the same name. These plays might not have stood the test of times but had borne tremendous significance in giving a new dimension to Bengali drama in its nascent stage. They opened the floodgate for both original creations and Shakespearean influences in Bengali theatre, later matured and carried forward with tremendous success by the likes of Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824–1873) and Dinabandhu Mitra (1830–1873), followed by the giant of a 19th-century Indian thespian, Girishchandra.

Talking briefly of how Madhusudan received the Bard, his first play, *Sharmistha* (1859), modelled on Shakespearean form, dramatizes a happy triangle love—Debjani-Jajati-Sharmistha—taken from the Mahabharata. Distant influences of *Hamlet* can be traced in creating the ambience, but the idea of cross-dressing certainly came from *As You Like It*. Shades of Lady Macbeth and Goneril can be found in the characterization of determined/tendentious Shachi in his next play, *Padmaboti* (1860), though it was an indigenization of the narrative of the Greek myth of the Golden

Apple. But the favourite student of Richardson at the Hindu College, Madhusudan, had reserved his best in his only historical play, *Krishnakumari* (1861). It demonstrated his astute dramatic skill in appropriating Shakespeare and introducing a highly mature idea of tragedy, dramatic heroism, and shades of Shakespearean violence in Indian drama. It has beautifully dramatized the tragic story of a ravishing beauty in Krishnakumari and her old father/king Bhimsingh's inability to protect her from two aggressive neighbouring rulers, Mansingh and Joysingh. The Lear-Cordelia later narrative in the Shakespearean play, the frenzied exclamations of its storm scene have been replicated in portraying Bhimsingh and his emotive relationship with Krishnakumari (discussed in chapter V). Madhusudan's last play, *Mayakanon* ('Magic Garden'), which came out in March 1874 after his death on 29 June 1873, depicted the chilling love story of Ajoy-Indumati. It was largely adapted from Shakespeare's *RJ* but did not really do well. Leading a highly turbulent life, Madhusudan was more attracted to the 'stern realities of life, lofty passion and heroism of sentiment of European dramas especially by Shakespeare' than the soft romantic Sanskrit plays of Indian classical eras (Mitra, 76). Did such attractions correspond with his own dramatic, if not tragic, life? We shall attempt some answers in the fifth chapter while deliberating upon *Krishnakumari*.

Madhusudan's talented friend and another alumnus of the Hindu College, Dinabandhu Mitra, started his career with extremely popular *Neel Darpon* (1860). It had magnificently dramatized the contemporary Indigo agitations, plight, suffering, and annihilation of the forced Indigo farmers/labours without really following any conventional European tragic form.³⁹ Shakespeare is followed only in employing violence on stage. The play represented a serious, sensitive theme through the indigenous three-act play structure and remained an unassailable success in evoking intense patriotic feelings for long. Turning to comedies/farces, he perfected the art of appropriating Shakespeare in *Sadhabar Ekadoshi* ("Customary Fast of a Chaste Wife", 1866), whereby, he presented a stinging satire on the English-educated, wayward Bengali middle-class youth and their tendency to ape colonial modernity. Portrayal of their drinking habits, profligacy, and debauchery may remind us of the typical mid-19th-century Bengali 'Babus' or the insipid mimickers of foreign manners and customs. The extraordinary method of a pastiche employed to ridicule those oft-quoted moving speeches/lines from tragedies or serious plays like *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Henry VI*, and *Merchant of Venice* was an instant success. Serious Shakespearean lines are cleverly reconfigured to create farcical turns of events such as crude male chauvinism, excessive drinking, hiring of prostitutes, and leading an unproductive spendthrift life. Well-read in Shakespeare, Dinabandhu was deliberate in (mis)appropriating those tragic

events to evoke low comic laughter. This may be considered as a ploy to deride the futile life led by the English-educated spoilt brats and take on the highbrow indigenous bourgeois culture born out of their unthoughtful emulation of Shakespeare. Dinabandhu chose a perfect drunkard but educated creep Nimchand as his protagonist, who could quote Shakespeare at will and more hilariously under the influence of alcohol. The play begins by quoting Cassio's cursing of alcohol in *Othello*, 'O thou invisible spirit of wine ... Devil', followed by a real-life equivalence of it by famous mid-19th-century American statesman Elihu Burritt, 'Touch not, taste not, smell not, drink not anything that intoxicates'. Mocking, thus, at the notoriety of unscrupulous alcohol consuming practices and by making a drinking fish like Nimchand the mouthpiece for the contemporary Shakespearean buffs, Dinabandhu willfully misplaced the following memorable lines among many: 'To be weak is miserable/Doing or suffering', 'If consequence do but approve my dream/My boat sails freely ...', 'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd ...', 'Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff!', 'Thou canst not say I did it never shake ...', 'Things at the worst will cease ...' and 'I dare do all that may become a man ...' from *Macbeth*; 'The tyrant custom, most grave senators ...', 'Man but a rush against Othello's breast ...', 'So sweet was ne'er so fatal', 'I look down towards his feet-but that's a fable ...' from *Othello*; 'The undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveler returns' from *Hamlet*; 'It is the east and Juliet is the sun ...' from *RJ* and, 'A Daniel come to Judgement ...', 'Thou stickest a dagger in me ...' from *Merchant*.⁴⁰ Dinabandhu's Nimchand may be considered a classic case of colonial mimicry with the radical but completely unintended potential of subverting the 'book of the Empire' (Bhabha:1996). It remained an extremely popular character in Bengali drama for a long time to come.

Quite interestingly, Girishchandra's extraordinary acting talent was also revealed with his mesmerizing role as Nimchand during the production of Dinabandhu's play by his Bagbazar Amateur Theatre in October 1869; did not have to look back thereafter (Gangopadhyay:1977, 54–55). He continued to play the character to such perfection that in one such performance, informs Kironmoy Raha (1978, 62), the playwright himself was reported to have said to Girishchandra: 'I am sure Nimchand had been created for you alone; but for you the play could not have been acted at all'.

Hailing from a reasonably rich family in North Calcutta, Girishchandra was admitted in the famous Oriental Seminary after completing his local school, and went to Hare School after two years, but could not really have any organized higher learning as he lost both the parents and his elder brother by the time he reached 11. Curiously, as his biographer Abinashchandra Gangopadhyay (1977) informs us, Girishchandra had tremendous love for the Indian epics, ancient and mediaeval literature. He used to have an instinctive inclination for Indian folks, *half-akhrai*, *kathakatha*, and especially *jatra* which

were quite frequent in his north Calcutta locality owing to the patronage of the wealthy people (Raha 61). Conventional (colonial) pedagogic education did not really attract him. He had an uncanny ability of delving deep into the essence of any subject/book he used to lay his hands on. Girishchandra's self-styled engagement with English literary studies was driven partly by the demands of the time and partly out of his passion for literature. Interestingly, he used to buy himself some excellent books of English literature with the money he had got in the form of 'dowry'. At times he used to remain completely engrossed with them till he could reach their bottom (Gangopadhyay, 34). Without any doubt, Shakespeare had figured in the list, and Girishchandra's deep attraction for the Bard was evident in his attempt to translate his sonnet 'Go rose' as a Bengali song quite early in life (Gangopadhyay, 40). His critical appreciations for western dramas, especially of Shakespeare, however, started unfolding when he became close to famous American actress Mrs. G.B.W. Lewis (of Lewis Theatre Royal) during his job as an assistant bookkeeper in the company of another American, John Atkins, from 1867. Inspired by his long and astonishing conversations with Mrs. Lewis he started translating *Macbeth*, the manuscript of which was unfortunately lost after the company was wound up owing to internal feuds, though the memory of it had helped him accomplish his 'Macbeth' in 1893 (Gangopadhyay, 93–95).

Girishchandra's acting career began, as suggested already, with the formation of Bagbazar Amateur Theatre in the company of some of his friends and with the performance of Madhusudan's *Sharmistha* in 1867 which, incidentally, turned out to be a great year for Bengali drama with as many as nine different plays being successfully staged (Gangopadhyay, 48). For the next one decade or so the principal challenge before him as an actor/director/producer was how to negotiate with the two evidently incongruous dramatic trends: the increasing European/Shakespearean influence and affectionate indigenous tradition. He started experimenting by incorporating song/dances of the popular melodramatic or *jatra* legacy in Madhusudan's highly westernized *Sharmistha*. In fact, like his illustrious predecessor, he, too, was acutely aware that mere Sanskrit dramatics would not really satisfy the appetite of middle-class Bengalis. The rising nationalist sentiments—both the liberal and conservative—as discussed above, on the other hand, would demand infusion of themes with local/Indian flavours. That the nationalist trends started flowing fast in theatre can be ascertained from the recollection of a contemporary fellow thespian and friend, Amritalal Basu, of a brief performance of a play *Bharatmata* ('Mother India') at the National Theatre in January–February 1873:

During this time people in the city (Calcutta) were gradually drawn to another subject: love for your country and its freedom. In their speeches delivered by Nabagopal (Mitra) and Manomohan Basu in the Hindu

festivals organized by ‘National Nabagopal’ (Mitra), these issues used to be discussed. Hemchnadra’s *Bharat Sangeet* was very fresh then, and Satyendranath Tagore had newly composed the song, “malin mukhach-nadrama bharat tomari” (‘O India! Your pale face!’). In such an auspicious time, we had performed a short poetic drama *Bharatmata* which was greatly appreciated by people in general. *Later, the demand for those few songs in the play increased so much that the day it was not supposed to be performed we had to put out ‘Bharat-Sangeet’ at the end of a placard for the advertisement to appease the audience...*

(quoted in Gangopadhyay, 83, emphasis added, translated)

The passage unmistakably points at people’s perceptions about the role of theatre in complementing the rising nationalist fervour. Curiously, ‘in reproducing and acting out dramas of colonial exploitation and domination’, as argued brilliantly by Nandi Bhatia (2004, 2), ‘theatre had become an invigorating arena of anti-colonial cultural resistance’ and nationalist struggles. This could remain one of the reasons that uncritical or unimaginative reworking of Shakespearean plays, including the one by Hemchandra, did not really do well in theatre. On the other hand, plots taken from contemporary politics, Indian mythologies, *puranas*, or epics and even slapstick comedies/farces capturing socio-economic realities, albeit in the Shakespearean form, were box office hits. The stage success of *Sharmistha* or *Krishnakumari* and *Neel Darpan* or *Sadhabar Ekadoshi* bears ample testimonies to that effect. Classic example of a humongous failure was, again, Girishchandra’s own near faithful translation of *Macbeth* and its stupendous dramaturgy so very close to the original; the audience rejected both, as discussed later. Plays capturing prevalent social conditions, especially the colonial maladministration resulting in starvation, famines, and misery of the poor and downtrodden even within the confines of the metropolis, started turning out to be so successful in moving public anger against the Raj, that the colonial government had to bring in a censorship law to restrain such ‘incendiary’ dramatic performances. Claire Pamment (2009) has meticulously listed and discussed the plays whose serial performances, particularly in the Great National Theatre, triggered the enactment of the Dramatic Performance Regulation Act of 1876. Apart from obvious *Indigo Mirror*, her list includes lesser known *Tea Planters’ Mirror* (*Chakar Darpan* 1875) by Dakshina Charan Chattopadhyay, farces like *Surendra-Binodini* (1875), *Gajadananda and the Prince* (1876) and *Police of Pig and Sheep* (1876) by Upendranath Das, a friend and fellow actor of Girishchandra for long. The last two being the most radical ones, Pamment (Ibid., 233) shows how the plays ‘reveal a playful indictment of the British colonial character in portrayals that range from benevolent missionaries, swindlers, rapists, lusty princes, and monkeys, to pigs and sheep’. The

British government intended to perpetuate colonial hegemony, she goes on, in active collaboration ‘with a Brahmin and Indian elite and in so doing deflected the native gaze away from its own representations, whereby what was political was branded “obscene” and resistance to the colonial “other” was forced into self-abnegation’ (Ibid.).

While relying on Pamment’s argument on the censorship law and the colonial surveillance on the native dramatic performances, I wish to provide an important addendum to it: peeling off the subversive or political from the plays ironically culminated in an extraordinary sense of nationalist rejuvenation through dramatization of otherwise innocuous narratives taken from Indian mythologies, *puranas*, or folklore. Who better than Girishchandra himself? Incidentally, he turned to writing plays for the first time a year after the enactment of the Dramatic Performance Act. His *Agomoni* (“The Arrival of the Deity”, 29 September 1877) and *Akalbodhon* (“The Premature Rousing of the Deity”, 3 October 1877), both though immature dance dramas written and staged on the National Theatre to celebrate the popular Durga festival of the year, had tremendous positive response from the audience for a year or so. After experimenting with a few lesser-known unsuccessful plays like *Mayataru* (“Magic Tree”, 22 January 1881) or fictionalized history play *Anand Raho* (“Be Merry”, 21 May 1881) Girishchandra came up with his first major dramatic venture *Rabon Badh* [‘The Slaying of Ravana’] on 30 July 1881 at the National. Amritalal Basu being a part of the production recalled later:

The day *Rabon Badh* was staged we were extremely anxious whether the puranic play would do well. But during the performance (of critical scenes involving Ravana, Ram, Lakshman, Bibhshan and Sughrub), the way entire audience started cheering us, we became confident that the play would run. *We were reassured that devout Bengalis had not forgotten their own world—the play had struck a chord with the God-fearing nation.*

(quoted in Gangopadhyay, 155–156, emphasis added, translated)

The unprecedented success of the play opened the floodgates for many such plays; the next decade or so witnessed the rollercoaster journey of an incredibly productive playwright adopting themes from Indian myths, puranas, and folklore.⁴¹ He followed them up with character plays based on the famous mediaeval legend Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu; first one *Chaitanya Leela* on 2 August 1884 was, incidentally, attended by his future spiritual mentor and the cult figure of religious eclecticism Shri Ramakrishna at the Star. *Buddhadev Charit* (On Lord Buddha, 19 September 1885) was adapted from the famous poem *Light of Asia* by renowned orientalist Edwin Arnold, who was stunned to praise Girishchandra: ‘The proprietors of theatre in Britain might have mocked

at the theatre of Bengal; but they would be certainly impressed by the enactment of deep-rooted philosophy and the clever improvisations of the actor on stage' (Ibid., 214). The superlative *Billamangal Thakur* (12 June 1886), based on the neo-Vaisanava movement and inspired by certain comic stories about asceticism narrated by his newly found guru Sri Ramakrishna, exposed the fake monks and upheld the value of real renunciation. '*Billamangal* has gone beyond Shakespeare', maintained his friend and future great Swami Vivekananda, 'I have not read any such great philosophical play ever' (quoted in Ibid., 215, translated). Barring a few topical social plays like *Prafulla* (27 April 1889) and *Haranidhi* (8 September 1890), the predominant trend in Girishchandra's dramatic oeuvre remained focused on the revival of India's ancient glories through the enactment of those highly popular religious narratives on the stage. It is amazing to note how he could cast those exclusive Indian themes in a perfect blend of European and indigenous dramaturgies; the Shakespearean framework was merged with the local *jatra* tradition with fine finesse. The trend remained in vogue even a century later in parts of rural India. The plays with overtly pious themes doing tremendously well to capture people's imagination for nearly a decade were undoubtedly supplementing the narrative of Hindu nationalism and defiance against colonialism. As a matter of fact, 'as part of cultural institutions that play significant role in mobilizing the populace toward political activism', Bhatia (2004, 2) contends, theatre in colonial India had 'consistently participated in providing possibilities for resistance to and reassessment of ruling ideologies through multiple methods of engagement ranging from mythology, folk forms, reenactment of oppressed histories, revival of histories ...'. Quite ironically, therefore, the repressive intent of the Act censoring the subversive potentials of the grotesquely social or dangerously political in plays with direct/indirect anti-colonial themes gave birth to a new sense of nationalist revivalism on stage: theatre, as it were, turned out to be a dynamic site for people to relive/reimagine past Indian glories, share common values, and a much favoured space for cultural nationalism to take off.

Coming back to Girishchandra's engagement with the Bard the most mature and intense period began during this point in time with plays on social and historical themes. Plays like *Prafulla* and *Haranidhi* dealing with the disastrous consequences of alcoholism were directly influenced by Shakespeare. The tragic end of the protagonist Jogesh in the first play performed by his famous disciple Amritalal Mitra (the Star in May 1889) was a fine amalgamation of Macbeth's fatal ambition, Lear's fatherly weakness, Othello's monomaniac jealousy, and Antony's unbridled passion. It had moved the contemporary audience so much that *The Statesman* carried positive reviews for three consecutive days (Gangopadhyay, 243). The success of this play led him to write/stage the

other play in August of the same year, whereby the unbridgeable gap between means and desire leading to plight of the acquisitive Bengali middle-class family had been dramatized in the framework of a serious Shakespearean drama. At one end of the spectrum is the generous protagonist Harish who is pitted against the self-serving opportunist Mohinimohan, in many ways a reincarnation of Iago, for whom wealth is the only desired end of life. However, unlike the Shakespearean tragedy, Girishchandra could give a remarkable twist to the Machiavellian character and transform him into an affectionate father. Finally, *Haranidhi* enforces a comic end to the delight of the Bengali middle-class audience.

Next in line was Girishchandra's most ambitious project on Shakespeare, a near faithful translation of *Macbeth*, following its extraordinary enactment using almost authentic versions of early 17th-century Jacobean stage properties and dramatic techniques. The first performance of Bengali *Macbeth* was occasioned for the opening of Minerva Theatre on 28 January 1893 and the advertisement circulated to that effect went like this⁴²:

OPENING NIGHT
 THE MINARVA THEATRE
 6 BEADON STREET
 Saturday, the 28th January at 9 P.M.
 Shakespeare in Bengali
 MACBETH
 I have got the piece mounted by European
 Artists and dressed it under European
 Supervision and make-up by J. Pimm.
 ... G.C. Ghosh
 Manager

This *Macbeth* in Bengali was staged with much fanfare and expectations from the following glowing cast, with the doyen himself playing the eponymous hero and his famous old friend Ardhendu Mustafi in multiple cameos (Gangopadhyay, 265–266):

Duncan-----Pundit Haribhushan Bhattacharya
 Malcom-----Mr. Surendranath Ghosh (Danibabu)

Donailban-----	Mr. Nikhilendrkrishna Deb
Macbeth-----	Girishchandra Ghosh
Banco-----	Mr. Kumudnath Sarkar
Macduff and Hecate-----	Mr. Aghornath Pathak
Lenox-----	Mr. Binodbihari Som (Padbabu)
Ross-----	Mr. Krishnalal Chakraborty
Menteth, 3rd Witch and 3rd Murderer----	Mr. Nibaranchandra Mukhopadhyay
Angus-----	Mr. Anukulchandra Batobyal
Carthness, 2nd Murderer and wounded soldier---	Mr. Chunilal Deb
Fleance-----	Mrs. Kusumkumari
Old Siward-----	Mr. Thakurdas Chattopadhyay
Young Siward and 2nd Witch-----	Mr. Nilmani Ghosh
Sayton-----	Mr. Nandahari Bhattacharya
1st Witch, Porter, 1st Murderer, Old Man and Doctor---	Ardhendu Mustafi
Two Messengers-----	Mr. Manikalal Bhattacharya & Tituram Das
Macduff's son-----	Miss Chayankumari
Lady Macbeth-----	Mrs. Tinkari Dasi
Lady Macduff-----	Mrs. Pramodasundari
Waiting women-----	Mrs. Harimoti and others ⁴³

Following reports carried in the reputed dailies of the time confirm that the performance was spotless (Bhattacharya:1974, 31):

The representation of Macbeth in the Minerva Theatre on Saturday last, as opening piece marks a new departure from the dramatic history of Bengal ... Girish Chunder Ghose, the father of modern stage of Bengal had the whole of the work under his under his personal supervision, commencing with translation of the masterpiece including the scenery and dresses which were as correct and effective as might be desired. The success of the play became therefore a foregone conclusion when Babu Girish Chunder Ghose undertook the leading character ...
(*The Hindu Patriot*, 30 January 1893)

... There were flashes of histrionic talents in the display of Macbeth's character, while Lady Macbeth must have made an impression on the assembly.

(*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 30 January 1893)

A Bengali Thane of Cowder is a living suggestion of incongruity but the reality is an astonishing reproduction of the standard convention of the English stage.

(*The Englishman*, 8 February 1893)

Accolades started pouring in from the elite and higher-ups. It was the most excellent translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, found famous editor of *Indian Nation* magazine and the then principal of Metropolitan Institution Mr. N. Ghosh (Gangopadhyay, 267). Two noted sitting judges of the Calcutta High Court, Chandra Madhob Ghosh and Gurudas Banerjee, along with two renowned barristers, K.G. Gupta and P.L. Roy, were later reported to have commented: 'To translate the inimitable language of Shakespeare was a task of no ordinary difficulty; but Babu Girish Chandra Ghose has performed that difficult task very creditably on the whole, and his translation is in many places quite worthy of the original' (Ibid.). It is well-known that this highly glamorous 'Shakespeare in Bengali', nonetheless, could not appeal to a larger audience.⁴³ Its massive box office failure prompted the playwright write to his friend acknowledging his mistake as also taking potshots at the general theatre going public:

You see, most of the people come (to theatre) to *watch dance and listen to songs*. Very few come to see the play in the theatre; this play (his *Macbeth*) has become suitable only to few specially educated persons and *not to the general public*.

(quoted in Bhattacharya:1974, 31, emphasis added, translated)

Why did, then, this 'astonishing reproduction' of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* fail to capture the imagination of the middle-class theatregoers of the time? Is it only because it was not a 'folk' or 'desi' Shakespeare? (Trivedi:2005, 153) Or, as it has similarly been argued by Trivedi's co-editor Dennis Bartholomeusz (Ibid., 205) that, despite adding songs to the original, Girishchandra failed to localize the play except in translating it, and 'the standard convention of the Highland landscapes of Scotland, the Scottish medieval sets and costumes, clashed with the Bengali text'. The amazingly faithful translation could not only successfully make the translator remain invisible, as Lawrence Venuti (1993) would like to theorize, but loyalty continued even in the performance, its stagecraft, and manners as well. As a result, it turns out, ironically, to be a largescale 'foreignizing' attempt

rejected by the Bengali audience in general. While I completely concur with both Trivedi and Bartholomeusz in gauging the technical reasons behind the failure of a 'videshi Shakespeare' (foreign Shakespeare), there might have been other important factors behind such an amazing flop on the stage. The mood and spirit of the late-19th century Calcutta audience, who by then had already become sufficiently soaked into not just localized Shakespeare but desi *Macbeths* (local Macbeths) as well.⁴⁴ The second important reason has already been elaborated earlier: popularization of nationalist sentiment among the educated Bengali *bhadralok*, constituting the major share of the theatre public. The theatre since the mid-1880s started driving towards national self-awakening, either by way of demonstrating direct dissent against the colonial government or by enacting ancient glories, myths, or folk tales. On a different but related front, this was the time when the undisputed nationalist writer Bankimchandra, through his most controversial political novel *Anandamoth* (1882) following with *Devi Chowdhurani* (1884) and *Sita-Ram* (1887), had reawakened a section of the Hindu Bengalis to what is often defined as Hindu nationalism. Interestingly, the first major 'adaptation' of *Macbeth* as *Rudrapal Natak* (1874) by Haralal Roy did quite well on stage, argues Abhishek Sarkar (2016), owing largely to its incorporation of obvious Hindu sentiment even while portraying the witches as Bhairovi (an avatar of Goddess Kali).

As a matter of fact, since the early 1890s, the intensity of Bengali engagement in directly translating/adapting Shakespeare started to come down in comparison with the earlier two decades and so was the popularity of the performances of such recreations. Simultaneously, plot of the plays taken from 'nationalist' narratives started to increase, prompting Girishchandra to come back to his original 'track' after the *Macbeth* disaster. He wrote/produced an otherwise insignificant farce like *Abu Hoshein* in the same year (25 March), popularity of which, ironically, compensated the huge loss he had to incur for his lavish production of the Bard's sublime tragedy. *Jona* (23 December 1893), then, successfully blending the *Ashvamedha* (horse-sacrificing altar in Vedic rituals to protect the sovereignty of a state) in the *Mahabharata* with European dramatic tradition. This also explains Girishchandra's frustration against the 'untrained' (in Shakespearean dramaturgy) spectators and the abandonment of his intended projects of translating the other great tragedies by Shakespeare (Ganguly, 267). However, and this is quite astonishing, though the Shakespearean plots might not have done as good as the indigenous ones, the framework of his tragedy, the incorporation of bombastic scenes, and the enactment of violence supinely blended with the typical *jatra* form continued to mesmerize the same Bengali audience for a long time to come. And it became so regularly common that even Rabindranath could not avert

its influence in his initial plays, though soon started creating his own niche, discussed in the next chapter. In fact, Purnachandra Basu, as we shall see, too, was extremely critical of such European dramas dealing with mindless violence on stage, and it must, according to him, be rejected in favour of sobriety of Indian classical drama.

Be that as it may, the imbuement of direct nationalist sentiments that Girishchandra had achieved in theatre with a piecemeal performance of *Bharatmata* in the early 1870s came back with more rigour since the turn of the 20th century. The first performed was *Satnam* (30 April 1904), a contentious dramatization of the well-known Satnam uprising and its crushing defeat at the hands of repressive Mughal ruler Aurangzeb in 1672. Taken from the history of the peasant movement as captured in Elphinstone's *History of India*, the play had apparently painted the puritan Muslim ruler and its followers in poor light. The staging of the narrative provoked many Muslim leaders to brand Girishchandra as communal, and the fourth performance of the play (21 May 1904) had to be abandoned midway after vehement objection from a few of them. The timing of its production could not have been more ominous, as the entire province was plunging against the colonial government under Curzon for his bid to partition the province on a communal line, with some of the Muslim leaders from the eastern parts gradually turning in favour of the decision.⁴⁵ And yet, one amazes at the level of tolerance and generosity on the part of the playwright; he rewrote the play after patiently listening and noting the objections, and thereby issued a highly sensitive though extremely balanced statement reconfirming his deep regards to the Muslim brothers:

The playwright nurtures immense respect for the Muslims, and that he believes, they are bestowed with all those qualities which the Hindus should idealize. Hindus and Muslims are now habitants of Hindustan, share its happiness and sorrow. Hence, history of conflicts howsoever had occurred between Hindus and Muslims in the past, must not anger any community. Rather, such revisits to history can amend mistakes from both communities ...

(quoted in Bhattacharya:1974, 26, translated)

And, if such reasoned utterances were not adequate to dilute the charge of Hindu chauvinism in Girishchandra, the last three major historical plays of his life, namely, *Siraj-ud-Dowla* (9 September 1905), *Mir Kasem* (16 June 1906), and *Chhatrapoti Shivaji* (26 August 1907), might say it all. The first one was performed at the most impassioned period of the resistance against the Partition of Bengal, leading to its proclamation on 16 October 1905. Quite interestingly, appropriated from Shakespearean characterization of Richard II, the moving portrayal of Siraj and its

stupendous enactment by the playwright's talented son (Surendranath Ghosh), had changed the popular perception of the last independent ruler of Bengal as an immature, arrogant, debauched Mughal. The enactment of the Plassey, the conspiracy by the British and betrayal from his own, leading to the cession of the last independent bastion in Bengal, had immediately struck a chord with the bruised Bengalis for the failure of the anti-partition agitations. A nationalist of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's stature watched one such performance and personally met Girishchandra to praise the work. Accolades also came from another great nationalist writer, Nabinchandra Sen, famed for his own epic poem *Palashir Juddha* ('The Battle of Plassey', 1875): 'You are more powerful than me, more fortunate. When I wrote *The Battle of Plassey* we had the only option of portraying Siraj as an adversary. May God bless you with long life for bringing glories in Bengali literature' (Gangopadhyay, 369 translated). Following the same historical narrative after Siraj's defeat, *Mir Kasem* was written and its execution might have been distantly influenced by *Julius Caser*. Surendranath, playing the lead role, continued to mesmerize the audience for consecutively seven months with the major dailies like *Bangalee* and *Statesman* providing favourable critical opinions of the play, the most significant being a review in Bengali *Basumati* of June 1906:

... We have read in history books that Mir Kasem was a benevolent ruler, did not want to remain a puppet in the hands of the British, and hence, raised a battle against them, got defeated by them; at last lost everything and died like a homeless orphan. Only Girishbabu could have created such a phenomenal and sublime play out of such a mere skeleton of a story.

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 376–377, translated).

The last of the trilogy dramatized on the very famous Maratha warrior Shivaji was performed at the Minarva with one of the best actors of the time Amarendranath Dutta in the lead. Like the first two it continued to run in theatres for months, grabbing the attention of all the major dailies and common people of Bengal during the crucial period of the Indian national movement and when the Congress was gradually breaking into two factions, the Moderates and Extremists. The towering nationalist of the time S.N. Banerjee had applauded the play as 'one of the best and most powerful dramas ever produced on the Indian stage' (*Ibid.*, 382). Excitement and emotive attachment of the people with the play can be gauged from the following report by *The Statesman* on 17 November 1907:

The popularity of Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh's 'Chhatrapati' which deals with some of the striking incidents in the life of Shivaji, is manifest

from the large audiences which are attracted to the Minarva Theatre on every occasion that this thrilling play is billed. *Though it has been running for about ten weeks now the large auditorium was crammed in every part and early in the evening the sale of tickets had to be stopped, the large overflow helping to fill the adjacent play houses.*

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 383, emphasis added)

The scene glaringly typifies what Bhatia (2004, 3) has so astutely captured as the ‘forgotten stories of powerful theatrical resistance’, the ‘experiences and voices of those visibly engaged’ mass and/or ‘subalterns’, ‘in dismantling the exercise of power at national, regional and local levels’. Six years later (January 1911) the colonial government enforcing the old repressive law of 1876 to prohibit circulation of all the three plays in any form whatsoever, ironically, attests to their rising popularity and the role of theatre ‘as a powerful tool of political engagement’ in rousing mass nationalist sentiment for long (*Ibid.*). Such panicked reactions from the ruler, however, could not neutralize the intended purpose of the native articulations, as by then, Indian nationalism had already got a settled narrative howsoever divided at times, but all gradually throwing themselves for the liberation of their motherland in their own ways. The repercussions of the anti-Partition Movement at the turn of the century, maintains the historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2011), were so huge and diverse that the British could not really completely overcome them till the end of the Raj. Sumit Sarkar (1973), on the other hand, has gone to the extent of attributing the leadership of this movement to the intelligentsia and writers/thinkers of the time, with none other than Rabindranath Tagore, for him, emerging as the glue for the mass agitation. One of the general purposes of this book has been to boldly blend mimetic art or literature with the formation of nationalist discourse in India, which, as this chapter has discussed, had started having a structured beginning since the 1870s. During the first few decades of the last century when nationalism had become a *mantra* in India, both language and literature on whose back it had risen became fully ripe to assert itself with more vigour and less dependence on foreign ingredients. The premonition about possible annihilation of Bengali implicit in Ramnidhi Gupta’s emotive poetic utterance in the epigraph of this chapter, fortunately, did not come true.

Notes

- 1 Taken from Ramnidhi Gupta’s short lyric, ‘Swadeshi Bhasha’ in Bengali (‘Language of My Country’). The original Bengali lines are:

*Nanan deshe nanan bhasha,
Bina swadeshiyo bhasha, pure ki asha*

*Kata nadi sarobar, kiba fal chatakir,
Dhara jal bine kabhu ghuche ki trisha?*

(Quoted in Gangopadhyay:1977, p. 33, op. cit.)

- 2 Ramnidhi Gupta (1741–1839) was well-versed in English even as early as 1762 and served the East India Company briefly; however, he dedicated himself to the cause of his mother tongue and deliberately composed his extremely popular lyrics in the Bengali language.
- 3 For the entire preface and a detailed discussion on Harachandra’s adaptation see Sayantan Roy Moulick and Sandip Debanth, “‘Murmuring Your Praise’: Shakespearean Echoes in Early Bengali Drama’, in Panja & Moitra Saraf, eds. (2016), pp. 156–162, op. cit.
- 4 Cartelli mentions various kinds of appropriation. Ascribing a completely new meaning or opposing/alternative political/social agenda to a prevailing Shakespearean text is classified as *confrontational* appropriation, with Aime Cesaire’s *A Tempest* being a pioneering instance. Transpositional appropriation is less directly confrontational ‘which identifies and isolates a specific theme, plot, or argument in its appropriative objective and brings into its own, arguably analogous, interpretive field to underwrite or enrich a presumably related thesis or argument’; George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* has been cited as one such endeavour. Cartelli then defines *proprietary* appropriations (like Percy Mackaye’s 1916 masque, *Caliban by the Yellow Sand*) as an ‘avowedly friendly or reverential reading’ of the appropriated, and *dialogic* appropriative mode (i.e., Aphra Behn’s 1688 prose fiction, *Oroonoko*), involving ‘the careful integration into a work of allusions, identifications, and quotations that complicate, ‘thicken’, and qualify that work’s primary narrative line to the extent that each partner to the transaction may be said to enter into other’s frame of reference’ (1999, 18). See Cartelli (1999), pp. 17–19, op. cit.
- 5 An untoward incident occurred in the evening of 14 May 2019, involving an unruly mob desecrating Vidyasagar’s bust in a noted central Calcutta college (named after him) at an election rally held by the then National President of Bharatiya Janta Party (the present Home Minister of India) during the last parliamentary elections. Nearly for a week every media in India held a series of debates between the rival politicians, blaming each other for disgracing the great man, with none other than the Prime Minister coming up with the promise of a huge indemnification of a gold-bronze bust to be erected in that place. Beneath such unwarranted tirades what also brought to the fore was the value of this forgotten hero and how contemporary popular discourses started to flow relating to his humongous benefactions to India’s rise as a nation.
- 6 Considering my own personal journey to the metropolis from a remote village in the same underdeveloped region of Bengal in the present century, I cannot help but get struck with awe in fathoming how a poor boy from about 130 km away from Calcutta could come to the city and do what he did in those days.
- 7 See Shambhuchandra Bandopadhyay (1914), pp. 25–53, op. cit.
- 8 Tagore (Ibid., 773) quotes Vidyasagar’s younger brother Shambhuchandra on this visit of the government officer to their residence:

My mother remained seated with the Sahib to look after him when he was taking lunch. The Sahib was deeply astonished to find how an old Hindu woman was trying to converse with him from her chair ... The Sahib out of reverence fell before her feet like a Hindu show regards to an elderly. Then the conversation

went on stray subjects. Despite being an old Hindu lady my mother was a true liberal, modern and without any superstitious inhibitions. She used to bear the same disposition with everyone whether they were rich or poor, educated or not and irrespective of their gender, caste or religion. (translated)

- 9 Asok Sen (1977) quotes Macaulay's speech in the House of Commons on 10 July 1833 locating the ultimate goal of English education: 'The mere extent of empire is not necessarily an advantage. To many governments it has been cumbersome; to some it has been fatal It would be, on the most selfish view of the case, far better for us that the people of India were well-governed and independent of us than ill-governed and subject to us; that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broadcloth, and working with our cutlery, than that they were performing their salaams to English collectors and English magistrates, but were too ignorant to value, or too poor to buy English manufacturers'. See Sen (1977), p. 4, op. cit.
- 10 For 60 such widow marriages, Vidyasagar had to incur a total expenditure of Rs. 82,000/—in those days, with nearly Rs. 50,000/—of the sum as debts. See Sen (1977), p. 60, op. cit.
- 11 They include the likes of Durgacharanan Banerjee, Neelmadhab Mukhopadhyay, Shyamacharan Sarkar, Ramratan Mukharjee, Rajnarayan Gupta, Anandakrishna Basu, Amritalal Mitra, and Srinath Ghosh. See Bandopadhyay (1970), pp. 39–41, op. cit.
- 12 In the preface to the first edition of *Biographies (Jiboncharit)* he strongly recommended this book for the students. Two years later, while publishing the second edition, he wrote that despite his doubts about acceptance of his book the first edition was sold out in six months, prompting him publish the second one. See *Vidyasagar Rachanabali I* (2013), pp. 195–196, op. cit.
- 13 For the proto-feminist argument in Vidyasagar see Sen (2021), pp. 161–163, op. cit.
For 'the greatest human act of my life' see Vidyasagar's letter to his brother Shabhuchandra dated 17 August (31 Shrabon 1866) in *Rachanabali II*, p. 582, op. cit.
- 14 We may be, here, reminded of the fact that narrativizing of plays/poetry had remained his favourite forte since his first major 'translation' of Kalidas's play *Abhijanasakuntala* as 'Sakuntala' or 'Sitar Vanabas' ('Exile of Sita') both being extremely successful narratives when India had yet to produce its first novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1859) by Payerichand Mitra.
- 15 See Ramkrishna Bhattacharya's *Unish Shatake Nastikata: Vidyasagar o Anyanyo Baktitwa* ('Agnosticism in 19th Century: Vidyasagar and Others'), Ranasrij, October 2019, Calcutta.
- 16 Hatcher seems to have given more emphasis to the very popular 1970 Bengali filmic appropriation of *Bhrantibilas* and taken the name of one of the central characters wrong.
- 17 Such an unfazed domestication of the colonial writer may be promisingly considered as an attempt at the provincialization of an international literary giant and the derivatives of capitalist modernity transmitted through him.
See Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press. Chakrabarty offers a critique of western social science in explaining the historical experience of modernity in South Asia by not necessarily rejecting the European Enlightenment as a whole but by arguing in favour of renewing European thought from and for the margins, whereby diverse histories of human beings

and belonging can have a place for themselves. It may be considered as an attempt to pluralize and self-understand capitalist modernity by way of translating it and the existing world order and thought.

- 18 That *Bhrantibilas* added further ammunition to the improvement/simplification of Bengali prose, for which Vidyasagar was gratefully credited by none other than the best narrator of the century Bankimchandra. He was quoted saying to another brother and biographer of Vidyasagar, Chandicharan Bandopadhyay, ‘The Bengali language constructed and structured by Vidyasagar is our principal capital. We are only cultivating the property acquired by him.’ See Chandicharan Bandopadhyay (1895), p. 187, op. cit.

- 19 See Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics and Praxis*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Walter Mignolo critiques the hegemony of western knowledge industries and their claim to universality and offers instead a set of ‘pluriversal’ approaches to understanding the coexisting epistemologies and practices of the different worlds, a co-habitation of both western and non-western thoughts in a mutually conclusive intent rather than monopolization of the western as has been the case for centuries.

- 20 See Tagore’s *Vidyasagar Charit* in Bengali (‘A Short Biosketch of Vidyasagar’), in *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1986, 779), whereby he reverentially attributes an immense degree of sixth sense to Vidyasagar (*kandogyan*) in understanding the prevalent world order of colonial modernity and without rejecting the same made it suitably co-habit with his traditional knowledge of Indian scripture and philosophy.

- 21 Madhusudan Dutta, the great poet and a close friend of Vidyasagar, had placed this tribute to him (Sen:1977, 39).

Tagore, too, had described him in a similar, if not more glowing, eulogy in his biosketch of Vidyasagar as a ‘rebel without a soldier ... who could carry the scepter of victory alone on his shoulder to the margins of human battlefield ... we are miles away from the realms of his consciousness and thought ...’. See *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1986), vol. II, p. 786, op. cit.

- 22 Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827–1994) was the then editor of the gazette, under whose instance *Bharat-Sangeet* was published. See Chaudhuri (2005), pp. 223–224, op. cit., for a detailed analysis of the controversy.

- 23 After its publication in 1861 when Michael’s *Meghnadbadh Kavya* (‘A Poem on the Slaying of Meghnad’) was receiving a bout of critical onslaughts for its unique style, complexity of form, and reversal of the mythical Rama narrative, Hemchandra chose to defend his friend in a critical foreword of the poem in July 1862, making it more acceptable to contemporary readers. See Hemchandra’s *Meghnadbadh Kavyer Mukhabandha* (‘A Foreword to the Poem of Slaying of Meghnad’), in Sajnikanta Das, ed. (1954), *Bibidha: Hemchandra* in Bengali (‘Miscellaneous Writings of Hemchandra’), Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.

- 24 Rosinka Chaudhuri (2002) has elaborately discussed how the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ had generated negative reactions, especially among the educated middle-class Bengalis for its violent turn; they even supported the British under Lord Canning for his ruthless massacre, public executions, and punishment to the natives. She cites the famous future radical nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal’s recollection of the ‘murderous horde’ much later in his autobiography *Memories of My Life and Times* (1932).

Incidentally, it was V.D. Savarkar’s book *The Indian War of Independence 1857* which was first to consider the Sepoy Rebellion as the First War of Independence in 1909. See Chaudhuri (2002), pp. 128–131, op. cit.

- 25 Dinabandhu Mitra's extremely popular play *Neel Darpan* (1861, 'Indigo Mirror'), discussed briefly in this chapter, had expansively captured such sentiment.
- 26 The following lines from *Padmini Upakhyān* may be considered Rangalal's ode to freedom, remained highly popular among the middle-class Bengalis:

swadhinata heenatay ke banchite chai hey?	Who wants to live without freedom?
ke banchite chai?	Who wants to live?
dasatwa shrinkkal balo ke poribe pai he?	Who wants to chain his legs with slavery?
ke poribe pai?	Who wants to chain?
Kotikalpo das thaka naraker prai he, Naraker prai,	It's like a hell to have crores of slaves, It's like hell,
Dineker swadhinata swargasukh tai hey, Swargasukh tai.	Even a day's freedom is like heaven,

- 27 I would depend on the wonderful paper by Chaudhuri (2005) for the analysis of Hemchandra's poetic nationalism and the nationalist thought in general, without, of course, agreeing with the sweeping argument that it was a sectarian, if not communally driven, nationalism that these important early writers were trying to propagate. See Chaudhuri (2005) op.cit.
- 28 Rajnarayan Basu's crucial early nationalist document could be accessed at https://www.midnapore.in/people/trishi_rajnarayan_basu_prospectus_of_society.html.
- 29 See Partha Chatterjee (1986), 'Introduction' to *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* pp. 1-35, op. cit.
- 30 The first Indian to pass the Indian Civil Services (1863), Satyendranath Tagore (1842-1923), who remained a great enthusiast of the fair since the second session, composed a song, *mile sabe Bharat santanlektan mon-pran/gaho Bharater jashogaan ... hok Bharater joy, joy Bharater joy, gao bhrater joy ...* ('Unite all children of Bharat/ In heart and mind/Sing panegyric of Bharat/ ... Victory to Bharat, victory Bharat, sing victory to Bharat').
The widely available Bengali song is mentioned in Prasanta Kumar Pal (1984), p. 84, op. cit.
- 31 Hemchandra comes from the family of well-respected Rudraram Chakraborty, which was also hailed by the famous future nationalist Surendranath Banerjee.
- 32 See Ghosh (1920), p. 67.
Hemchandra was deeply influenced by the Professor of History and Economics, Mr. E.B. Cowel, who joined the college in 1856, as also by the principal Mr. L. Clint. See Ghosh (1920), pp. 97-98, op. cit.
- 33 Akkhay Chandra Sarkar (1911, 47-48) in his short biosketch of Hemchandra, *Kavi Hemchandra* accused him of unthoughtfully imitating/copying English writers like Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow. See Akkhaychandra Sarkar (1911), *Kavi Hemchandra*, Calcutta: Bangiyo Sahita Parishad.
- 34 Thomas Cartelli's (1999) 'Introduction' refers to such postcolonial readings of *Tempest* in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) by O. Mannoni, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) by George Lamming, *A Grain of Wheat* (1968) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *A Tempest* (1969) by Aime Ceasar. Cartelli, pp. 15-20, op. cit.

- 35 Gurudas Hazra, while acknowledging its source, maintained that the translation of ‘this exquisitely beautiful, charming story into pure Bengali prose’ was attempted for the benefit of readers unacquainted with English since they had, till then, remained deprived of the pleasure of Shakespeare (translated).
See Gurudas Hazra’s Introduction in Bengali to *Romeo o Juliet-er Manohar Upakhyan* [Engrossing Tale of Romeo and Juliet], which can be accessed at <https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.4704>.
Romeo and Juliet was taught in the colleges and performed serially by the educated Bengalis since the early years of English literary studies. After Gurudas Hazra it was recreated into Bengali quite a few times: Harachandra Ghose’s *Charumukh Chittahara Natak* (1864), Radhamadhob Kar’s *Basantakumari* (1870), Jogendranarayan Das Ghosh’s *Ajoy Singha o Bilasbati* (1878), and Anonymous *Romeo-Juliet* (1892) before Hemchandra’s own. See Sanatkumar Mitra (1983), op. cit.
- 36 For the entire poem, see *Kabitabali* (‘Poems of Hemchandra’), vol. I, in Bengali edited by Sajnikanta Das (Calcutta: 1953) for the complete poem, pp. 1–8.
- 37 It is quite well documented that Bengali interest for theatre had received some initial but short-lived kick-off in the hands of an adventurous Russian playwright/explorer Herasim Lebedeff. In 1795 after learning Bengali from his friend/mentor Golaknath Das, he had translated two French plays, *The Disguise* and *Love is the Best Doctor* by M. Jodrelle and Moliere, respectively, into Bengali and went on to design and erect a theatre on his own in Domtola (Domlane). Golaknath arranged Bengali actors/actresses for his ‘student’ to have the first play performed on 27 November 1795 (Mitra:1983, 25). However, the India-Russia ‘collaborative’ venture known as ‘Bengali Theatre’ saw an untimely death after Lebedeff was literally driven out of India, completely penniless owing to his ugly legal spat with the East India Company officials. But it points towards Bengali enthusiasm for theatre quite early, where, though the Bard did not have any direct role to perform, his plays being already staged by the Company officials had certainly generated such interest. We needed to wait for a few more decades to see the performance of arguably the first Bengali play, *Vidyasundar* (1831) a dramatic appropriation by Nabinchandra Basu of the beautiful poetry of the same name by Bharatchandra (Gangopadhyay:1977, 46).
- 38 See, for example, P. Guha-Thakurata’s *The Bengali Drama: Its Origin and Development*, London: 1930. Asutosh Bhattacharya’s *Bangla Natya Sahityer Itihas* (‘History of Bengali Plays’) in Bengali, Calcutta: 1960. Brajendranath Bandopadhyay’s *Bangio Natyoshalar Itihas* (‘History of Bengali Theatre’) in Bengali, Calcutta: 1961. Amal Mitra’s *Kolkatay Bideshi Theatre* (Foreign Theatre in Calcutta) in Bengali, Calcutta: 1967. Kironmoy Raha’s *Bengali Theatre: India, the Land and the People*, Calcutta: 1978. Sushil Mukharjee’s *The Story of Calcutta Theatres 1753–1980*. Calcutta: 1982. Rustom Bharucha’s *Rehearsal of Revolution: The Political Theatre of Bengal*. Honolulu: 1983. Bratya Basu’s “*Bangla Theatre: Oitijhya o Parampara*” in Bengali (“*Bengali Theatre: Tradition and Legacy*”), Apan Patha, Kolkata:2021.
- 39 Dinabandhu’s other plays with some Shakespearean influences are—comedies/farces like *Nabin Tapaswanee* (1863) or *Biye Pagla Buro* (1866), with only distant shadows of *Merry Wives of Windsor* in them; *Jamai Barik* (1872), dealing with a typical contemporary domestic problem of keeping son-in-laws at the house with shades of *Taming of the Shrew* in it. *Leelaboti* (1867), a love story of Lalit-Leelaboti, is a serious play bearing shadows of *RJ*; and in his last somber attempt before his death *Komale Kamini Natok* (1873), the portrayal

of the central protagonist Queen of Manipur Gandhari was deeply influenced by Lady Macbeth. See Mitra (1983), pp. 85–96, op. cit.

40 See Mitra (1983), pp. 90–93, op. cit., for a detailed discussion.

41 Girishchandra went on to successfully navigate with varied themes in plays like *Sitar Bibaho* (11 March 1882), *Ramer Banabas* (15 April 1882), *Sita Haran* (22 July 1882), *Sitar Banabas* (17 September 1882) taken from the *Ramayana*, and *Abhimunya Badh* (26 November 1881) and *Pandober Agyatobas* (13 January 1883) from the *Mahabharata*.

42 See D.P. Bhattacharya (1977), p. 30, op. cit.

43 For further detail on the performance and commentaries on the translation see Sen (2021), pp. 172–177, op. cit.

44 Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal Natak* (1874) and Nagendranath Basu's *Karnabir* (1886) were sufficiently indigenized recreations of *Macbeth* which worked well on stage before Girishchandra's translation of the same play. See Sarkar (2016) op.cit.

45 The British administration under Curzon could successfully dissuade the then Nawab of Dhaka Salimullah and many Muslim clerics against participating in the anti-partition agitation during its most intense phase after 1904; they were promised of a new province centred around Dhaka as a lollypop. Consequently, though most of the Muslim leaders like Abdul Rasool or Abdul Halim from the western part of Bengal opposed the partition leaders from the eastern part supported it.

See Sumit Sarkar (1989), *Modern India: 1885–1947*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, and Shekhar Bandopadhyay (2004), *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

3 Raging the Storm

Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, and *The Tempest*

Kalidasa belongs to India, Shakespeare to the world
(Hemchandra:1868)

... it would be a mere show of impudence if a person like me even engages in
judging whether this claim (about Shakespeare) is correct or unbiased
(Vidyasagar:1869)

The immortal poet of universal human nature ... the only man in the world's
literature whose works hold up a mirror to every possible phases of man's inner life.
(Bankimchandra on Shakespeare:1873)

Shakespeare could not write any play to match the excellence of *Sakuntala* (by
Kalidasa)
(Tagore:1902)

The enormously engaging 19th-century debate about supremacy of Shakespeare over Kalidasa becomes doubly riveting when we come across two of the most influential writers/thinkers of India, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore, participating in it.¹ Neither really requires any detailed introduction to the world academia: two of the most admired Indians ever; the former gets remembered through our chanting of his immortal *Vande Mataram*, India's national song, and the latter for his mesmerizing *Jana Gana Mana*, the national anthem of the country. By focusing on these two impactful nationalists of India and their conspicuously opposing responses to *Tempest*, this chapter attempts to foreground the predominant trend of the bardolatry in India on the one hand and a rare instance of resistance against it on the other. Considering the unflinching nationalist commitment of both, though distinctly different from each other at times, and the immeasurable degree of influence they continued to exert on the larger nationalist discourse in the country, their parleys on Shakespeare appeared to be intriguingly complex. That

Shakespeare was considered as the best literary gem or a universal genius was doubtless, and so was the unbridled enthusiasm of the colonial intelligentsia to compare him with Kalidasa ending inevitably with greater obeisance to the Bard. What, however, most of them were not aware of was their surreptitious intellectual/moral subordination to the colonial hegemony transmitted through Shakespeare, which ultimately provided a sense of moral legitimacy to the ‘civilizing mission’ of English colonialism. Tagore, however, in an untypical fashion, moves beyond such indiscriminate apotheosization of the Bard led by his senior pro Bankimchandra, and attempts to re-establish primacy of Indian literature and culture against colonial hegemonic invasion. In the final analysis, this chapter proceeds to trace a decolonizing discourse in Tagore, who, unlike Bankimchandra, by diminishing Shakespeare or English cultural norms transmitted through *Tempest* and upholding the Indian classical writer and the values in *Sakuntala*, refuses to be sucked into the cultural politics of British imperialism.

However, an important caveat must be added here: while judging Tagore’s insightfully anti-colonial reading of the Shakespearean play in his essay *Sakuntala*, published in October 1902, one cannot lose sight of how his long literary career continued to be determined by his diverse if not self-contradictory responses to contemporary sociopolitical changes. The point may be sufficiently clear if we meticulously underline Tagore’s own assessment of his career made towards the end of his life in a brief introduction to his *Collected Writings* (June 1939):

From quite early in my life the natural stream of my writings has uninterruptedly moved with the current of my life. They have taken various twists and turns and forms owing to the changing context and environment around me, and according to diverse and new experiences of mine. Some signature of unity among my writings may mark the interconnectedness in them. Those who investigate and study them from outside can discern it in their analysis. But the author cannot clearly recognize it. To the author what matters are those moments of creation, the seasons of flowering and fruit-gathering; this is what really touches the author’s mind. At times he feels lack of inspiration and crisis in his creativity; whatever then he finds around are the barren shoots of his past creations; and these infertile periods must be forgotten.

(*Rabindra Rachanabali*:1986, 9, translated)

By following Tagore’s river metaphor defining his creative writings, the historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2011, 7–18) has brought about a nuanced periodization of Tagore’s life and intellectual evolution into five distinct but overlapping phases: ‘the Enchanted Garden’ (1861–1890), ‘Into

the World: Tagore in the Public Sphere' (1891–1908), 'the Sage of Santiniketan' (1909–1919), 'New Directions' (1919–1930), and 'Towards the Religion of Man' (1930–1941). Any comprehensive understanding of Tagore, he goes on, ought to be achieved by trying to 'highlight on the one hand the overarching unity of his thinking and the changes that occurred in different phases of his life and work'. Considering 'Tagore's own reflections on his literary life and the historical context', Bhattacharya traces 'some major turning points, each of which marks the beginning of the five phases in Tagore's intellectual life' (Ibid., 6–7). The second phase of Tagore when he was in his 30s and 40s that I propose to largely deliberate upon in the present discussion, which, incidentally, had coincided with the most prolific period of his career, his *anus mirabilis*, whereby, he was fascinatingly imbricating his creative oeuvre and politics of the day (Mandal:2018). Another revered historian of modern India, Sumit Sarkar (2011, 43–47), while detailing the history of anti-Partition or Swadeshi movement in Bengal, goes to the extent of considering Tagore as the undisputed leader of those anti-colonial agitations occurring between 1901 and 1906:

... it is Rabindranath Tagore rather than the professional politicians who stands out as the most vivid and remarkable personality of those stirring of 1905 days—participating in the rough-and-tumble of politics as never before and after, suggesting far-reaching schemes of autonomous rural development ... bestowing with the vision of a poet a rare beauty and imaginative appeal to the whole movement through his rakhi-bandhan proposal, composing at the same time a magnificent series of patriotic songs which will surely endure even if everything else about the swadeshi movement is forgotten.

(Ibid., 47, emphasis added)

Nearly half a century ago when Sumit Sarkar was writing his book, he was spot on in anticipating the enduring life of those highly emotive patriotic songs as they continued to be sung/evoked by not just common people of India (and Bangladesh) but by statesmen/politicians cutting across boundaries.² Nepal Mazumder (1982, 153–158), too, finds a remarkable political nationalist in Tagore. As per his account, when other big nationalist leaders remained either silent or mellow in their protest against the draconian Sedition Amendment Law of 1898, Tagore delivered an impassioned speech in Bengali to the delight of the capacity crowd in the meeting organized by the National Congress. This event on 17 February 1898, according to Nepal Mazumder, marked Tagore's gradual but active entry into nationalist politics of India.³

Coming back to the anti-Partition Movement, despite its obvious but temporary failure—as the actual partition had to be revoked in 1911—Tagore's

unprecedented role in moving public sentiment was seminally recognized by the Indian National Congress, with him being unanimously nominated as the President of Bengal Provincial Congress in 1908. Curiously, Tagore had performed his new political responsibility quite well by temporarily uniting the factional Moderates and the Extremists. The events prove beyond doubt his direct role in nationalist politics, and yet, till the beginning of the present century, Tagore remained renowned mostly as a poet/writer/thinker to the world.⁴ His active nationalist politics, extraordinary political intellectualism, and anti-expansionist crusade have not really received equal attention from postcolonial historiography, notwithstanding some recent perspectives in English by Michael Collins (2012), Linn Cary Mehta (2015), Subrata Mukharjee (2020), and Bidyut Chakraborty (2021).⁵

Despite their huge significance these studies appear to be somewhat anachronistic, lay seminal emphasis on his post-*Gitanjali*/Nationalism period, when ironically, the fervent nationalist in Tagore, the undisputed leader of the anti-Partition Movement, was progressively transforming into a composite cosmopolitanist. I have argued elsewhere (Mandal:2018) that the high nationalist phase of Tagore combating imperialism in all its forms started to gradually diminish when he began translating his Bengali poems (including *Gitanjali*) into English. The subsequent publication of them as *Song Offerings* (September 1912) heralded an ‘English Tagore’ in world literature (Chakraborty:1998, 33). Nevertheless, Tagore’s compelling withdrawal from his intense political engagement around 1910, owing to his disagreement with the mendicant Moderates and radical Extremists, did not distract him from his goal of a free motherland neither his eclectic vision of India. He started placing India’s case at global stage, exhibiting its inner spiritual strengths against soulless materialism of the imperialist West through his public lectures in various countries till the last decade of his life. The quintessential decolonizer turned into a visionary synthesizer of East and West, with ‘culture’ and ‘reason’ in Arnoldian sense identified as most powerful force to free India and distressed humanity in general (Chakraborty:1998, 13). Simultaneously, an enduring friendship with M.K. Gandhi since the latter’s permanent arrival in Indian politics in 1915, Tagore’s considered disagreement with his political moves and yet, Gandhi’s unflinching faith in Tagore’s political wisdom prompting him seek blessings of his *Gurudev* (‘great Mentor’, the way Gandhi used to address Tagore) before undertaking new political ventures—succinctly suggests Tagore’s immense but unacknowledged contribution to Indian national movements.⁶ My contention here is, to arrive at a deeper understanding of this multi-faceted genius, we require to study his life and career by dividing them at least in two distinct phases if not five as mentioned above: the pre-*Gitanjali* period coinciding with his high nationalist moods, and the post-Nobel era when Tagore, in many ways following Tolstoy’s take on peace or

patriotism, took side with ‘peace’ and turned to ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’ (Williams:2007, 73).

Bankimchandra’s life and career, on the other hand, had remained laden with profound contradictions, deeply riddled with tension, bitterness and at times even with humiliating sense of self-flagellation. Blaming it on the huge family debts for his less accomplished career, he used to consider himself a ‘petty servant’ of the British and his middle-ranked job as ‘curse of life’ (Raychaudhuri:1998, 109). On one occasion, while cautioning his elder brother Sanjivchandra for borrowing money to arrange lavish wedding of his son he writes to him:

No one is more unhappy in this world than the person who has to bear the burden of debts ... You see me as an instance of this fact. Ramesh Mitra is a High Court judge, and I am a petty employee in Maldah.

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 109)

Bankimchandra had a point as he was not allowed to fully flourish. His rise repeatedly hindered by some racist British officials, and he used to be serially transferred to remote locations for his bold orders/judgements against the delinquent officers. Owing to his poor health and frequent travels, he was compelled to go on regular leaves, and yet he had to continue with the ‘curse of his life’ to repay his father’s debts.⁷ ‘A fundamental contradiction of Bankim’s life’, Raychaudhuri rightly observes, ‘which he shared with the entire social class he came from—derived from the fact that his livelihood depended on the service to and collaboration with alien rulers whose contempt for Indians was a fact of daily experience’ (*Ibid.*, 117).

Coupled with such painful realization of professional indignity was his endorsement of European modernity, which in India was inexorably intertwined with the history of colonial subjection, the acute awareness of which rendered Bankimchandra, ‘a most agitated, tense and self-correcting self to contend with’ (Kaviraj:1995, 162). Around the year 1875, he started engaging in a serious revision of his commitment to rationalist doctrines of the Enlightenment; the most blatant manifestation of the same, if we go by the biography by his nephew Sachishchandra (1911, 84–87), was his complete surrender to conventional Hindu religious rites. Of course, as informed by this biographer, in his heart of hearts, Bankimchandra had remained a devout Hindu which could be discerned in his fanatic prayers offered to their family deity Lord Krishna whenever he had faced crises of severe illness in the family. But after 1875, Bankimchandra’s overtures to stringent Hindu religious practices began to become more intense and regular, signalling his radical departure from strong European rationalism. Could it really provide him any lasting solace, as had been the case with his similarly placed illustrious friend Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, who could settle

and remain at peace with traditional Hinduism (Raychaudhuri, 106)? Sudipta Kaviraj (1995, 165–167) has tried to explain this sense of dichotomy through a dense analysis of his *Kamalakanta* (1875), a unique character creation by Bankimchandra often putting out his own predicament as a writer ‘hesitating at the gates of modernity, of traditional and modern story-telling and fictional aesthetics ... the single great hero of uncompromising critical thought that high Bengali literature of the early period produced—desolate, incomparable, inimitable in his peculiarity, ceaselessly lamenting the fate of subalternity, reflecting the darkness of history ...’. Kaviraj goes further to fathom Bankimchandra’s unmitigated crisis by discerning in him an indomitable writer who could not exactly make any of the convenient choices available to his contemporaries, to go either with modernity or traditionality. Caught precariously between these two dominant circles of discourse, with the fear of being assimilated into either, Bankimchandra like many of his contemporaries could not be able to

... turn decisively away from the two sides of their history, their continual interrogation of both, condemned them to a form of unhappy consciousness ... The gift of history bestowed by a modern education, appeared to them a deeply ambiguous one. They had learnt from it to think of their lives—singly and collectively—in the frame of linear time, and in terms of the rational capacity to construct the present and future. But in their condition, this made a self-conscious existence more difficult.

(Kaviraj, 168)

Without any shred of doubt colonial history had been unmerciful in offering ‘the gift of modernity’ to a self-righteous intellectual like Bankimchandra, but was the choice of it always accompanied by ‘subjection as its condition’? Was there a clearly visible third position of conscious amalgamation of both tradition and modernity to escape the recognition of colonial indignity without necessarily denying its historicity? Vidyasagar, as already discussed in the previous chapter, might offer a classic example. His judicious, thoughtful, and interpenetrative discursive formations, whereby, without sacrificing pride in tradition/indigeneity, he could decisively draw the derivatives of modernity closer and blend both in order to recreate something seminally new and beneficial for the hapless subject nation. Not that Bankimchandra could not achieve the same feat; or else, what explains his creation of those immortal narratives since the 1860s, whereby an exclusive western modality was exquisitely appropriated to perfect the form of novel in India, thus inspiring a language for gradual narration of nation? Neither was he entirely unsuccessful, unlike his elite Young Bengal compatriots, in overcoming the apparent pitfalls of English education; his conscious abandonment of his first attempt to write an English novel at the beginning of his

career bore ample testimony to that effect.⁸ Even his last big attempt to draw the character of Lord Krishna as a historical human figure in *Krishnacharit* (1886) followed modes and concepts of reasoning which were derived entirely from his knowledge of post-Enlightenment thought (Chatterjee:1986, 58). It was a remarkable use of (colonial) western paradigm of reason to establish the historicity of a seminal character from an ancient Sanskrit mythology (*Mahabharata*) by selecting out and brushing aside the ‘layers of legends, fables and fantastic imaginings’ within the narrative (Chatterjee, 59). Bankimchandra here, as Partha Chatterjee (1986, 58) argues, was trying to answer to ‘the “falsifications” of Hindu history at the hands of foreign (including Muslim) historians’ and rediscovered past glories for his beleaguered countrymen. Simultaneously, by redrawing his ideal Hindu hero in Krishna as a strong, pragmatic, and shrewd person, he was exhorting the bruised contemporary nationalists, often accused of shameful effeminacy, to imitate Krishna’s character traits and fight the foreigners.

Despite Bankimchandra’s remarkable task of explaining a major cult of Hindu religiosity—after all Lord Krishna had been mainly worshipped as a Hindu god—through European scientific thought, the puzzlement in Bankimchandra’s approach to colonial modernity, like many other greats, including his illustrious friend Hemchandra, was a distinct reality. He was reported to have nursed a deep sense of snobbery owing to his ‘Brahmin origin, striking good looks, fame as an author, and above all, confidence in his intellectual and creative talent’ (Raychaudhuri, 114–115). Without any doubt, this would have also included his knowledge of English literature and the ‘fact that all the four brothers were “high” officials’ (Ibid., 115). His evaluation of contemporary Bengali literature published (though anonymously) as ‘Bengali Literature’ written in English in the *Calcutta Review* (No. 104) proudly privileged the Bengali writers of ‘English school’ with ‘high culture’ over what he called the Sanskrit school writers ‘remarkably deficient in originality’ (Bankimchandra:1871). Even his great literary persona Kamalakanta gleefully retained his rarefied intellectual taste and delight in the world of Shakespeare by quoting lines from his plays at the drop of his hat. Therefore, in addition to the inglorious recognition of the historical contradiction of European modernity, the dichotomy that Bankimchandra was intensely engulfed in could be explained further with our understanding of how hegemony works in typical Gramscian sense in a colonial situation. How his implicit (unconscious) consent to the cultural logic of imperialism was delicately poised against his tragic awareness of the visible colonial indignity. This may also help us understand his preference for Shakespeare to Kalidasa, upholding of Miranda’s/Desdemona’s cultural norms against Sakuntala’s—the principal point of contention that Tagore later chose to refute.

Keeping such contextual biographical details of these two great Indians, I wish to advance an understanding of their engagement with Shakespeare,

focusing, as mentioned, on one of his most enduring and controversial creations ever. It is proven beyond any reasonable doubt that *Tempest* had started generating remarkable interest among scholars/writers since the staging of the play way back in 1611. It assumed a disproportionate shape since the mid-19th century, both at home and in the colonies, and continued with renewed vigour in the 20th century, not with slightest sign of diminishing even in the present century.⁹ Perchance the only other Shakespearean text which can come near to its staggering popularity is *Othello*, which we shall discuss in the next chapter. The debate over whether *Tempest* encapsulates the ideological underpinnings of the early phase of English colonialism continued even in the beginning of this century with attempts to de-politicize/de-problematize the Prospero-Caliban relationship. I have discussed elsewhere (Mandal:2002) how one such facile reading of the play was accomplished by Jerry Brotton (1998, 37), for whom *Tempest* is ‘a play that ultimately reflects the belatedness and subsequent subordination of English forays into the Mediterranean, and *not the rise of English colonialism*’ (emphasis added). What is also amazing in this reading is how it highlights the play’s Italian context in order to dismiss any English hand in the power game entrenched in the play (Mandal:2002). However, given the fairly wide range of intense research on the play, especially in the last two decades, the issue seems to have resolved by now, with majority coming to a general consensus about its strong colonial overtones. Nevertheless, one must not lose sight of the fact that critics like Brotton constitute a well-articulated tradition of scholarships deeply engaged in insulating a play like *Tempest* from any such ‘dangerous’ political readings. Their untiring attempts in approving the Prospero-Caliban relationship as universal culture-nature/civilized-savage binary, whereby Prospero had been out on civilizing mission, tacitly justify what the British had done to the rest of the world for centuries.¹⁰ The point is, even decades after the collapse of the great Empire some still felt intellectually constrained in bluntly stating that a refined ‘Europeans’ like Prospero (Shakespeare) could be involved in a narrow imperialist project—never, if he bore the torch of the Renaissance liberal humanist culture (Mandal:2002). One of the principal purposes of this chapter is to argue that *Tempest* being a play directly dealing with the ideological foundations of early English colonialism, its teaching and reception in India must bear immense political ramifications both in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Some two decades back, while deliberating on *Tempest*, I was first struck by Tagore’s insightful understanding of the play transmitted through his metaphoric observations on the frictional man–nature relationship. This has led me to a profound realization that how one of finest critics of literature in Tagore has remained unrecognized in world academia, who while living under colonial subjection had advanced an extraordinary anti-colonial critique of the play, the kind of

which could be found in world academia long way into the postcolonial era (Mandal:2002). It is indeed heartening to see some noteworthy writings on Tagore as an *avant-garde* critic of Shakespeare in the last few years (Chakravarty:2016; Sen:2021).

I

I will first turn to Bankimchandra whose direct transaction with Shakespeare and *Tempest* began quite early in his career with one of his most popular novels *Kapalkundala* (1866). It is a gripping tale of the marvellous eponymous heroine, who, having been brought up by an evil tantric (Kapalik) in a desolate forest off the shore in southern Bengal, remains quite naïve to the ways of the world. Nabakumar, betrayed by his fellow travellers on the sea, lands up there and is consequently saved by Kapalkundala from the Kapalik, who planned to sacrifice him before goddess Kali. Nabakumar marries her and takes her to his once-thriving business town of Saptagram in Midnapore, where they spend a year together, with the lady constantly struggling to cope with the customary codes of her newly found 'home'. A dramatic subplot replete with historicity creeps in with the arrival of another beautiful woman, Padmavati turned Luft-unnisa, who was originally married to Nabakumar before being forcibly converted to Islam and eventually reaching the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, where she had risen to prominence. She attempts to unsuccessfully win her first husband back; cross-dressed as a young man, she is spotted with Kapalkundala by Nabakumar, the scene being used to sow the seeds of jealousy in his mind by the Kapalik, who by then has already reached Saptagram in search of Kapalkundala. Kapalkundala's naivety makes Luft-unnisa realize her mistake, forsakes her suit but by then, Nabakumar falls prey to the evil design of the Kapalik and decides to sacrifice his wife as per the command of the notorious tantric. Unable to understand the complex web of human love and jealousy, Kapalkundala drowns herself in the river after a series of gripping emotional dramas, including Nabakumar's realization of her innocence, his repentance and attempts to woo her again, and he floats along with unsuccessful attempts to rescue her.

The four-part novel with 32 chapters each uniquely begins with a suggestive epigraph quoted from various English, Sanskrit, and Bengali texts, wherein Shakespeare dominates. The first chapter begins with 'Floating straight obedient to the stream' (from *Comedy*) pointing at the sail of the boat, followed by 'Ingratitude! Thou marble-hearted fiend' from (*King Lear*), suggesting Nabakumar's desertion by his fellow travellers in the second chapter. Romeo's 'And that very night—shall Romeo bear thee to Mantua' defines Nabakumar's acute attraction for Kapalkundala in chapter VIII. Chapter VII of Part II quotes 'I am settled and bend up/Each corporal

agent to this terrible feat' (*Macbeth*), indicating Luft-unnisa's determination to win back Nabakumar. In chapter IV of the last part, Hamlet's 'I will have grounds/More relative than this' attributed to Nabakumar for ascertaining Kapalkundala's infidelity, followed by 'Stand you awhile apart/Confine yourself but in patient list' from *Othello*, suggesting how Nabakumar gets maliciously tempted by the Kapalik against Kapalkundala. Overall, the Bard is directly invoked in six chapters with conspicuous but, I think, deliberate omission of any direct reference to one of his principal sources, *Tempest*. Why deliberate? That Bankimchandra had intensely read the play could be made out from his own admission—'I used to read Shakespeare quite extensively while writing Kapalkundala'—and his deep indebtedness to English literature and, especially, Shakespeare while writing the first three novels forming a trilogy of sorts (*Durgeshnanadini*:1865, *Kapalkundala* and *Mrinalini*:1868) (Chattopadhyay:1911, 193). Following *Tempest* was obviously *Malitimadhava* by the 8th-century Indian playwright Bhavabhuti as the principal source for *Kapalkundala*. Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, along with the historical narrative of Luft-unnisa, may be considered secondary sources. Except some situational similarities, we do not really find any deeper reflection of Sakuntala's inner traits in Kapalkundala, especially considering the ending of the novel. We shall return to this shortly. *Othello*, too, as a play, cannot really be called a principal 'intertext' the way the first two are used.¹¹ If at all, *Othello* is considered as a principal source of the narrative, then why not *Macbeth*? Driven by Lady Macbeth/Macbeth-like passion/determination, Luft-unnisa's fervent pursuit of Nabakumar has been dramatically enacted in the novel for quite some time. Temptation technique of *Othello* (III, iii) was used only briefly and was dismissed as Luft-unnisa revealed herself quite early and Nabakumar, too, realized his mistake on time.

Now, the question is, did Bankimchandra intend not to make the principal English source obvious to the readers and hence, did not quote or allude to? We do not really know. Some hints can be found in Bankimchandra's idea of what he would call imitation literature in an essay in the vernacular *Anukaran* ('Imitation') written in 1874, wherein he strongly recommended 'imitation' of superior literature by the inferior. But it ought to be accomplished by a naturally gifted writer or else 'the imitator remains a perpetual imitator failing to demonstrate signs of his independence' (*Bankim Rachanabali*, 187 translated). But then, even in case of a naturally talented imitator, Bankimchandra cautions, there needs to be careful consideration in gleaning the imitations; mere repetition of the earlier works must be avoided in the later works (Ibid., 188). Bankimchandra maintains that a relatively uncivilized society spontaneously tends to imitate a naturally civilized society when they meet. 'Considering the condition of Bengali society', he goes on, 'one cannot say for certainty that this tendency to imitate is harmful' as it can automatically bring independence later. Interestingly, what Bankimchandra

so eloquently means by ‘imitation’ can be potentially deduced as ‘appropriation’ as elaborated in the previous chapter: utilization of the cultural capitals of the ‘more civilized society’ by the ‘relatively uncivilized society’. But it needs to be accomplished thoughtfully and judiciously by naturally gifted people who must know if it ‘continues to flourish for inordinately long, there will be grave danger’ (Ibid., 188, translated). Curiously, what Bankimchandra was attempting to theorize in his 1874 essay, he had already been practicing since his first major novel. The point is that while composing *Kapalkundala*, Bankimchandra was quite aware of what he was doing by imitating the English narrative and wanted to appear a naturally talented ‘imitator’, giving his ‘imitation’ an original look. And hence, any direct reference to it might have been deliberately avoided. Further, in his 1875 essay, *Sakuntala, Miranda, and Desdemona*, while discussing *Tempest* he did not mention *Kapalkundala* even once. The first critic to read *Kapalkundala* as a kind of rework of *Tempest* was one of his avid admirers Shrischandra Mazumder (1860–1908) in his essay ‘Miranda and Kapalkundala’.¹² Again, the essay by Shrischandra with obvious approbation from his mentor did not mention *Sakuntala* while evidently comparing *Kapalkundala* with *Miranda*, making further validation of our point about distant influence of Kalidasa’s play in the novel. In the same year (August 1880), in his *Kabya-sundari* (39–40), Purnachandra Basu (discussed in the next chapter), too, had compared *Kapalkundala* with *Miranda*; he brought in *Sakuntala*, but only to demonstrate their remarkable differences rather than the similarities. According to him, the *tapovan* *Sakuntala* lived in had all the ingredients of a family, friends, education, and culture; *Miranda*, too, had her father’s protection, affection, and education but no friends or companions. *Kapalkundala* on the other hand was distinct, having no such familial affection or parental protection and yet, with meaningful self-knowledge and incredible human values and compassion imbibed from her close affinity with nature; she was Bankimchandra’s creation and a unique one (Basu:1880, 29). She might have been occasionally influenced by the priest (Adhikary) of the Bhabani temple in the forest—under whose advice she had married Nabakumar—but, despite her childhood being spent under a frightening tantric she remained a blessed child of the wilderness. Her life-string was completely controlled by nature or mother goddess Bhabani, a distant transposition of fate in Greek tragedies by the novelist and hence, the inevitable end of her life ending the narrative itself.

Coming back to Bankimchandra’s ‘imitation’, one does not need to go deeper into the series of meticulously drawn justifications, if not pretexts, to understand that he had in mind the British as the ‘civilized’ or ‘more civilized society’. His anonymous essay ‘Bengali Literature’ (1871), mentioned above, makes the point clearer. Here, Bankimchandra was unambiguous in deriding the 19th-century Bengali writers from the ‘Sanskrit school’, both an imitator

like Vidyasagar and an original like Ishwarchandra Gupta. Ishwarchandra Gupta, for him, was a very remarkable man but ‘ignorant and uneducated ... knew no language but his own, and was singularly narrow and unenlightened in his views; yet for more than twenty years he was the most popular author among the Bengalis’. Moreover, ‘Vidyasagar’s ambition soars no higher than adaptations, and a few translations’, whose ‘claims to the respect and gratitude of his countrymen are many and great, but high literary excellence is certainly not among them. He has a great literary reputation; so had Ishwarchandra Gupta: but both reputations are undeserved, and that of Vidyasagar scarcely less so than that of Gupta’ (Chattopadhyay, 1871). Of course, he admired Vidyasagar’s superhuman efforts in effecting women empowerment and at times, as mentioned in the previous chapter, he appreciated Vidyasagar’s prose but did not attach much credence to his literary skill. The audacity of Bankimchandra in dismissing both these popular Indian writers is not difficult to understand, as he was strongly pushing for imitation of colonial literature classified as ‘the more civilized force’ at a time when his compatriots were gradually moving towards an ardent classical revival. Hence, six years earlier, while conceiving *Kapalkundala*, it was extremely improbable that Bankimchandra was even inadvertently thinking of challenging the ‘civilizing mission’, of which, undoubtedly, the wily Bard had remained a principal component.¹³ Rather, in the novel, he was quite consciously working at a perfect assimilation of two different sets of values—from the Sanskrit texts of his own culture and the English of his alien rulers. The name *Kapalkundala* is taken from Bhavabhuti’s *Malatimadava*, her traits largely but not wholly from Miranda, and only some external elements from Kalidasa’s play. The sublimity of *Kapalkundala*’s beauty, innocence, and chastity was Bankimchandra’s own way beyond either of the sources, and it intensifies in her refusal to return to normal human society. *Kapalkundala*, in many ways, was the romantic unreal, a near divine in a human that the novelist could so adeptly imagine only once in his career, leaving the readers perpetually awestruck and in mesmerizing quest for ever. Hence, her self-effacement, though possibly avoidable but a narrative necessity and not merely an honourable exit from the ignominy or complexity of suspicious human relationships she was briefly involved in. She was not allowed to exercise the choice of a desolate but dignified living like Sakuntala after being publicly shamed and deserted by her husband, nor was she made to befriend a genuinely repentant and generous Luft-unnisā. Quite intriguingly, we are informed, Bankimchandra might have thought of a different ending with both *Kapalkundala* and Nabakumar committing suicide (Chattopadhyay:1911, 203). Curious also was his own version of the ending where the ‘Kapalik at length dragged Nabakumar to land, but *Kapalkundala* was seen or heard no more’ and ‘the story ends, much to the disappointment of most Bengali readers, who mostly prefer the

orthodox ending, where all live happily ever after' (Ibid.). Quite evidently, the final ending is significantly different from both the above contemplations by the author. What, though, is strongly suggested in both towards the end that Nabakumar survives either owing to his swimming skills or Kapalik's efforts, but Kapalkundala certainly dies. The point that I wish to draw here is, the narrator, despite having available choices to keep Kapalkundala alive, allowed his imaginative oeuvre to deliberately enforce such a tragic end to such an idealized woman and, may be, also to tease the sentiment of middle-class readers of his time.

Therefore, finding a definite source of a proto-feminist reading in Kapalkundala's self-destruction and considering it more feminist than Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*—'unlike *Sakuntala*, Bankim's *Kapalkundala* values her independence of spirit more than her marriage and willingly dies by drowning ...' (S. Sen, 124)—may appear to be somewhat speculative if not far-fetched. It must also be remembered here that suicide or sudden tragic turn of a narrative, necessary or not, is a recurrent theme in Bankimchandra. Sudipta Kaviraj (1998) has read this trend as liminality in his novels: a conflict between a moral order and the transgression of it, two necessary but dissimilar inevitabilities of human life. What was, then, morality for Bankimchandra? Kaviraj demonstrates further: 'Bankim's concern for morality is of a very different kind. Morality is of wonder to him because it seems to touch the ontological, to reveal a romantic and fearsome darkness at the centre of the world. ... This is how he thought the universe was tense, disorderly, nocturnal, swept by incomprehensible disorders' (Ibid., 3). For most of the central characters in Bankimchandra's novels, and most certainly for those women-centric ones, what matters most is the act of the transgression, the choice to go out of bounds, not really its consequences.¹⁴ What the novelist perhaps desires to lead the readers in, is the moment of longing, the 'tragic taste of finitude ... not an empirical question of judging an act against a set of moral rules' (Kaviraj, 5). This romantic sense of tragic yearning he might have received from his profound reading of the English Romantics (Raychaudhuri, 128) who, too, used to fascinate in self-mortification:

In this tragic world of happiness, rationality, the human ability to create an order of any kind, a moral order or rational order, or a small order of a little family of order unthreatened relationships, is forever threatened by the storm of the universe, the night—an incomprehensible and irresistible force which can destroy everything.

(Kaviraj, 24)

Successfully emerging as a creative writer at the prime of his youth with tremendous mastery over the language, Bankimchandra must have followed some plans while constructing the narrative ending with romantic

self-annihilation of the principal protagonist, and not exactly in a feminist urge to hit back at Nabakumar or patriarchy he represents. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1994, 308) has rightly observed the self-destruction as ‘Kapalkundala’s destiny’, ‘limits of freedom’, and ‘source of the melancholy that pervades the novel’. Of course, her polite refusal to return even to a repentant husband may be worthy of feminist interpretation, but certainly not the consequent suicide. Hence, it seems quite improbable that in causing a wilful death or tragic ending to such a unique creation, Bankimchandra was being deliberately proto-feminist.¹⁵ Rather, this incredibly idealized woman has been ultimately chosen for oblation at the altar of artistic imagination. Supriya Chaudhuri (2008, 232) has rightly observed that as an educated Bengali *bhadralok*, Bankimchandra in his novels was addressing a typical project of male ‘construction of the female subject’, at the heart of which were ‘the education, the reform of social customs, and the ideal of companionate marriage’. Taking out the artistic value, Kapalkundala indeed appears to be an exercise of the male gaze at female creation: give life to a destitute woman, infuse ravishing beauty and sterling values, and then destroy her at will. Can death or material destruction of a woman be classified as a narrative of feminist anger, especially when the novelist has a remarkable choice like Sakuntala to offer? Was he, then, deeply moved by Sakuntala’s inner traits while portraying Kapalkundala? Bankimchandra’s preference for Desdemona as an ideal woman/wife for her silent acceptance of patriarchal oppression over Sakuntala’s stunning feminist daring against her husband-king for humiliating her in public makes our contention clearer. Consider how he compares the responses of these two women to the acts of injustice by their respective husbands in the second part of the 1875 essay:

If unshaken devotion to one’s husband, even under (his) beating, torture, desertion or reproach defines a true sati (chaste woman), then Desdemona is more honorable than Sakuntala. After getting deserted by her husband, Sakuntala rebuked him holding her head high like a serpent showing its fangs. When the king belittles her by saying that she is uneducated but too clever, Sakuntala, in her anger and pride, abandons her humble, bashful, and pitiful countenance and asks him, “You dishonorable man, you view everyone by the measure of your own heart?” When the king retorts further, “Dear lady, everyone knows Dushyanta’s (noble) nature”, Sakuntala too, hits back with further sarcasm.

(*Bankim Rchanabali*, 192–193, translated)

Contrast this with Bankimchandra’s approbation of Desdemona’s chastity, obedience, and sacrifice even while on her deathbed:

This sense of anger and emotion or sarcasm are not to be found in Desdemona. When Othello slaps and dismisses her in front of everyone, Desdemona only says, "I will not be here to disturb you anymore". And the moment she is called, she addresses him, "My Lord", and comes back to him. When Othello unjustly insults and calls out Desdemona as a whore, Desdemona only utters, "I am innocent and heaven knows it". ... When Othello like a terrible monster, appears before the half-asleep lady on her bed and groans, "I will kill you", even then, Desdemona shows no anger or emotion, no lack of respectfulness or affection, but only states, "Then Lord have mercy on me!"

(Ibid., 192–193, translated)

Bankimchandra's unabashed endorsement of English (colonial) cultural norms subscribed to by Desdemona and simultaneous rejection of Sakuntala's may also give lie to any sweepingly found motive of 'challenging the civilizing mission' in this novel or in his 1875 essay on Sakuntala, Miranda, and Desdemona that we discuss shortly. Therefore, apart from its sublime central figure, the significance of *Kapalkundala* rests not in generalized dissent against the colonial culture but in his conscious ability to steal/abduct the valuable gifts from that 'superior civilization' and selectively assimilate them with his own for a worthy purpose of self-aggrandizement. Obviously, as the history suggests and this book, too, has already maintained, ultimately such endeavours did lead to a greater cause of self-assertion and narration of India, much to the discomfort of the 'civilizing mission' of English colonialism. But it was accomplished in a deeply ambivalent fashion, not in such unequivocal straightjacket formula, at least in the case of Bankimchandra, who, as shown above, had to constantly oscillate between his endorsement of colonial modernity if not direct servitude (his professional pangs) and nationalist commitment. Much to one's amusement, Bankimchandra's anxiety did not entirely diminish even after his retirement. A year before his death, while presiding over a meeting held by some nationalists in Calcutta, Bankimchandra had a curious preview of a lecture presented by a young Tagore to ascertain if anything seditious would be spoken.¹⁶ And does one believe that the same man had created *Vande Mataram* which went on to become the war cry for Indian revolutionaries since the days of anti-partition agitations happening some 10 years later? Concurring with both Raychaudhuri and Kaviraj, I believe that such an unsurmountable degree of puzzlement makes Bankimchandra's world so quintessentially complex and hence perpetually riveting. Sisirkumar Das, too, eloquently writes that this sense of ambiguity remained a symptomatic feature among many remarkable Indian writers, especially in the latter half of the 19th century:

What makes the period unique in our literary history is its continuous conflict between the indigenous and the alien ideals, values and sensibilities. The conflict is a tortuous one. *It was not a contact between two authors or two texts, it was a contact between two civilizations in an unfortunate historical circumstance.* The Indian writers, at least some of the very talented amongst them, were fascinated by the power and the sweep and the beauty of Western literature. But they were also restless about the political domination of the British. *This love and hate relationship with the West made the literary contact tortuous and complex.* The uniqueness of the Indian literature of this period lies mainly in the Indian writer's ability to negotiate with literature of the West and in his capacity to give memorable expression to human problems he faced during this period.

(Das:1991, 331, emphasis added)

Unmistakably, *Kapalkundala* is a 'memorable expression' where Bankimchandra has shown tremendous dexterity in negotiating with *Tempest* by successfully merging its essence with Indian ethos. Nonetheless, to him, the Bard remained supreme in comparison with the best of Indian writers. Bestowing highest honour upon him in another English essay 'The Confession of a Young Bengal', he holds him as, 'the immortal poet of universal human nature ... the only man in the world's literature whose works hold up a mirror to every possible phases of man's inner life' (Chattopadhyay:1872). Therefore, the contact with Shakespeare or his plays, which Bankimchandra had so dearly endorsed, also put him tacitly accepting the supremacy of their intrinsic civilizational values in a delicately poised colonial situation. This becomes unambiguously clear in his essay 'Sakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona', which I proceed to discuss and fortify further the argument presented above.

Bankimchandra's more pronounced engagement with *Tempest* occurs in the first part, 'Sakuntala and Miranda', of his 1875 essay, wherein, by uncritically accepting the supremacy of the 'colonial book', he implicitly subjects himself to the cultural logic of imperialism. In the very first sentence, he regards Prospero as a *rajarshi* or 'philosopher-king', clearly refuses to endorse any of the qualities of the Kapalik, and thus rules out any possibility of resistance reading of Shakespearean play. Further, he considers the sight of the unnamed tempest-struck island as *tapoban* (a hermitage or a sacred place in the lap of nature where peace prevails for all), erasing any scope of anti-colonialist depiction of the most travelled 'postcolonial space' in Shakespeare. Evidently, in his reading of the play, Bankimchandra has left no hint enabling us to compare Prospero's 'serene caverns' with Kapalik's dreadful killing field strewn with half-burnt human carcass in the topographically recognizable forest in the Bay of Bengal. Incidentally, it is widely believed that Bankimchandra, while posted in the coastal region of the

undivided district of Midnapore, had a strange encounter with such a Kapalik, who, of course, might not have been as frightening as the one he painted in the novel (Chattopadhyay:1911, 202–203). The real-life Kapalik came to ‘disturb’ Bankimchandra for two consecutive nights, only to implore him to visit the enigmatic seashore during the dark of the night. The terrifying traits of the fictional Kapalik might have been largely borrowed from the 8th-century Indian play *Malatimadava*, whose evil sorceress Kapalkundala, quite interestingly, has been completely metamorphosed by Bankimchandra as a serene enigma. It is highly possible that apart from the extraordinarily exotic settings/situations of the two principal sources—*Tempest* and *Malatimadava*—what might have fascinated Bankimchandra the most were the women protagonists: some of the characteristic traits in the first play and only the name ‘Kapalkundala’ in the other. Incidentally, he continued with such character studies—a dominant critical practice in Shakespeare studies since its inception, as mentioned in the introduction—in the essay under discussion, the title itself being suggestive of the same, ‘Sakuntala, Miranada, and Desdemona’. Going by this trend, it is also quite unlikely that while portraying such a sublime woman in Kapalkundala, Bankimchandra was incorporating certain features of Caliban, the ‘savage and deformed slave’ or his absent witch mother. Quite obviously, to his contemporaries, including Hemchandra, we have discussed in the last chapter, Caliban remained a ‘Barbot’—a barbaric rogue drunk with greed for power, betrayal, and treachery, as described in the *Tempest* through his proximity with Stephano and Trinculo. Nor is he portrayed as an untamed nature’s child; with his manifest vulnerabilities, he falls in line and gets sucked into the master’s narrative at the end, promising further to be a ‘wise’ and reformed prodigy of his ‘benevolent’ ruler (Mandal:2002). Going by Chaudhuri’s (2008) insightful reading, *Kapalkundala* does incorporate another significant intertext which was undoubtedly the history of contemporary social mobility of the colonized subjects. It is plausible, hence, that Kapalkundala should not be allowed to follow ‘a veritable rogue-figure’ like Caliban in any manner whatsoever. Quite curiously, her Indian counterpart Sakuntala appeared to Bankimchandra quite abreast of the social conventions but too shrewish to be compared with Kapalkundala or to be emulated by others. However, she being Kalidasa’s immortal creation deeply revered for ages, he could have only shrewdly disapproved her aggressive values by meticulously juxtaposing her with her more ‘noble’ English counterparts Miranda and Desdemona:

Shakuntala has imbibed all the social conventions ... Miranda is free of them, yet Miranda is affectionate ... Miranda is not a bashful daughter of the clan ... Miranda is an unfettered bird of the forest.

(Ibid., 189–190, translated)

Such perspectives reveal Bankimchandra's leitmotif in comparing/contrasting the three fictional women characters which is to define an ideal female subject during the emergence of women's education and empowerment in India. Without any shred of doubt Bankimchandra was sympathetic to, though supported only distantly, the cause taken up by his senior compatriot Vidyasagar. Nonetheless, the women's world that he has envisaged in the novel seems to be his own fantastic gaze, and in this essay, certainly anti-feministic if not entirely misogynistic. His repulsive glorification of Desdemona's fatal silence to her husband's unjust oppression, on the one hand, and blatant condemnation of Sakuntala's just resistance to her husband, on the other, have already validated such contention. Interesting further to underline here is how he derides Sakuntala and upholds the sentiments derived from the Miranda-Ferdinand or Romeo-Juliet love story by pitting them against that of the Dushyanta-Sakuntala:

The glory in Dushyanta's character has completely overshadowed little Sakuntala ... the pervasive figure in Dushyanta has overshadowed scanty Sakuntala—she cannot bloom properly. This is not (his) amorous advances but king's play. The ruler of the world, resting in a bower, is only fancying to play a game of love. Like an intoxicated elephant with its trunk he is plucking the Sakuntala lotus for the sport; how will the lotus bloom then? ... We could see only a restless, anxious young girl in Sakuntala but not an affectionate and dignified woman.

(Bankim Rachanabali, 191)

As a matter of fact, throughout the essay, in a painstakingly meticulous manner, while evaluating Miranda's character, Bankimchandra evaluates certain sets of values to which she belongs and contrasts them with the unacceptable social conventions subscribed to by Sakuntala. Despite Sakuntala's education she is devoid of affection and dignity, and therefore, for Bankimchandra, it is Sakuntala (and not Kapalkundala) who still undermines his notion of an ideal Indian woman. Hence, she must be rejected in favour of both Miranda and Desdemona, who, despite being aliens, together will make a perfect female subject for him. I think, the paradigm so laboriously invented herein appears to be doubly problematic for Bankimchandra: his uncritical acceptance of a set of values endorsed by Miranda/Desdemona and the accompanied project of colonial modernity with its concomitant subjugation. What deeply problematizes his position further is his blunt admiration and privileging of Miranda's cultural norms and simultaneous rejection or subordination of Sakuntala's.

The complex dynamics may be meaningfully understood through the application of Gramscian notion of hegemony in a colonial situation: how an otherwise great nationalist implicitly consents to the cultural logic of

English colonialism, thus tacitly providing moral ammunition to the same. The imperialist agenda set forth by the likes of Macaulay and Trevelyan, attempted to morally and intellectually manipulate the colonized intelligentsia, Bankimchandra being an authoritative figure, is accomplished through Shakespeare. His eulogisation of Miranda and Prospero, in particular, and Shakespeare in general, clearly suggests the obvious outcome of the deeply entrenched British cultural dominance in colonial India, a dominance which received its greatest moral support from the introduction of Shakespeare in the Indian curriculum way back in 1820s (Viswanathan, 2–26). The unbridled admiration and veneration for the Bard, even while appropriating/reproducing him by the dominant section of the Bengali elites over the years, may be a testimony to the enormous success of the colonial state apparatus.

Even without applying the enduringly significant critical apparatuses of Gramsci or concurring with Viswanathan (1998) one can understand the agonizing pitfall that the likes of Bankimchandra were creating for themselves. Their engagement with Shakespeare or English literary studies was not simply an issue of literary transmission or textual transactions, but it involved deeper problematics of negotiating with questions of cultural politics in a colonial situation. One cannot deny that the Anglicist project of ‘Shakespeare in India in the academic sphere being a part of a well-designed project of replacement of the indigenous literary canons with sensibilities by a superior body of literary models’ was quite ironically reciprocated with an ‘intimate relationship between the process of apotheosization of the bard and the growth of an English educated community’ (Das:1997, 41). Added to that was how Shakespeare or English literary studies had become ‘the defined parameters within which the new class of Hindu male elite was going to draw up its agenda ... form the arena of self-definition within which burgeoning nationalist consciousness found its initial ground’ (Bagchi:1991, 152). Bankimchandra, like his friend Hemchandra, certainly fell into the category of ‘new class of Hindu male elite’ who, despite being deeply committed to Shakespeare/colonial modernity, started forming a distinct national identity by producing a great body of literature in the vernacular. How far such endeavours of those great Indians had smoothened the process of Shakespeare/English studies to be appropriated as a new tool of hegemony by the indigenous bourgeoisie should be left for posterity to judge. My point here is, that Bankimchandra while reworking on Shakespeare or *Tempest* through the fiction or the critical essay, did not rise to challenge the play or infuse a completely new narrative to change its basic argument of control, dominance, and chastisement. This may also explain why Caliban remains totally excluded from his scheme of things. I have maintained elsewhere why a completely fresh narrative of resistance needed to be incorporated into Caliban, who is otherwise made to gratefully accept

the benefactions of Prospero's 'civilizing mission' (Mandal:2002). It seems that Bankimchandra, following many of his English-educated compatriots, had countersigned the warrant of civilizing mission implicated in the play and also outside in his precarious history of subjugation. Of course, if mere commenting on or transmitting an English (colonial) writer into (colonized) Bengali language, even *while glorifying him against the diminishment of your own icons*, constitutes an act of anti-colonialism, then perhaps the most insipid adaptation or limitless eulogy of Shakespeare may turn out to be a resistance reading. This is where, I think, the sagacity of his great predecessor Vidyasagar lied, who, while admiring Shakespeare's works, could uphold Kalidasa and his world equally if not more emphatically. A similar task would be carried out with more vigour and unambiguity by his most talented successor Rabindranath Tagore in his 1902 essay 'Sakuntala', discussed hereafter.

II

Tagore's firm rejoinder to Bankimchandra's comparatist reading of *Abhijanasakuntala* and *Tempest* came eight years after Bankimchandra's demise and six years after another rebuttal as 'Sakuntala and Miranda' by Purnachandra Basu (discussed in the next chapter). But being a lesser-known writer/critic Purnachandra's insightful defence of Sakuntala against Miranda or the Indian classical writer vis-à-vis Shakespeare did not assume any real literary merit. On the other hand, delivered initially as a public lecture, Tagore's 'Sakuntala' became immensely popular among literary circles, even caught the attention of some elite nationalists who were gradually gearing up for a bigger political movement against the British for their clandestine plan to divide Bengal.¹⁷ Interestingly, the first attempted translation of the essay into English came out within three months of its delivery in *New India* (11 December 1902) edited by the famous radical nationalist Bipinchandra Pal (Pal:1990, 90). That the popularity of the essay did not dip could be proven from another translation of its 'inner meaning' by famous historian Jadunath Sarkar much later in February 1911 (Ibid., 90). It is pertinent to mention here that a year before 'Sakuntala', Tagore had started his first school in Santiniketan, whereby he had strongly preached for an ashram or *tapaban*-style modern-day education with Bengali as the principal medium of instruction. His inaugural address had clearly illustrated that the school, in a village around dense forests some 150 kilometres away from Calcutta, was established to consciously look for an alternate to the prevalent western/colonial style education in India.¹⁸ English language/literature was taught, but without giving it a primacy in comparison with Bengali. 'Rabindranath's Santiniketan represented', writes Sumit Sarkar (2011, 132), 'a poet's imaginative reaction against the factory-like atmosphere of conventional urban schools ... The ashram ideal of ancient

India attracted him strongly, with its austere simplicity so natural to a poor country like ours and its close personalities between the guru and his pupils'. Keeping in mind both the rising volatility in Indian politics, Tagore's active participation in it as discussed above, and his education mission, I wish to advance an understanding of Tagore's strong rebuttal to Bankimchandra.

It is curious to note here that even during Bankimchandra's lifetime following his novel *Devi Chaudhurani* (May 1884), young Tagore had raised bitter intellectual debates against his version of Hinduism, to which, in a rare attempt, Bankimchandra posted an indulgent retort to the young prodigy.¹⁹ Prasantkumar Pal (1983, 218–223) informs us that Tagore could not agree with the structure of Bankimchandra's most controversial political novel *Anandamath* (December 1882) where, according to Tagore, he had tried to describe a 'huge idea' without showing its regulation by human 'agency' as the characters remained bereft of any autonomy or transparency.²⁰ However, without losing an iota of mutual respect for each other, both reconciled quickly, with Tagore expressing his deepest regards to the great man and Bankimchandra extending his affection for the prodigious Tagore's 'young impulsive agitation' (Ibid., 218–223). It is widely known that after Bankimchandra's demise in 1894, Tagore delivered a moving tribute to him. Later he also tuned, sang, and popularized his *Vande Mataram*, which, as mentioned earlier, went on to become the most enchanting slogan during the entire stretch of the Indian freedom movement across the country.

In 'Sakuntala' Tagore's defence of the classical writer, inter alia, Indian culture became doubly intense owing to the surcharge atmosphere of movements against the repressive policies of the Curzon government. Tagore's intent is clear at the very outset of the essay. He rejects the banal comparatist methodology of evaluating characters by extrapolating them from their sources neither does he endorse the comparison between two inherently different plays *Tempest* and *Abhijanasakuntala*. To Tagore, there may be external or situational similarities, but essentially they are different in evoking poetic/dramatic sensibilities. The 'rajarshee' (Platonic philosopher-king) accord bestowed upon Prospero and the classification of his unnamed island as *tapaban* by his senior are discarded at once by Tagore. Instead, Prospero's tempestuous fiefdom is deliberately contrasted with Kanva's serene hermitage, where, 'the habit meets virtue, humans unite with nature ... nature and animals forging a soothing bond with humans and yet, remaining distinct from each other' (*Rabindra Rachanabali*:1987, 726, translated). In Shakespeare's play, Tagore argues, despite assuming human form, nature is not allowed to form any cordial connect with the humans:

In *Tempest*, the external nature is embodied in the person of Ariel, yet he is denied human companionship. His relationship with the humans is that of an unwilling servitude. He wants liberty but works as a slave

after being chastised and confined by the humans. He has lost human emotion, his tears. Even Miranda's feminine heart fails to extend its filial affection to him. *In Tempest there is chastisement, dominance and repression; in Sakuntala we have love, peace and goo will.*

(Ibid., 726, emphasis added, translated)

The man-nature metaphoric representation here symbolizes Prospero as an oppressive master and Miranda an active collaborator. Bankim's indiscreetly idealized Miranda appears to be unsympathetic towards the natural world represented through Ariel, an unwilling slave of Prospero. There is hardly any mutual relationship between the natural world and the human world; rather, nature is forcibly tamed and captured in order to serve certain selfish human interests. If skillfully extended, Tagore's figurative utterances may be deduced as attempts to unmask the problematic power relation between the ruler and the ruled, and the same are generated by his unambiguous disavowal of the very basis of that repressive association. Considering Tagore's excruciating recognition of the colonial situation in India, his argument can be extended further, explaining Prospero's position as an imperial voyager, who, after being treacherously driven out of his country, constructs, controls, and dominates a power narrative with the ominous instrument of his magic. Unlike in Kalidasa's play, where the natural and the human are connected in a mutually benevolent friendship, in *Tempest*:

[man] has tried to establish his own authority over the world by humbling and subjugating it. *Indeed, disputes and attempts to establish dominion are the essence of Tempest* where Prospero, deprived of his kingdom, establishes his unbending authority over the natural world through his powers of magic. *There, a group of people after somehow escaping imminent death reached the shore and yet, they are involved in conspiracies, treacheries and plots to assassinate in order to establish their authority in the desolate island.* Finally, though their efforts are restrained but none can say that they really ended. Monstrous nature though remains dormant like the chastised Caliban out of fear, oppression and lack of (further) opportunity, its teeth and nails continue to bear the venom ... the name of the play *Tempest* is so fitting to its internal issues. *In fact, in the heart of the animosity between the humans and nature or between humans and other humans, are their attempts to grab power.* It is full of disaffections from the beginning to end.

(Ibid., 728, emphasis added, translated)

Tagore's admonishment of such unreal portrayal of emotional excesses goes beyond *Tempest* to the Europeans in general while at the same time he upholds the Sanskrit play:

The European poets gets frenzied whenever they find opportunity to express human instinct. They love to portray such instincts in extreme exaggerations. We have innumerable instances of such feeling in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. *Shakespeare could not write any play so expansively serene and profound as Sakuntala* where, whatever the love-affair Dushyanta and Sakuntala have is appropriately precise, expressed largely through gestures and suggestions; Kalidasa has never let it go loose. (Ibid., 732, emphasis added, translated)

One is instantly reminded of Tagore's reminiscences quoted in the long epigraph in the beginning of this book of the 'frenzy of Romeo's and Juliet's love, the fury of King Lear's impotent lamentation, the all-consuming fire of Othello's jealousy'. By undermining the western values embedded in *Tempest*, by playing down the boundless eulogy of Prospero/Miranda or Shakespeare, and at the same time by showcasing the cultural norms endorsed by Sakuntala/Kalidasa, Tagore adopts a counter discursive strategy against the cultural politics of imperialism. The task for the great man was quite daunting, considering the colonial conditions of overwhelming cultural dependence and the Bard being the preferred icon of his influential compatriots. But Tagore's reading of Shakespeare informs about the hollowness of the western cultural values transmitted through such canonical texts. In the final analysis, the most important foundation of English literary studies in India, the much-coveted 'colonial book', appears to be radically de-glamourized, and with that, the supremacy of the 'civilizing mission' sternly neutralized.

Tagore's strong reproach against the insipid reception of colonial culture allied with the emphatic privileging of his own, considered in such a backdrop, can be read as a fascinating discourse of cultural decolonization, the kind of which Ngugi went on to theorize much later.²¹ Unfortunately, we in India, and, especially in Bengal, have shown little enthusiasm in responding to Tagore's insightful analysis of *Tempest*. Is it owing to the academic practice for us not to consider *Tempest* as a colonialist text or understand its subversive potentials until some Western criticism produced in a colonial language directs us to do so? Is this also a kind of implicit acceptance of western literary/cultural dominance in our readings of English canonical texts? One reason for this, as Supriya Chaudhuri (2008, 233) is right to the extent of identifying, is 'partly owing to the relative insulation of Shakespeare criticism in the West from literature in the Indian languages'. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that Shakespearean criticism, even produced in Bengali language in the colonial era, resulted largely 'out of received readings of Shakespeare, readings determined by the British critics' (Das:1997, 43). As discussed in the introduction, it has remained a larger predicament, especially in colonial India if not long way into the postcolonial world, that Indian

critical responses to Shakespeare, even while producing them in the vernacular—like Bankimchandra or Hemchandra—were primarily determined by the parameters set by the British pedagogic/critical model. ‘The Indian academic activity’, writes Sisirkumar Das (1997, 43) ‘was not expected to question or challenge the existing paradigms of criticism; but to accept the greatness of the bard as indisputable fact of literary history’. Purnachandra Basu, in his two decades-long near-obscure literary career, as would be discussed next, remained an unflinching campaigner/upholder of the supremacy of Indian classical literature juxtaposed with Shakespeare or English literature. Tagore, too, though tempering down drastically after 1910, continued to champion the cause of Indian classical cultures. I have written elsewhere (Mandal:2018) that the kind of anti-colonialist sentiments that Tagore had consciously generated in this essay and many other direct political lectures/essays between 1894 and 1908 would be virtually theorized by a plethora of writers/critics through a movement in the independent colonies or in the American academia collectively known as ‘postcolonialism’.²² Undoubtedly, Tagore was consciously exposing the cultural politics of British imperialism, and I feel quite tempted to aver that much later, Edward Said (1994), too, would produce a fundamentally similar argument in his treaty on the equation between culture and imperialism (1994, xi–xxxii). And yet, while elaborating on the themes of resistance culture (Ibid., 230–340), Tagore became merely a passing reference for Said though had a long deliberation on W.B. Yeats as a poet of decolonization, ‘the indisputably great *national* poet who during a period of anti-imperialist resistance articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power’ (Ibid., 265–266). My point is that what Yeats was doing in Ireland in the (English) colonizer’s language, Tagore was doing in the language of the colonized (Bengali), but Tagore did not receive the accord of a poet of decolonization. Was it ironically because he was writing in a non-colonial language?²³ In fact, Tagore was fighting colonialism more intensely by juxtaposing his writings with his active participation in the fervent political agitations against the British at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁴

However, an extremely crucial point, as discussed earlier, is to remember that an evidently distinct phase in Tagore’s life began with *Gitanjali* (1910), followed by its English version. The changes anticipated his strong reprobation of contemporary nationalism already signalled towards the end of the serial publication of his longest political novel *Gora* between 1907 and 1909.²⁵ An unswervingly decolonizing mind, a self-righteous Bengali and vigorous nationalist, began to emerge as a discreet internationalist, moving to his quiet retreat at Santiniketan from the metropolitan Calcutta and started living there as a ‘Sage of Santiniketan’ (Bhattacharya:2011, 108). A ‘new’ world was waiting for Tagore; he sailed for England with his translated poems in September 1912, met W.B. Yeats, and the famous friendship began.

English *Gitanjali* or *Song-Offerings* got published with Yeats' celebrated introduction in September 1912, and the rest was history: he became the first Asian to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. Tagore began composing more in English, not just translating his Bengali writings into the colonial language. Prasantakumar Pal (1992, 22–23) has aptly suggested that following Tagore's Presidentship of Bengal Provincial Congress, the first major change of direction towards the British can be traced in his public lecture 'Purba o Paschim' ('East and West'). Delivered on 8 August 1908, it depicts the long tradition of India as a pilgrimage of different races from across the globe and strongly recommends a union with the 'refined' British as well:

We have to make our union with the British a success. This is a responsibility bestowed upon us for constructing a Great India (*Mahabharatbarsha*). If we turn back, we will lag behind; we cannot stop the course of Time, or deceive the history of India by secluding ourselves from it or by not accepting the unity.

(Tagore Rabindra Rachanabali:1988, vol. VI, 556, translated)

Curiously, while marking a re-evaluation of his own engagement with the colonial masters, Tagore here complains about 'our' lack of meaningful understanding of Shakespeare or English literature as a vehicle of a refined British culture. He does not, however, vouch for a general meeting of the East and West and prescribes complete rejection of the colonial bourgeoisie or the rapacious rulers, calling them the depraved version of the real British, who were deliberately depriving the Indians the best of their civilization. Tagore began identifying two distinct categories in the British: small and great. Small were ruling India through the repressive stick of law and order (cane or cannon). The great were those liberals in the British parliament and the English writers (the canon), or the bearers of the high British culture, starting from Shakespeare, Milton, to Matthew Arnold with special stress on the Romantics.²⁶ Partially, this also explains his dramatic change of guard in the oft-quoted panegyric *Shakespeare* originally written in Bengali (November 1915) and its English translation of his own for the occasion of Shakespeare's tercentenary death anniversary. The poem reveals Tagore addressing Shakespeare as the 'world poet' whose glory spreads from England to India: 'When by the far-away sea your fiery disappeared from behind the unseen, O Poet, O Sun, England's horizon felt you near her breast, and took you to be her own'.²⁷ Of course, Tagore's stunning eulogy flowed, considering the solemn occasion. But it had also to do with his growing attraction for the 'great English' in general in the post-Nobel era and, in this case, particularly after the conferment of knighthood on him under the personal care of the then Viceroy Harding in June 1915. Prasantakumar Pal (1997, 65–66) has suggested that Tagore,

despite having the option, could not refuse the 'honour' and invited humiliating diatribes from his friends as also future embarrassment of renouncing it after the ghastly massacre of Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) by the British police in April 1919.²⁸

Be that as it may, Tagore, though not reverting to his untempered political nationalism of yesteryears, he continued to articulate his cultural nationalism by strongly upholding the Indian classical ethos transmitted through the great Vedas, Upanishads, epics, and *puranas*, as also Sanskrit literature like *Abhijanasakuntala*. His attitude to Shakespeare, too, had evidently become more conciliatory, if not at times venerative, which, of course, was in keeping with his larger goal of achieving a synthesis of the East and West. In 'The Religion of Forest' in *Creative Unity* 1921 (Das:1996, 516–517), he returns briefly to discuss *Tempest* and still remains critical of the play for its inability to the forge man–nature harmony rather, 'through Prospero's treatment of Ariel and Caliban we realize man's struggle with nature and his longing to sever connection with her'. A changed Tagore, to whom creation now means 'the harmony of contrary forces—the forces of attraction and repulsion', finds in 'Shakespeare's dramas, like those of Kalidasa ... a secret vein of complaint against the artificial life of king's court—the life of ungrateful treachery and falsehood' (Ibid., 516, emphasis added). In a stark, cryptic comment, he finds fault with almost all the great plays of Shakespeare on this count, as 'he (Shakespeare) fails to recognize in them the truth of interpenetration of human life with cosmic life of the world' (Ibid.). But in an astonishing contradiction to his tenor/tone in 'Sakuntala', 'these observations are not intended to minimize Shakespeare's great power as a dramatic poet, but to show in his works the gulf between Nature and human nature owing to the tradition of his race and time' (Ibid., 517, emphasis added). Quite interestingly, in an earlier essay, 'Tapovan' ('The Hermitage':1909), he maintained a similar position on *Tempest* while remaining absolutely silent on Shakespeare. But now the failure to unite the human world with the natural does not diminish Shakespeare's dramatic poetry, nor does it mean that 'beauty of nature is ignored in his writings' (Ibid., 517). The only complaint Tagore now has against Shakespeare's plays (including *As You Like It*) is that, in them unlike in Indian Sanskrit classics, 'Nature offers no message or balm to the injured soul of man'. He found such 'message' or 'balm' in the Romantics, where Nature becomes an intrinsic part of poetry and not a mere occasion (Ibid., 517). Quite evidently, the earlier Tagore of 'Sakuntala' dismissing Shakespeare's ability to write a play like *Abhijanashakuntalam* is clearly missing here; he is still critical of *his plays* but not of *his excellent dramatic oeuvre*. The point is that notwithstanding the phenomenal essay of 1902, Tagore's interface with the Bard had remained largely ambivalent, more so, in his post-*Gitanjali* or Nobel period.

It is widely known that Tagore's encounter with Shakespeare, as suggested in the long epigraph in the beginning in this book, began quite early when he had attempted to translate *Macbeth* at the age of 13.²⁹ Shakespeare's influence on his plays—both comedies and tragedies—written between 1888 and 1898 is also visible.³⁰ Some early signs of direct admiration for the Bard can be excavated from the letters that he had written to his friend Loken Palit between April and September 1892.³¹ In one such letter (April 1892), he had made a distant comparison between Kalidasa and Shakespeare for their extraordinary skill to portray human characters through poetry. 'In Shakespeare', Tagore writes in another, 'we find an archetypal being, a real human being and not its mask. By stirring a man to the last extreme Shakespeare has bared his humanity to view ... There is a high degree of philosophy in it from where the widest panorama of human nature becomes visible' (*Rabindra Rachanabali*:1987, 704–705, translated). Tagore's stray comments on Shakespeare and his plays in essays and novels produced both before and after 'Sakuntala' largely indicate his tangential transactions with the Bard in various stages of his life, a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this chapter.³² Nonetheless, as I have discussed elsewhere (Mandal:2020), Tagore's reference to Shakespeare and English literary studies in his last public lecture, *Crisis in Civilization*, delivered originally in Bengali as 'Sabhyatar Sankat' (15 April 1941) to celebrate his 80th birthday, assumes a different significance.³³ As will be elaborated in the last chapter, in his last lament we rediscover Tagore's old nationalist spark regretfully exposing the hollowness of English liberal tradition including Shakespeare that, as discussed above, he had endorsed after 1910. The stance, however, did not dissuade him from lauding the Bard briefly for his immortal creations like Lady Macbeth, Lear, Anthony, and Cleopatra, though to his consistent adulation, Kalidasa's Sakuntala and her universal excellence remained unimpeached.³⁴ Tagore's conspicuously ambivalent engagement with the colonial culture in general and Shakespeare in particular has been quite rightly explained as his 'fraught relationship' with the Bard by Radha Chakravarty (2016). 'In relation to colonial enterprise', she eloquently writes, 'Tagore finds it necessary at certain moments to distance himself from Shakespeare as a representative of Western cultural and political domination in order to claim instead a place among the great Indian classics. Yet he also embraces "Shakespeare" as the epitome of internationalism and cosmopolitanism and uses him as an example with which to critique the narrow, imitative practices of his contemporaries in Bengal' (Chakravarty, 214). She is absolutely right in spotting the dichotomy in Tagore, but it is applicable, as discussed above, largely in the post-*Gitanjali*/Nobel period and partially in the early part of his life following his first two major critical plays *Raja o Rani* ('The King and the Queen', 1889) and *Bisarjan* ('Sacrifice', 1890). *Malini* ('Gardener')

cited by Chakravarty (2016, 209), according to Tagore's own admission, was conceived in 1890 while he was in England, and, the introduction to the play, where he acknowledged 'Shakespeare as our ideal for writing plays', was actually written 50 years later for the publication of his collected writings in August 1940. The issue is that despite getting influenced by Shakespeare—which was virtually impossible for any new playwright to avoid given the humungous craze for the Bard by the end of the 19th century—Tagore found it difficult to come to terms with the western theatre model. Unsurprisingly, his first few plays—*Valmiki Pratibha* ('Valmiki's Realizations'), *Kalmrigaya* ('The Fatal Deer', 1882), and *Mayar Khela* ('Game of Illusion', 1888)—were completely different operatic representations. *Prkritir Pratoshodh* ('Nature's Revenge', 1884), written in verse form, looks for 'a new drama different from contemporary trends' where the theme is neither mythological nor historical and 'characters are nameless, anonymous figures representing a wider segment of life; and the scenes mostly located in open spaces and streets indicate an uneasiness on the part of the playwright with the rigidities of a proscenium theatre' (Das:1991, 285). Even while composing his second most important play *Bisarjan* with *Macbeth*'s influence, Tagore felt a constant urge to come out of it, continued to radically revise the play, completely toned down the strong conspiratorial Lady Macbeth figure in the queen Gunabati.³⁵ The overarching sense of violence remains, but the actual enactment of it was avoided, only one suicide scene (of Joysingha) is caused to smoothly effect the catharsis in the villain Raghupati who is allowed to live a reformed life bringing peace to the kingdom of Gobindamanikya. Quite curiously, only two months after his 'Sakuntala', in his brief treaty on contemporary theatrical conventions in 'Rangamancha' ('The Theatre', December 1902), Tagore severely criticized the dominant trend to imitate the western theatrical model, especially the use of backdrop scenes, which, according to him, was not just a challenge to the imaginative faculty of the audience but sheer wastage of huge money in a poor country like India. 'By copying from the western model', he argues, 'we have created a bloated substance of a theatre which cannot be moved to the doors of the common people' for their benefits. Instead, he lauds the *jatra* or the indigenous model of theatre where 'there is no real distance between the audience and actors' (*Rabindra Rachanabali*: 1986, 680–681, translated).

The point that I wish to arrive at is this: Tagore could never entirely accept the western, especially Shakespearean, model of drama, not even while he tried to model a few of his plays on it. He rejected it completely during his most intense period of nationalist agitation, both in theory and practice. In his *post-Gitanjali*/Nobel period, while appreciating Shakespeare's dramatic genius, he continued to uphold at the same time greatness of the Indian classical plays. Based largely on the Indian classical tradition of dramaturgy and partly on the *jatra* and folk traditions, Tagore

went on to create a unique model for his own plays.³⁶ ‘In them’, writes Sisirkumar Das, ‘Rabindranath abandoned the Shakespearean model and developed a new structure which was peculiarly his own ... emerged out of his experiments with the traditions of an open air theatre’ (Das:1991, 286). Kironmoy Raha (1978, 141), too, has beautifully summed it up by saying Tagore in ‘his own unique way created his dramatic and technical oeuvres, and tried to indicate the way in which a genuine Indian theatre could come into being; a theatre which belonged to the soil and was true to its native genius, which sustained itself on plays inspired by Indian ideas of synthesis rather than conflict, on internality rather than external actions and which drew upon traditional sources to express universal truth’. Tagore’s model of theatre might not have achieved immediate success, but it went a long way in making radical interventions into the western paradigm of dramaturgy and giving birth to a new series of Indian drama.³⁷ Similarly, in his critical reading of Shakespeare, especially of *Tempest* in ‘Sakuntala’, he ventured to create a distinct Indian response to Shakespeare.³⁸ Unfortunately, his essay has not really received any attention as ‘Shakespeare criticism’ till the beginning of the present century.³⁹ Both Radha Chakravarty (2016) and Suddhaseel Sen (2021) are, I think, to that extent have also made a significant contribution to what is often eloquently termed as ‘Indian Interventions in Global Shakespeare’.⁴⁰

This chapter, in a way, brings to the fore a postcolonial enquiry into the reasons behind such neglect of a remarkable Shakespeare critic in Tagore, who had, over a century ago, not only challenged the hegemonic control of the Western literary canon but posed critical questions to the ideological position of the dramatist vis-a-vis *Tempest*: Is Shakespeare really concerned about the play’s Others in Ariel or Caliban? Or does his play justify Prospero’s narrative and, in turn, the imperialist narrative of their time? Reading from such perspectives, the counter discursive strategies by Tagore and Purnachandra (discussed next) pitted against the growing apotheosization of Shakespeare or cultural values transmitted through him assumed a remarkable significance, especially with the advent of nationalist sentiment in education under the aegis of the general anti-colonial movement.⁴¹ Since then, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Indian enthusiasm in adapting/translating Shakespeare had substantially gone down. Bengali literature became quite formidable in its articulation. Of course, it is impossible to suggest that an Indian literary revival or a cultural revolution happened to completely replace English. That was out of the question, as Shakespeare or English studies, by then, had already established their overwhelming dominance in the identity formation of the emerging Bengali bourgeoisie or in the upper echelons of the nationalists. Even Gandhi’s attempt to replace English with Hindi as the language of the Indian National Congress was politely disapproved by a changed Tagore in 1918.⁴² Nevertheless, what the nationalist movement in education did was a

huge boost to both Indian languages and literature to grow alongside English. Indian authors would not feel the usual pinch of inferiorization or self-flagellation while writing in the vernacular—a phenomenon, one may say, consequently sparing India, perhaps the only ex-colony of Britain to sustain its major ethnic languages/literature till today.

Notes

- 1 The debate around Shakespeare between Hemchandra and Vidyasagar and their respective statements in Bengali have been already discussed in the previous chapter. Bankimchandra's statement in English in his essay 'The Confession of a Young Bengal' and Tagore's reply in Bengali in 'Sakuntala' are discussed in detail in this chapter.
- 2 Originally, Sumit Sarkar (1973), *op. cit.*, was his doctoral dissertation on the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, turning it into the book.
For Tagore's patriotic songs, see Prasantkumar Pal (1990), pp. 259–262, *op. cit.* Apart from his usual participation in the anti-Partition movement, Tagore had composed a slew of patriotic songs which instantly caught the attention of the mass and drew common people into the movement. One of those songs, 'Amar sonar bangala ami tomay Bhalobasi' ('O my golden Bengla! Love to thee, mother') has been adopted as the national anthem of Bangladesh. Politicians cutting across political lines, including the present Prime Ministers of both India and Bangladesh are often seen to be referring to those beautiful songs.
- 3 See Nepal Mazumder (1982), pp. 150–173, *op. cit.*
Tagore's dissent against the colonial government used to be openly spelled out and recorded through various public lectures/essays during the crucial period of the anti-colonial struggles in India. The immediate cause of Tagore's address *Kanthorodh* ('The Throttled', February 1898) was the imminent amendment in the sedition laws in the IPC to make it more repressive in crushing dissents against the Raj. But it is also deeply reflective of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's unjust incarceration in September 1897 on a completely flimsy charge of sedition for writing the article in his weekly *Keshari* against the atrocities of the police in handling the plague in Pune. During the trial, which he eventually lost, Tilak sought help from his Calcutta friends through Sisir Kumar Ghose, who arranged a meeting on the issue in the office of the Amritbazar Patrika where Tagore played the pivotal role in collecting money and sending defence lawyers for Tilak (Majumdar, 151).
- 4 For a long period in his career Tagore was known to the rest of India and the world primarily because of his English *Gitanjali*, fetching him the most coveted accord in 1913, followed by his active international phase/world tours, and the controversial lectures on nationalism delivered in the United States in 1916. See Mandal (2016), *op. cit.*
See Prasantkumar Pal (1990), pp. 395–399, *op. cit.* See also Tagore's remarkable presidential address known as 'Sabhapatir Abhibhasan', delivered in Bengali in that meeting, in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. V, pp. 696–713, *op. cit.*
- 5 Michael Collins (2012) engaged with insightful inquiries into Tagore's political intellectualism and idea of nation-building, devoted an entire chapter on the Tagore-Gandhi symbiosis, and placed him quite appropriately alongside the most important political leader of 20th-century India. Linn Cary Mehta (2015), by publishing her doctoral dissertation in Columbia University (USA), traced definitive sentiments of decolonization in Tagore's poetics and read him

along with greats like Yeats, Césaire, Senghor, and Neruda, who, too, had undergone similar struggles against colonialism in their respective countries. Subrata Mukharjee (2020) has recently published a concise compendium of Tagore's political ideas, aptly considering him as a public intellectual par excellence. Bidyut Chakraborty (2021) has blamed it on the hegemonic influence of Western discourse for not recognizing Tagore's sociopolitical thoughts. However, one may find a somewhat anachronistic approach to Tagore's long career in these seminal endeavours.

- See Nepal Mazumdar (1980), *op. cit.* One of the earliest works in Bengali to diachronistically provide a deeply engaging political Tagore, his nationalism, and his gradual overture to internationalism.
- 6 See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1997), *op. cit.*, for more on the rivetingly engaging debate on numbers issues—social, political, and cultural—between two of the greatest Indians ever.
 - 7 See Sachishchandra Chattopadhyay (1911), *op. cit.*, Bankimchandra's nephew and the first biographer Sachishchandra Chattopadhyay has mentioned in detail those transfers and frequent travels which could not be permitted owing to Bankimchandra's health compelling him to take leave.
 - 8 According to Sachishchandra Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra did not complete his first novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife*, which he wrote in 1862. See Chattopadhyay (1911), Introduction, p. 23. Sachishchandra could not procure a copy of this novel as it was not available in print in his time. We do now have a copy of this incomplete novel, though. Whether Bankimchandra himself had completed the narrative or not would be an entirely different debate, but that he had never attempted to write another English novel in English was a fact of history.
 - 9 See Thomas Cartelli (1999), Introduction, *op. cit.*, referring to various appropriations of *The Tempest*, starting from the earliest ones, *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) by Ben Jonson and *The Enchanted Island* (1667) by Dryden and Davenant, to the canonical postcolonial readings, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) by O. Mannoni, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) by George Lamming, *A Grain of Wheat* (1968) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and *A Tempest* (1969) by Aime Cesaire.
 - 10 See Edward Dowden's (1875) *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, Henry S. King & Co., London. One of the most influential and long-enduring traditional (colonialist) readings has been Frank Kermode's introduction to Arden edition (1954) of *Tempest* *op. cit.* See Jerry Brotton (1998), *op. cit.*, and David S. Kastan's *Shakespeare After Theory* (1999), New York: Routledge.

That the play is about the early phase of English colonialism can be ascertained from the following readings among others:

Stephen Greenblatt's 'Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century' in Chiappelli (1970), ed., *First Images*, pp. 561–580.

Paul Brown's 'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism. In Dollimore and Sinfield (1985), eds. *Political Shakespeares*, pp. 48–71, *op. cit.*

Francis Barker & Peter Hulme's 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish': The Discursive Contexts of *The Tempest*. In Drakakis (1985), ed., *Alternative Shakespeares*, pp. 191–205.

Stephen Orgel's Introduction to *Tempest*, Oxford edition (1987).

Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*, *op. cit.*

Manojit Mandal's 'Prospero's Play or the Manifesto of a Deformed Slave: Contesting Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from the Post-colonized Perspective', op. cit.

- 11 Suddhaseel Sen (2021, 122–137) has considered *Abhijanasakuntalam*, *Malitamadhava*, *Tempest*, and *Othello*—all as principal sources or intertexts for *Kapalkundala*.
- 12 Shirishchandra's literary acumen at a young age was recognized by Bankimchandra by handing over the editorial responsibility of his famous brainchild journal *Bangadarshan* to him in 1880.
- 13 Suddhaseel Sen (2021, 111–150) has titled the entire chapter dealing with responses to *Tempest* by both Bankimchandra and Tagore as 'Challenging the Civilizing Mission', the contentions of which, obviously, this book is interrogating, especially in respect of Bankimchandra.
- 14 These seven novels are *Durgeshbandini*, *Kapalkundla*, *Mrinalini*, *Indira*, *Radharani*, *Rajani*, and *Devi Chaudhurani*. Many of his better known novels, except *Kapalkundal* and *Bishabrikha*, may not end in a formal tragedy, the tragic sense pervades nonetheless.

It is probable that Bankimchandra derived such a tragic ending from his reading of Edward Lytton's famous novel *Last Day of Pompeii* (1834), on which he modelled one of his later novels *Rajani* (1877). The Nydia plot with a blind girl in the title role had influenced *Rajani*'s portrayal, though it infused a series of new narratives into the novel, the most striking among them being the happy ending of his novel unlike Lytton's.

- 15 See Sen (2021), pp. 111–137, op. cit. I am essentially differing from his argument about Bankimchandra's conscious/brazen challenge to civilizing mission argument.
- 16 See Prasantkumar Pal (1987), pp. 276–277, op. cit.

Tagore delivered his famous 'Ingrej O Bharatbasi' ('The English and the Indians') in Bengali on 12 September at the General Assembly Institution Hall. One of Tagore's first major political lectures was thoroughly enjoyed by the capacity crowd cutting, across students from elites and literati. His bold yet cogent argument about the visible discrimination meted out to the Indians by the colonial government moved them so much that they did not want to listen to the next public address by a relatively unknown person. For the essay edited and published later, see *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1987), pp. 623–638, op. cit.

- 17 See Prasantakumar Pal (1990), pp. 89–90, op. cit. Pal informs us that initially, Tagore delivered 'Sakuntala' as a public lecture in a conference hall in Calcutta, probably in the last week of October 1902, and it came out first in *Bangadarshan*, October–November. In the public address, Tagore had made it clear that he was raising his protest against Bankimchandra's essay, its content, and the methodology of critical comparison, especially his extraction of the characters from the plays. He went on arguing that all literature is created in a specific time in a given country and contains expressed/unexpressed feelings of its people, and the same must be read as a complete whole to get its real pleasure. Many parts of the original lecture were discarded later. Nonetheless, the version that we are following maintains the essence of Tagore's protestation against the diminishment of Sakuntala vis-a-vis Miranda by his senior pro.

See Sumit Sarkar (1973), pp. 8–10, op. cit., for detailed discussion on Curzon's revival of the old plan to partition Bengal in a big way in the early part of 1902. Cited in Note 25, *Introduction*.

- 18 See Tagore's 'Santiniketan Bhramyacharyasram', *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1989), Vol. XIV, pp. 297–301, op. cit. Tagore's 13-year-old eldest son, Rathindranath, was among the first few pupils of the school.
- 19 See Sachischandra Chattopadhyay (1911), pp. 341–347, op. cit. The direct war of words between them started after Bankimchandra's campaign for militant Hinduism in two essays, 'Dharmajiggasa' ('On the Question of Religion') and 'Hindu Dharma' ('Hindu Religion'), published in July–August 1884. Tagore became the Secretary of Adi Bhramosamaj (The Original Bhramo Society) on 21 September 1884, and posted his scathing reply in November–December 1884 in *Bharati* by questioning Bankimchandra's idea of truth, indirectly blaming him that he was actually justifying a tendentious 'lie' in the name of religion. Bankimchandra immediately retorted with his essay 'Adi Bhramosamaj', targeting fundamentally the Original Bhramo Society and its religious principles, not exactly Tagore, who, Bankimchandra wrote, was too young to be replied with besides being quite close to him. Tagore followed him with 'Kaifyor' ('Explanation'), where he tried to clear the air of misunderstanding while at the same time politely defending his earlier position and seeking Bankimchandra's affectionate indulgence for causing any unintended hurt to him; Tagore continued with his enthusiasm for his other writings.
- 20 See Pal (1983), pp. 219–221, op. cit.
The principal issue for a liberal (Brahmo) Tagore was Bankimchandra's unrestrained propagation of militant Hinduism in the novel followed by the two 'sequels', which Tagore would make clear much later at the age of 70: 'then came the propagandist Bankim. *Anandamath*, *Devi Chaudhurani* and *Sitarani* came out one after the other, not to tell stories but to advise' (Pal:1983, 219–220, translated).
- 21 See Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, op. cit. In a highly perceptive way, he rakes up the ideological positions of linguistic/cultural colonialism and a need by the indigenous intelligentsia to produce a conscious counter ideology based on the native language and culture to completely dismantle them.
- 22 See Manojit Mandal's *Tagore and Decolonization* (2018), op. cit. My argument is: between his first major political lecture, 'Ingrej o Bharatbasi' ('The English and the Indians', August 1893) and the Provincial Congress' Presidential address, as 'Sabhapatir Abhikasahan' ('Address of the President', February 1908), through his regular public appearances, Tagore had consistently revealed his radical critique of imperialism, laying bare its economic, political, and cultural exploits of the subject nation. There are about 150 odd public lectures pregnant with such direct topical themes relating to politics, history, education, and culture. Some of the other most explosive are the following: 'Ingrejer Atanko' ('Terror to the British', January 1893), 'Apomaner Pratikar' ('Protest against Humiliation', September 1893), 'Raja o Praja' ('The Ruler and the Ruled', August 1894), 'Kanthorodh' ('The Throttle', February 1898), 'Siraj-ud-dulla' (May 1898), 'Prasanga Katha' ('Topical Talks' series in five lectures, May–October 1898), 'Atyukti' ('Exaggeration', September 1902), 'Bharatbarsher Itihas' ('History of India', July 1902), 'Sakuntala' (October 1902), 'Ramayan' (December 1903), 'Imperialism' in Bengali (April 1904), 'University Bill' in Bengali (April 1904), 'Bangabhangao' ('The Partition of Bengal', April 1904), 'Swedshi Samaj' ('Swedish Society', July 1904), 'Abostha o Baybostha' ('Situations and Remedies', July 1905), 'Bangobichhed' ('Separation of Bengal', September 1905), 'Partitioner Sikkha' ('Lessons of Partition', September 1905), 'Rajbhokti' ('Fealty to the King', January 1906), 'Jatiyo Bidyalay' ('National School', August

1906), 'Baydhi o Pratikar' ('Disease and its Remedy', August, 1907), 'Jagyobhanga' ('Breaking of Congress', January 1908).

See also Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (2011), pp. 84–107, *op. cit.*, who has termed this period as Tagore's political public life.

- 23 See Edward Said (1994), 'Yeats and Decolonization', pp. 265–288, *op. cit.* According to Said, Yeats, though writing in the tradition of the English writers and in their language, presents a fascinating aspect of decolonization. Though he deliberates upon other writers/thinkers of decolonization like Aime Ceasar, Pablo Neruda, or Frantz Fanon along with Yeats, mentions Tagore only once (p. 281) in the essay. Again, while discussing the themes of resistance culture, what was referred to marginally were Tagore's 'Nationalism' lectures (p. 259), wherein, ironically, Tagore was severe against the very idea of nationalism or anti-imperial nationalism as was being practiced then in contemporary India. This has remained the fact of history and also argument of the present book.
- 24 See Sumit Sarkar (1973), pp. 127–155, *op. cit.*, for the detailed discussion on Tagore's active role in the anti-Partition movements followed by the national education movement, whereby Tagore's idea of a school already established in Santiniketan had influenced the nationalists in Calcutta. The education movement started taking shape after the failure of the anti-Partition movement; the plan for the National Council of Education was drawn in November–December 1905, and the Council started its formal journey on 11 March 1906, with the first national school founded in Calcutta on 14 August 1906, where the inaugural address was delivered by Tagore. See 'Jatiya Bidyalay' ('National School') in Bengali, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol., *op. cit.* Incidentally, the first National College established under the Council went on to emerge as the present Jadavpur University in 1955.
- 25 Tagore's first political novel and perhaps the most controversial, *Gora*, though published as a whole in February 1910, it began to be serialized from August 1907 in the *Probashi Patrika* and ended by February 1909. I have discussed elsewhere how the changes/turning points in Tagore's own vision of politics and nationalism during these 18 months had influenced the narrative of the serialized novel. The novel had captured with remarkable poise the poignant debate on nation and nationalism, which many ways was reflective of Tagore's own volatility on the issues during that period.
See Manojit Mndal's 'Nationalism, *Gora* and Tagore's Vision of India' (2018), *op. cit.*
- 26 See Tagore's 'Chhoto o Baro' ('The Small and the Great') in Bengali *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1988), Vol. XII, pp. 555–568. Written in November 1917 in this important essay, the 'English' people Tagore had in mind were the 'great' English (*baro ingrej*), the great minds of England who upheld the highest value of their civilization through their refined literature and culture, and certainly not the 'small' English (*chhoto ingrej*), who were ruling India with their repressive policies or the sticks of law and order.
- 27 The English translation of the sonnet 'Shakespeare' came out on 23 April 1916, in *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, ed. Israel Gollanz (Oxford University Press). Obviously, the request to Tagore from the organizers of Shakespeare's tercentenary celebration had come much earlier, and he wrote the original poem in Bengali in the same name in November–December 1915 (In the Bengali calendar, 13th day of the 8th month *Agrahayon* in Sakabda 1322) and published in the Bengali journal *Sabuj Patra*. It was later included in the collection of his poems known as *Balaka*, published in May 1916.

Some two decades ago, the federal (State) government of West Bengal, while erecting a bust of Tagore at Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford, entered into a debate regarding inscribing the English version of the poem at the feet of the bust.

- 28 Tagore received this 'honour' on the birth anniversary of King George V on 3 June 1915, much to the disappointment/disgruntlement of many of his friends and compatriots who, by then, were deeply immersed in the freedom struggle against the British. The title was also offered to the famous nationalist and Congress leader, G.K. Gokhale, but being an astute politician in judging the situation, he had refused it. See Pal (1997), pp. 65–66. op. cit.
- 29 Krishna Kripalani (1980, 87) informs us (which was also corroborated by Tagore in *My Reminiscences*) that during his first ever visit to London at 17, while attending classes at London University, he was attracted by Henry Morli's reading of some of Shakespeare's plays. See Krishna Kripalani (1980), *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, Calcutta: VisvaBharati.
- 30 For a detailed discussion on Shakespeare's influence on Tagore's plays, see Sanatkumar Mitra (1985) in Bengali, pp. 151–163, op. cit. Pramathnath Bishi's *Rabindranatyaprabaha* in Bengali (The Course of Tagore's Plays), Vol. II, Calcutta: 1951. Can be accessed at https://ia904707.us.archive.org/33/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.454572/2015.454572.Rabindranatyaprabaha_text.pdf
- Asutosh Bhattacharya's *Rabindra Natyadhara* in Bengali ('The Nature of Tagore's Plays'), Calcutta: 1966. Can be accessed at https://departmental-library.blogspot.com/2016/09/blog-post_515.html?m=1
- E.J. Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet and the Dramatist*, New Delhi: 1991; Ananda Lal's 'Introduction to Tagore's Plays' in *Rabindranath Tagore: Three Plays*. Calcutta: M.P. Birla Foundation, 1987.
- 31 For Tagore's letters to his friend Loken Palit, see *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1987), pp. 695–710, op. cit.
- 32 For direct comments on Shakespeare by Tagore, see 'Gadyo o Padyo' ('Poetry and Prose', February 1892 RRII, 919–923), 'Naranari' ('Man-Woman', March 1892, RR II 1986, pp. 895–902), 'OitihasiK Upanyas' (Historical Novel, October 1897, RRIV 1987, pp. 685–688), and in the introduction to the novels, *Ghare-Baire* ('Home and the World', 1916, RRIV 751–758), and *Jogajog* ('Relationships' 1929 V 802–803, 1987) (RR stands for Rabindra Rachanabali).
- 33 Though Tagore's birthday normally falls on 8 May, it was a tradition followed in Santiniketan to celebrate his birth anniversary on the occasion of Bengali New Year, as the educational institution used to remain closed in May owing to scorching summer and other practical difficulties.
- 34 See 'Sahityer Mulya' ('Value of Literature', 25 April 1941) in *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1989), pp. 195–196, op. cit.
- 35 See Prasantkumar Pal (1987), pp. 132–133, op. cit., for a detailed discussion on the various editions of the play.
- 36 Plays like *Sarodatsab* ('The Autumn Festival', 1908) and *Raja* ('The King of the Dark Chamber', 1910), heralded this Tagorean model of drama.
- 37 See Kiranmoy Raha (1978), pp. 127–142, op. cit., for a detailed discussion on Tagore's varied influences on later dramatists like Shambhu Mitra and Utpal Dutta.
- 38 See Manojit Mandal (2002), op. cit., considering Tagore's 'Sakuntala' as a remarkably advanced

Shakespeare criticism anticipating the radical postcolonial readings of *Tempest* (Greenblatt:1970, 561–580; Greenblatt:1988, 142–161; Hulme and Barker:1985, 191–205; Brown:1985, 48–71; Loomba:1989, 142–158,

and so on). They have sought to validate Caliban's 'significant counterclaim to Prospero's authority' (Orgel, 30–35) and have endorsed the ideological underpinnings of the possible subversion of Prospero's colonialist discourse due to Caliban's unwillingness and occasional threats to Prospero's hegemonic control over the island.

- 39 Tagore's seminal criticism of *Tempest* in 'Sakuntala' is now available in a good translation for non-Bengali readers. For a complete translation of Tagore's essay, see Sukanta Chaudhuri (2010), ed., *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 40 See Poonam Trivedi, Paromita Chakravarty, and Ted Motohashi, eds. (2021), *Asian Intervention in Global Shakespeare* (Routledge: New York), interrogating Shakespeare's 'universality' from Asian perspectives.
- 41 See Sumit Sarkar (1973), note 24 above.
- 42 See Gandhi's letter dated 21 January 2018 to Tagore proposing Hindi to be the language of Congress, followed by Tagore's prompt reply dated 24 January discouraging Gandhi. For both letters, see Bhattacharya (1997), pp. 44–45, op. cit.

4 Murders in Shakespeare

Othello and a Forgotten Native

Full many a jewels in your treasure: O beloved Bengal!
Have I foolishly ignored them all,
Drunk with greed for wealth of others
I travelled abroad beggar in those evil hours.¹

When a repentant Michael Madhusudan Dutta composed these lines, hailing his mother tongue and returning to find inspiration in Swadeshi literature, somewhere on the outskirts of colonial Calcutta, an unknown young Purnachandra Basu, an alumnus of Michael's famous college, was silently preparing for an unequal battle against British cultural colonization by aggressively flaunting the glories of Indian literature. Born to a middle-class father Ramchandra Basu at Maheshpur village near Barasat (at present the district headquarters of North 24 Parganas) in 1844, much detail about the life of this sensational man is not available, except that he had studied at the school of Gourmahon Addhya, followed by the Hindu School. He had cleared his entrance for Presidency College in 1860, where he obtained his BA, and started teaching in a school in Howrah, followed by his short stint as a school inspector. Finally, sometime in the early 1880s he settled for a clerical job in the General Post Office in the metropolis. The details about his life thereafter need to be suitably gleaned from the only available sources, i.e., his rarely recognized critical treatises on varied themes—literature, religion, science, and society—published in a span of little over two decades between *Kavyasundari* ('The Beautiful Women in Novels') of 1880 and *Samaj-Tatva* ('Social Theories') of 1901 and the last accessible treatise, "*Shristi-Bigyan*" or "Science of Creation published in 1904." Being a student of English literature at the most elite college in the country did not deter Purnachandra from revealing an untypical defiance against it and the mindless craze for Shakespeare developed by the Indian intelligentsia. It is quite possible that the course of such glaring recalcitrance he might have received from his readings of

cataclysmic socio-political upheavals like the French Revolutions, which had a deep reflections in an earlier writing, *Samaj-chinta* (“Thoughts on Society”) in 1882. The literary dissent soon grew into a remarkable resistance against its concomitant western values which, he thought, were unsuitable to India and gradually affecting and polluting the serenity of indigenous culture. Judging from this perspective, this chapter can be considered as a meticulous excavation of a forgotten native intellectual of Bengal who, by going against the grain, rose to mount an unequivocal challenge to bardolatry and simultaneously carve out a discursive space for promoting and privileging Swadeshi literature over that of the alien rulers. His endeavour to boldly float what he used to call ‘Aryan literature’ and its cultural corollaries against offshore hegemonic intrusion may be read as ‘cultural nativism’ of a unique kind.²

Before elaborating on this term let us consider, for example, what he writes in the brief introduction to his first major collection of critical writings published in 1880:

The purpose of poetry (literature) is to express exalted thought and beauty of nature. The beautiful woman in such poetry is born out of poetic imagination. The way the beauty and exalted thought is manifest in such poetic queens cannot be found in real life women. *The huge storehouse of European poetry bears testimony to that. There is no dearth of such beautiful treasures in Indian Sanskrit literature as well.* Bankimchandra has elevated Bengali literature by creating few such beautiful women.

(Basu:1880, 2, emphasis added, translated)

This is a righteous assertive showcasing of the values of indigenous literature against the dominant trend of European literature. This collection of essays called *Kavyasundari*, set forth to defend Indian literature, both classical and contemporary, may be considered as the beginning of a structured counter-literary criticism produced in the vernacular. For example, in the chapter ‘Kapalkundala’, he upholds the eponymous heroine as Bankimchandra’s own unique creation meant only for such a fascinating narrative. The twists and turns of the novel, accoeding to him, are created to specially demonstrate the nature of the principal protagonist, with her remarkably uncommon traits distinct from both Sakuntala and Miranda:

... Sakuntala hails from a high clan with the Diva Menoka as mother and the great Sage Biswamitra as father. She has been raised in the *tapovan* of the sage Kanva surrounded by friends and brothers ... Sages and ascetics used to impart her education and philosophy of life ... Her exile is no exile at all and it is obvious that her nature will be so gentle. But how Kapalkundala could become so noble is amazing? She had an exile in

real sense of the term—desolate, stern exile. Unlike Sakuntala she is not born of a good lineage ... raised by a cruel tantric and yet she had a soft sweet nature. Where does she learn such benevolence? The beauty and nobility of her heart is higher than that of Sakuntala ... To create such an unearthly beautiful eremite the poet has kept her in the forest ... Miranda too being raised by her father had some idea of familial bonds ... But Kapalkundala was a like free wild nature ...

(Basu, *Ibid.*, 36–39, translated)

Despite such unalloyed appreciations, Bankimchandra's excessive dependence on the Greek tragedy and its use of fate do not find endorsement in Purnachandra, as he, according to him, 'has thrown the narrative of *Kapalkundala* into the hands of destiny. He has gone to such an extreme that a whole chapter is filled with issues of fatalism' (*Ibid.*, 89–90). This proposition, he argues, may not be quite palatable to rational minds as 'some phenomena in the world sometimes may appear to be destiny-driven, but who can say that they are happening all the times as per the ordain of the divine?' (*Ibid.*). Such beliefs, according to him, give birth only to irrational minds. In the case of another 'beautiful woman', Saibalini, from his novel *Chandrasekhar* (1875), Purnachandra has brought up the issue of forced loveless marriages and compared her elopement with an Englishman with Juliet's secret marriage. The consequences of both, according to him, are death or chaos, which must be avoided in Bengali literature. The reason for rejection of such an excess of European influence, he clarifies in his discussion of another of Bankimchandra's female protagonists Bimala from his first Bengali novel *Durgeshbandini* (1865). Modelled entirely on the European idea of esprit, intrepidity, and splendour, her shrewd and aggressive demeanours, according to him, defy revered Indian beauties like Sita. He takes a potshot at the English-educated middle-class Bengalis for being enchanted by Bimala: 'they are so engrossed in her sensual beauty that they devour Bankimchandra's portrayal of her half-naked body like a lecher' (*Ibid.*, 160). This is a serious fault in Bankimchandra, according to Purnachandra, as the depiction is crude and fit only for a bedroom scene of a Bengali *bhadralok* (160). The issue at hand for Purnachandra is unambiguously clear: despite Bankimchandra's greatness in excelling in literary creations, his unrestrained adherence to the rules and customs of foreign (colonial) literature is something that he finds unacceptable. This transaction, according to him, is not merely literary but involves problematics of larger question of cultural invasion. We shall continue to observe such resentment getting intensely articulated in his next big collection of writings *Kavyachinta* ('Poetic Thoughts', 1894) which contains the most sensational essay 'Sahitye Khoon' ('Murders in Literature'), hovering largely around discussions on Shakespeare's *Othello*, the principal focus of this chapter.

Coming back to the term 'cultural nativism', I primarily mean one's obsessive attachment to his native culture or its signifiers in conceiving and aggressively nurturing a distinct identity for him and his fellow citizenry, especially when such identity is under constant threat of being completely annihilated owing to the domineering presence of non-native culture. It is a deliberate ideological task on the part of such a native to proudly show off his ethnic identity and its markers; the bid becomes doubly pugnacious in a colonial situation where he has to deal with a powerful political intrusion at the same time. Read in this line it is significant how the idea of nativism seems to share a tantalizingly thin border with the discourse of nationalism. And yet, in the Indian context, as this chapter will argue, they remained distant from each other, or, to be more specific, they were surreptitiously separated by what was known as an otherwise innocuous department of culture/civility relayed through English literary studies in imperial India. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that many of the essential ingredients of Indian nationalism were visibly borrowed from such nativist cultural symbols. There were ceaseless endeavours on the part of the nationalist intelligentsia to grab them for their self-definition, to relive their pre-colonial prides by an act of writing or imagining them to make them palpable, and then to juxtapose them with present indignities. Edward Said (1994, 256–258) has attempted to comprehend such apparent dichotomies among the colonial intelligentsia in three ways by revisiting the fascinating Ariel-Caliban fable from *Tempest*. Some chose to be an obliging and consenting subjects like Ariel and returned to his nativity after Prospero's departure, 'a sort of bourgeois native untroubled by his collaboration' with the colonizer. Then, by dissecting the Caliban narrative, Said argues that one set of colonized people chose to be like a Caliban 'accepting his mongrel past but not disabled for future development'. Still, some others wanted to be 'a Caliban who sheds his current servitude and physical disfigurements in the process of discovering his essential, pre-colonial self' (Ibid., 258). Appropriated in such a way, this second Caliban for Said is 'behind the nativist and radical nationalisms that produced concepts like negritude, Islamic fundamentalism, Arabism and the like' (Ibid.).

Said's theory of radical fundamentalism of any kind having an inspirational figure in such a Caliban may appear to be too over-simplistic and far-fetched, especially in the Indian context. But without going into that unrelated debate one can safely assume that the fundamentals of his doctrine of resistance in a colonial situation are not entirely unreal or ahistorical. Purnachandra's ceaseless tirade against English literature/culture is to be understood in conjunction with his aggressive glorification of Indian literature as an instance of emphatic resistance against the encroachment of colonial culture. Said himself, while deliberating upon the history of such resistance movements in the colonies, goes to the extent of considering these

attempts as ‘themes of resistance culture’, and the ‘slow and often bitterly disputed recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded ... by the charting of cultural territory’ (Ibid.). Following the primary period of literal fight against the intruders is the second phase called ‘ideological resistance’ when attempts are made to reconstitute, according to Basil Davidson, a ‘shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of colonial system’ (quoted in Ibid.).

Purnachandra and the likes of him hold a critical but unrecognized place in the history of such restoration of native glories in colonial Bengal. To have a fair idea of his commitment to cultural nativism we need to, at least peripherally, go back to the actual theoretical presuppositions of the ‘nativist’ movements. The matter has been critically discussed and theorized by Said, followed by a host of other scholars, in the context of a series of resistance movements in ex-colonized nations ranging from the American and African continents to Asian and even some colonies in European regions.³ Quite obviously, India was by far left out, and the logic for omitting the two-century old richest and the most profitable ex-colony of Britain from such a large body of scholarship pertaining to nativist nationalist discourses was not entirely unfounded. It has to do with the historical fact that nativism as a movement based on a structured ideology and objective did not really grow longer in India during the heyday of imperialism and the resistance against it. Curiously though, and as discussed in the last two chapters of the book, ‘classical revivalism’, ‘cultural rejuvenation’, or even ‘militant Hindu reawakening’ had remained seminal and at times intersectional movements for a considerably long time. Since the latter half of the 19th century, these movements were getting suitably appropriated to solidify the narrative of Indian nationalism which was followed by a series of organized anti-colonial political uprisings/struggles since the last decade of that century.

The reasons behind the absence of any formidable nativist movement in colonial India, however, are manifold. The most significant of them was the nature of the colonized intelligentsia, the dominant segments of which were high-caste English-educated aristocratic and middle-class people. Readers may recall that in the introduction of this book, while commenting on Bagchi’s (1989) articulate adumbrations on the role of English studies in the formation of (male) colonial subjects, I have elaborately drawn on five distinct though occasionally intersectional classes of people directly or indirectly being shaped by colonial modernity. Even the most devout Hindus among them, like Bankimchandra, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, or Chandranath, had accepted the benefactions of English education. Only the caste Hindu Sanskrit pundits were still holding on to the *tols* or indigenous system of learning which also started to get pushed to the margins with the

advent of English education. The reason for such a recession of strong indigenous education in classical languages, as discussed, was owing principally to the thriving market value of the colonial language/education in the post-Macaulay era and the indigenous bourgeoisie, irrespective of their religious denominations, latching on to the same. Even the strongest practitioner of Hindu revivalism, remarkably popular then (and now), Swami Vivekananda, like Bankimchandra and Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, was deeply influenced by the western/colonial idea of modernity and used its values to liberalize his own religion, though he remained committed to it at the same time.⁴ Hence, to launch a virulent ethno-cultural movement, what is precisely defined as ‘nativism’ by Ashcroft and others (1998, 158), ‘to return to indigenous practices and cultural forms *as they existed in pre-colonial society*’ was really a distant possibility for the likes of them (emphasis added). On the other hand, the marginalized caste Hindu male (Sanskrit) *pundits*, despite getting aligned at times with their English-educated conservative counterparts on certain issues like Sati or child marriage, could not really sustain longer the regressive values attached to those inhuman rituals. Their opposition to widow marriage legislation also did not succeed, notwithstanding its overwhelming influence, as only a few generous and educated people came forward for implementing the cause. However, what those three remarkable religious reforms, led first by Rammohan Roy and then Vidyasagar and strongly backed by some philanthropic colonial governors and supportive laws, did was open the floodgates for the general environment of reform in society: the spread of literacy, education, women empowerment, and gradual build-up of civic sense among the colonized communities. As discussed earlier, though Vidyasagar’s persistently noble efforts and ‘the alien authority’s reforming legislations which interfered with matters of ritual practice, like the sati was not universally popular’ (Raychaudhuri:1988, 2), the reformist sentiments were quickly picked up by the English-educated minority controlling the mainstream discourse of Indian nationalism since the 1880s—with one of their legs stuck in the tradition of western liberalism. This was, though unpopular at times, one of the fortunate narratives of India’s national history, the constant resonances of which did not allow the country to go the way some of our other ex-colonial neighbours had gone later. This had also laid the foundation for further national reforms like women’s liberation, principles of civil liberty, and, more importantly, democracy.

However, this does not mean to suggest that the entire nationalist discourse was completely hijacked by such exclusive English values or that it became intrinsically westernized and the colonized intelligentsia as a whole was mortgaging their ethnic identity/value to the colonizer’s. The issue was much more complex. Partha Chatterjee (1986) has quite eloquently tried to explain it as the ‘liberal-rationalist dilemma’ of the colonized intellectuals in

general, whose attempt to search for a regeneration of the national culture adaptive of colonial modernity but also at the same time retaining certain significant stains of indigeneity was deeply contradictory:

It is both imitative and hostile to the models it imitates ... It is imitative in that it accepts the value of the standards set by the alien culture. But it also involves a rejection: in fact, two rejections, both of them ambivalent: rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity.

(Chatterjee:1986, 2)

Said, unlike Chatterjee, finds the transactions more straightforward, where Ariel/Caliban, like colonial intelligentsia, are engaged in an unabashed reconstruction of their native lands after the departure of their colonial masters and with the radical sets of Caliban completely rejecting the 'value of the standard set by the alien culture'. As we shall see, contrary to Chatterjee's assertion that in 'India, bourgeois opposition to imperialism was always ambiguous' (Ibid., 25), Purnachandra's persistent resistance against cultural imperialism was unambiguous, and it continued unabated for quite long. His undaunted veneration for Indian classical literature and Hindu tradition in consonance with his vehement denunciation of western principles may tempt one to see in the light of what Raychaudhuri (1988, 2–3) has called the 'negative dimension of nationalism—its xenophobic content' which 'began to emerge almost as early as the proud sense of a new identity and commitment to social change'. What could have been the resultant fate of the ex-colony, had it become the predominant side of mainstream Indian nationalism, is an entirely different debate. Nonetheless, it was a dimension; it evidently occurred both in ideas and reality. Someone from that educated community, despite being a servant of the British, had dared to challenge, undermine, and reject the basic tenets of the civilizing mission or the unsurpassable values attached to English literary studies or Shakespeare. Here lies the significance of a forgotten native like Purnachandra.

With such a context in mind, let us enter into a detailed discussion of how Purnachandra had meticulously, and not quite unconvincingly, laid bare the problematics of accepting/lionizing English culture transmitted through Shakespearean texts in late 19th-century Bengal/India. The essay 'Sahitye Khoon' ('Murders in Literature') had first come out in August–September 1894 in the fifth edition of the famous *Sahitya Patrika* ('Literature Magazine') before it was published in the collection of literary criticism called *Sahitya Chinta* ('Thoughts on Literature', 1896) exactly two years later.⁵ In its brief introductory appeal to the readers,

Purnachandra clears the air about his purpose: to uphold the glories of *swadeshi sahitya* or Indian literature, in comparison with British literature, and the role of literary criticism in achieving such a noble goal. English literature has gloriously thrived, according to him, owing to its sustained campaigns by the British wherever they had travelled, bolstered by continuous appreciations from an outstanding tradition of English literary criticism:

English literature has gloried so much primarily for two reasons: it is widely publicized and appreciated everywhere in the world; and secondly, *the English literary critics by eliciting limitless beauty in their own literature have extolled it ad nauseam ... Indian literature is not so fortunate to be discussed everywhere—even in its own country it is rarely praised.*

(Basu:1896, 1, emphasis added, translated)

Among the other arguable issues, this insightful statement illuminates that historically the spread of English literature has owed itself hugely to the expansion of British colonialism. The overarching sceptre of imperial power that English literary studies carried with it had a huge role in its consequent dominance across the globe and simultaneous marginalization of indigenous literature. Living under colonial ignominy any self-righteous native or Said's radical version of Caliban (1994, 258) would reflexively look back to his own past, be obsessed with it, find a suitable narrative to reconstruct his present, and write back to the intruders. Purnachandra attempts to do exactly that by ingeniously weighing up Indian literature with that of English and thereby, retracing the redeeming qualities in Indian literature. He goes on to set the terms of such a comparative methodology:

Because of the juxtaposition of the two literatures (Indian and British) in the comparative study the real essence of both has come out. And if one tries to extract the real essence of a literature can it be considered an attempt to disgrace the same? ... I have no intention to disgrace any of the two literatures. It is natural that, if British literature is discussed with Hindu (Indian) tastes in mind the results will be completely different from what it is in case of criticism of the same with British tastes.

(Ibid., 2, translated)

Committed staunchly to Indian classical tradition Purnachandra ventures to develop a niche for Indian critical responses to English literature, brings to the fore its darker sides, and then balances them with the brighter aspects of India's literary culture. Finally, by privileging his own culture he proceeds to produce a formidable counterpoint to both the Anglicist and the

missionary attempts—in different but converging ways—to promote English literature as an instrument of power, control, and chastisement.⁶

Coming to the essay written primarily on *Othello* but referring to other major Shakespearean tragedies as well, it begins by making a qualitative distinction between poetry and drama both in terms of their reception by the readers/audience and desired effects by the authors. Counting out Shakespearean tragedies mainly on the ground of dramatization of extreme barbarity, Purnachandra sensationally moves to the discourse on race in the play. Shakespeare's portrayal of murders, gory violence, and treachery is consciously contrasted with the peaceful, amiable ambience of Indian classical plays, even with a tragic sense. He contends that Indian dramaturgy does not permit the depiction or enactment of murders or bloodshed 'because in real life such murderous act can never generate any pleasure in humans; rather it evokes hatred, sends chill to our spine ... may create anger in the minds at times' (Basu:1896, 32). 'In theatre', he wonders, 'when audience watches such murders their anger can be raised to such an extreme that it can cause a real murder: no man can remain unmoved when witnessing such indiscriminate killings on stage?' (Ibid.). Purnachandra perfectly times this averment by citing Desdemona's murder scene (Act V, Sc. ii ll.79–85), quotes her conversation with Othello, her helpless appeals, unmerciful Othello, his damaging abuses, refusing her time for even a last prayer, and the actual smothering. He exclaims what might have been the mood of the audience, who are aware of Desdemona's innocence: 'won't they be furious and beat Othello on stage? They cannot afford to nurture a fellow feeling for a deceived unintelligent Moor and bear the killing of the guiltless wife' (Ibid., 33).

Readers may recall how Bankimchandra, discussed previously, has glorified the same scene, tracing an equivalence of *sati* in Desdemona and condemning Sakuntala: 'if unshaken devotion to one's husband, even under (his) beating, torture, desertion or reproach defines a true *sati* (chaste woman), then Desdemona is more honorable than Sakuntala' (*Bankim Rchanabali*, 192, translated). By contrast, Purnachandra has not just exposed the barbarity of the murder scene but severely admonished, if not deglamourized, the architect of such dramatic excess. Differing with Bankimchandra he rejects Desdemona's killing as a dramatic necessity to prop up Othello's character and consequent tragic sense or catharsis. Blaming it on the choice of the subject he raises an important question: was such a noble lady like Desdemona created only to meet such a murderous fate? (Basu:1896, 42). Furthermore, 'if such a talent (like Shakespeare) fails to turn the course of the play on its head, then it (his talent) is also deficient' (Ibid., 51). It is quite pertinent to note here that nearly two decades later, during the serialization of Tagore's famous novel *Ghare Baire* ('The Home and the World', 1916), he was answering a

reader/critic on the purpose of writing the novel; interestingly, he brought into brief discussion *Othello*.⁷ ‘What was Shakespeare’s objective in the play?’ he wonders, ‘would have been an extremely difficult question for one of the biggest writers in the world’. Shakespeare himself, Tagore surmises, might not be able to pick the correct answer and leave it to the audience/readers:

If someone is a Brahmin, he will understand that the poet has tried to advise the world to avoid racial discrimination. If one is against women’s free space, he will consider it as poet’s advice (for women) not see other men than her husband.

But if we doubt the poet’s intelligence and moral wisdom, then (we may think), the poet has tried to hit at the very idea of chastity (sati) by showing gruesome consequences of the wife’s impeccable loyalty to her husband. Or, he has the intention to mock at the innocent by allowing Iago’s evil ingenuity to win in the end.

(Rabindra Rachanabali:1987, 752–753, translated)

Tagore, too, finally maintains that Shakespeare must have incorporated his own likes/dislikes along with his country’s traditions and customs during his time, but that was done only for the purpose of poetry or art, not for theorizing or sermonizing (Ibid.). We are at liberty to agree/disagree with Tagore on Shakespeare’s own intent in presenting such a stupendous soldier, fascinating lover, and exceedingly articulate Moor in the beginning into a monomaniac gull robotically responding to Iago’s machinations in the middle and a heinous murderer of his innocent wife in the end. But that is not really the point of this discussion. What I find seminally significant in Tagore’s avrment was his skilful tracking of the racist elements in the play. How he had read them as reflections of Shakespeare’s time, and how a similar sentiment was prevailing in the Brahminical tradition of his own country. Finally, how he relates the violent fate of chaste women like Desdemona to the sati in his own country owing to chauvinist men like Iago. Like Purnachandra, Tagore had answered the likes of Bankimchandra for upholding the portrayal of Desdemona without, however, sharing the aggressive nativist zeal of Purnachandra. Purnachandra moved beyond *Othello* or English literature and continued his polemics against the culture they represent. He tore into the fundamentals of European or Shakespearean tragedy, brazenly calling out the most celebrated canonical plays as ‘veritable slaughter houses’:

Murders everywhere in *Macbeth*—in the beginning, middle and end ...
The last act of *Hamlet* too is a slaughterhouse. *Richard II & III, King*

John, Lear, Coriolanus—all filled with killings. How terrifying the words—‘Beware the Ides of March!’—are in *Julius Caesar* ... Does Shakespeare show the (thirsty) dagger only in the tragedies? Even when writing a comedy, he does the same thing. Read *Merchant of Venice*, you find a dagger getting sharpened in front of your eyes. Turning a play into a slaughterhouse is against the principles of civility ...
(*Ibid.*, 42–44, translated)

The argument is quite unambiguous: one of the best minds of the European Renaissance could not imagine drama without the enactment of violence in it, and the trend remained commensurate with the culture of his era. To validate his contention Purnachandra, quite interestingly, cites the late 17th-century rationalist thinker/essayist Joseph Addison (1672–1719), who found the very method of moving pity or terror or tragedy in general ‘dreadful butchering of one another’ on the English stage quite absurd and barbarous. ‘To delight in seeing men stabbed, poisoned, racked, or impaled, is certainly the sign of a cruel temper’, Addison quoted as saying, ‘it is indeed very odd to see our stage strewed with carcasses in the last scene of a tragedy, and to see in the wardrobe of the playhouse several daggers, poniards, wheels, bowls for poison and many instruments of death’ (quoted in *Ibid.*, 44). The adept critic in Purnachandra has not remained confined only to their literature. He backs his argument about the virtual blood-strewn theatre by corresponding it with real narratives of violence in European history ranging from the Spartan conflicts, scenes of Roman gladiators, to the middle-age barbarity, the Crusade and Inquisition, persecution of the Jews, witchcraft, and ‘the chilling tales of Ireland—the murderous riots between the English and the Scots, the deadly Protestant-Catholic conflicts in France ... Barbarous Spanish occupation of America (Latin)’ (*Ibid.*, 36, translated). ‘Study the European administrative statutes the former penal system’, he fumes, ‘used to remain bloodthirsty’. All these aspects of their history, according to him, suggest that the Europeans were fundamentally barbaric tribes; even their so-called enlightened religion (Christianity) had failed to curb barbarity. What we see in their history reflects naturally in their literature, especially in tragedies (*Ibid.*, 37).

One may have reason not to concur with such a sweeping argument in its entirety. But does it not compel us to rethink the much-hyped narrative of civilizing mission or cultural supremacy of the white West? Especially when they used to derive from it a kind of moral legitimacy to chastise the rest? Undoubtedly, English literary studies in general and Shakespeare in particular had founded the base of that ‘superior’ culture, the validity of which Purnachandra questioned even while living under colonial rule. One wonders in underlining how an obscure intellectual sometime in the late 19th-century colonial Calcutta was attempting not just a historicized reading of

English literature or Shakespeare but tracing a mutually sustaining interconnectedness between history and literature, or their intertextuality.

Purnachandra continues his argument by demonstrating how the barbaric heroism of tragedies was actually affecting both Indian literature and culture, how those violent Shakespearean tragedies had become an invaluable model for the world, 'how people are worshipping Shakespeare ... drinking poison through the golden straw made of his poetic excellence'. But 'does this "poison" get dissolved only at the gate of theatre or in writing/acting of tragedies?' Purnachandra goes far deeper that 'we too at times imitate tragedies in real life, kill our innocent wives like Desdemona with various sharp and cheaply available weapons coming from Britain; our murderous acts are getting publicized everywhere, and in the end whether high or low, Englishmen or illiterate dunces—all have become trained in using such weapons ... to create bloodbath in the country' (Ibid., 39). Well, we do not have the data to verify the audacious claim that the performance of Shakespearean tragedies in Indian theatre was precipitating or intensifying domestic violence and the subjection of women in late 19th-century India. Nonetheless, his argument about Shakespeare's increasing influence in literature and drama was beyond any reasonable doubt, as the issue has been discussed in a series of books, including the instant one. Whether blind imitation of Shakespearean violence in Bengali literature or plays has done good to our culture or society is beyond the scope of this book, but that the Bard was a preferred choice for the best of Indian writers is a fact of history. Purnachandra was raising a nearly lone battle against mindless craze for such Shakespearean savagery and showed anxiety for growing disinterest in Indian classical drama or literature at the same time. 'The way we become moved by Shakespeare's Desdemona', he asks, 'do we express more emotion for (our) Sita, Damayanti, Draupadi, Sakuntala, Sagarika, Malbika, Mahaswata, Sharmistha and others?' (Ibid., 40). By referring to these tragic heroines of Indian mythologies and Sanskrit literature, he regrets that they could not inspire his contemporaries because their role in the respective creations did not evoke vehement and outrageous passion. Curiously, by bringing in a counterpoint to his own argument on representation of violence in both the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, he goes on to answer by arguing that neither of the great epics was a drama to be staged and shown to people. They are poetry to be heard evoking less ferocious sentiment, and that, too, violence, according to him, in these great works, is employed to eliminate evil and not to kill, maim, or betray good souls like Lear, Cordelia, Imogen, or Desdemona. While judging the quality of literature, whether poetry or tragedy, what Purnachandra fundamentally stresses is the role of violence in evoking a tragic sense. He concedes that Shakespeare was immensely talented but, owing to his responsiveness to the savage tastes of his people, could not

present an aesthetically refined notion of tragedy like the *Ramayana* by Valmiki or *Abhijanasakuntala* by Kalidasa.

In the portrayal of the eponymous character of the play, too, Purnachandra reveals his displeasure with the way a Moor has been unmercifully represented on the contemporary stage. 'In reality how many people behave like Othello?' Purnachandra sternly questions, 'the way Shakespeare has exaggerated Othello's portrayal, the character has turned out to be somewhat unreal; normally, people are not that stupid especially a skilful warrior and an army general like Othello' (Ibid., 46). Finally, he virulently accuses Shakespeare of not being able to come out of the racist anxiety like his people while thinking of a Moor like Othello:

In Shakespeare, it was not a fault of talent; in Shakespeare it was a fault of taste—a taste that found joy in such murderous acts, a taste that derived great pleasure in depicting a black Moor as such a vile heartless creature. This was not merely Shakespeare's taste, this was the taste of the times, the taste and inclination of the English race found a great deal of pleasure in depicting a Moor in such a fashion. Even today, we find examples of this kind of taste from time to time.

(Basu, Ibid., 51)

Every sentence in this stunning passage assumes significance in unfurling the discourse of racism endorsed by the playwright, an issue taken up nearly a century later by another renowned Indian critic Ania Loomba (1989). In Shakespeare's play, she writes, 'Othello is described in terms of the characteristics popularly attributed to blacks during the sixteenth century: sexual potency, courage, pride, guilelessness, credulity, easily aroused passions' (1989, 52). One may also be tempted to find an uncanny similarity between this unknown native of 19th-century Bengal and the famous African Chinua Achebe accusing Conrad of blatant racism in *Heart of Darkness*.⁸ Purnachandra, like Achebe, had hit extremely hard at the core of the British 'liberal' humanism so gloriously born out of the European Renaissance, Shakespeare being the biggest torchbearer of the same.

After a plethora of books, journals, and theses written/produced in English studies departments across the world in the last 50 years, one does not need to recount such a rich history of scholarship negotiating with the discourse of racism in *Othello*, notwithstanding that such racialized readings used to be often treated as profane long into the postcolonial Indian classroom.⁹ I have discussed elsewhere (Mandal:2011) how Shakespeare, being one of the most important minds of the Renaissance, had attempted to sketch one of the most widely read characters in world drama. My endeavour was to draw an analogy between the fate of Othello in the play and that of the Orient by extending Said's critical argument

presented in his path-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978), that the existence of the Orient was not only displayed but was fixed in time and place for the West through the highly impressive textual successes of the Orientalists—the Orient is what Europe knew. Hence, Othello is what Shakespeare and his contemporaries knew. It is well known that Shakespeare was writing in a period when the age-old European interest in the Orient and far-distant lands was growing exponentially following the discovery of the trade routes to the East and the Virgin territories, which, in turn, produced a large body of travelogues. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare had relied upon such readily available materials to configure the eponymous hero of the play by carefully associating his ethnicity with the exotic tales. Furthermore, to give those irrational/inconceivable tales palpable credence and to cater to the white Europeans the playwright had deliberately chosen Othello as the vehicle to relay them, especially the accounts of cannibalism, ‘men whose heads/ Do grow beneath their shoulders’ (I, iii, 143–4). We are volubly informed how these incredible stories used to please not only Desdemona’s father, who ‘oft invited me/ Still questioned me the story of my life’ (I, iii, 127–128) but Desdemona as well, not to mention how subsequent generations of European audiences/readers continued to get thoroughly entertained by Othello’s ‘strange ... passing strange ... wondrous pitiful’ tales (I, iii, 159–160).¹⁰

The point I wish to make here is that, as held by Purnachandra also, Shakespeare was acutely aware of the taste of his countrymen and that they would like to see these attributes suiting an outsider like Othello more than anyone else—they appeared improbable to the Venetian structure of thought but very plausible in the case of the Moor. Alan Sinfield (1992) has persuasively argued how Othello is tolerated and attended by the Venetians when he keeps playing on his unfamiliarity, dramatizing his otherness, and displaying the peculiarities of his ethnic identity. The entire white civilization becomes not only the glued spectator but the director, jury, and judge of every facet of Othello’s life story and strange behaviour. Shakespeare, too, has kept the native identity of the central character shrouded in inscrutable mystery, relating him variedly with the Negroes, black Moors, sometimes with the Turks, and even with Indians. He either fails or does not provide any definite genealogy of his ‘hero’; his ‘monstrosity’ is taken for granted; Othello is what the dramatist gathers from various sources or portrayed the way willed by the white audience because ‘the English race found a great deal of joy in depicting a Moor in such a fashion’ (Basu, *Ibid.*) as a ‘blacker devil’, ‘lascivious Moor’, ‘barbary horse’, ‘malignant Turk’, and ‘base Indian’, among many more. The point is that the scope of constructing the psychological and cultural other in European discourse has been inextricably connected with an insular desire to disregard, essentialize, and divide the humanity of different cultures, peoples, and geographical locales in binaries

like 'us/them', 'West/non-West', and 'humans/sub-humans'. This might have been deliberately accomplished to delight the Europeans, as 'even today, we find examples of this kind of taste from time to time' (Basu, *Ibid.*). As 'instead of the unified subject of humanist thought, we have a near schizophrenic hero whose last speech graphically portrays the split—he becomes simultaneously the Christian and the Infidel, the Venetian and the Turk, the keeper of the State and its opponent' (Loomba:1989, 48).

Purnachandra, by becoming brazenly recalcitrant to Shakespearean plays, especially tragedies, in sharp contrast with Indian classical drama, ventures to serve dual purposes. Cautioning his fellow writers against imitating Shakespeare on the one hand and exposing the cultural logic of imperialism on the other, as 'it should be amply clear by now that Eurocentric literary curriculum of 19th century was ... a vital, active instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial expansionism and military action' (Viswanathan:1998, 166–167). As mentioned previously in another brief essay 'Sakuntala and Miranda', (Basu: 1896, 91–96) upheld Kalidasa's Sakuntala against Bankimchandra's unrestrained admiration of Miranda. Sakuntala lived among other humans with the love and affection of friends around, with education from her sage foster father, and was aware of familial values. Miranda, too, had the protection of her knowledgeable father and might have some training in worldly matters, but she did not have any friends around to know the finer senses or passion of love; Caliban is an enemy and is treated as a sub-human/monster. Purnachandra, after narrating the most intense courtship conversation (III, I ll.67–87) between Ferdinand and Miranda, retorts, 'how does Miranda learn such intricacies of human love affairs when she herself has confessed that she has not seen any man except her father for twelve years?' (*Ibid.*, 92–93). Shakespeare has created an implausible figure in Miranda, he goes on, 'perhaps owing to his habit he has not hesitated to infuse the common traits of Juliet, Rosalind, Beatrice, Imogen, Desdemona, Hermia and others in Miranda as well'. Undoubtedly, this was also his conscious rebuttal to Bankimchandra for promoting Miranda and, condemning Sakuntala who, for Purnachandra, is impeccable as 'the picture of her simple demeanour, shyness and yet spontaneous youthful love is rare in the western society of Shakespeare' (*Ibid.*, 93). After meticulously rejecting Bankimchandra's argument about Desdemona-Miranda as an ideal Indian woman, Purnachandra proceeds to propel Sakuntala, her honour, dignity, and yet deep commitment towards her husband. By so doing he effectively upholds her cultural norms against those of Miranda, an attempt to undermine both the supremacy of European values promoted through canonical literature and its accompanied hegemony in a colonial situation. Going by Viswanathan's argument, 'wherever the Eurocentric curriculum is described in the scholarly literature in terms of Western cultural superiority, there is an underlying assumption

that superiority is a measure of dominance' (1998, 167–168, emphasis added)—the position of dissident colonial intellectuals like Purnachandra appears to be clearer, and so does their unresolved anxiety about the dominant course of English literary studies over their own.

Purnachandra, in many ways, came quite close to Tagore, as discussed in the previous chapter, in exposing the vulnerabilities in the imperial culture. However, unlike Tagore, his defence of Sakuntala was not informed by any 'feminist' awareness against Miranda's uncritical acceptance of Ferdinand's marriage proposal or Desdemona's meek self-surrendering. Purnachandra reveals his intent in another essay called 'Sahitye Prem' ('Love in Literature') in the same collection, whereby, far from being a proto-feminist, he actually believed in the traditional Hindu idea of a female subject and her role in conjugal life. The western idea of equality between man and woman in marriage, according to him, was unsuitable in India, though both ought to be in intimate, emotive company with each other (Ibid., 80.) But their position in the eyes of the people must be different. Indian society, he continues, has fixed the responsibility of holding the extended family together on the wife, and hence she has to always respectfully look up to the men in the family (Ibid., 117). Curiously, prescribing such regressive roles to women does not, however, mean that Purnachandra was against women's education. In another place, he argues that women must receive appropriate instructions in conduct as in the classical era because 'the ultimate result of female education was to create such good wives' (Ibid., 154). Quite obviously, Purnachandra was also opposed to the contemporary agitation for abolition of child marriage which was enforced after the enactment of the highly controversial Age of Consent Act in 1891. Intriguingly, the history of the passage of this legislation bears ample testimony that even the best of the educated minds of the time and popular nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak vehemently opposed the Act. It is quite ironic that such noble and beneficial legislation had the support of only a few men and some women groups, and the opposition to it soon grew into an extremely popular movement against the colonial government.¹¹ The movements both for and against the law all through the 1880s and 1890s—even after its passage—reflected the classic paradox of colonial modernity: how it used to simultaneously hurt the colonizers and the natives, its harbingers and recipients. Driven by their commitment to 19th-century liberalism and women's empowerment at home, the British had no option but to think of introducing such 'benevolent' measures for their Indian subjects, and yet the same endeavours used to produce such boomerang reactions uniting many of them against their 'benefactors'.

By bringing the history of this 'regressive' movement, I intend to inform how one's obsessive commitment to his native tradition can undermine the fundamental premises of western reason or the pet project of the European Enlightenment in a colonial situation. Purnachandra, read with such

perspective, appears to be one of the many indigenous intellectuals to do so: the articulation of cultural nativism to resist and dismantle the offshore culture or the imperialists. Consider again how he cautions against the British idea of love or marriage transmitted, according to him, by daring and destructive Shakespearean heroines like Juliet, Cleopatra, or Desdemona:

Are we tending to become like the British? Are we trying to establish British society by abolishing the old Hindu society so strongly founded on the idea of love and respect? These two societies are completely opposed to each other; I have proven the same by showing their different ideals of love ... Their meeting is not possible. The more we follow the foreign social customs by rejecting the native, the more our society will be constituted like them, and in the end a complete British society will come to replace the Hindu society.

(Ibid., 120)

Evidently, this was not merely an anxious colonial intellectual speaking, nor was it only resentment against the intrusion of alien culture. Coupled with both, I think, it was a kind of *ressentiment* flaunted against the colonizers—blaming them and their culture for every evil in the native society. Said (1994, 276), as mentioned above, while defining nativism and why it should be rejected or reconceived, has cited Jalal Ali Ahmad's *Occidentosis* (1978), which, according to him, was 'an influential Iranian tract ... that blames the West for most evils in the world'. The argument appears to be quite compelling, as in most cases, nativist movements in a colonial or ex-colonial nation tend to deny the historicity of 'evils' that were intrinsic to their indigenous society, like sati, child marriage, caste, and ethnic oppressions that India had to negotiate with. This explains why the likes of Purnachandra, treading close to being a nativist nationalist, tend to be an exclusionist caste Hindu chauvinist, at times, and remain less known to an evolving late 19th-century Indian society with its reflexive responses to the liberal ideas of western/colonial modernity. Quite obviously, even an uncompromising nationalist Tagore in the late 1890s, despite being critical of Shakespeare's influence on Indian theatre, could not agree with Purnachandra's idea of cultural nationalism which compulsively accepted tradition and fanatically rejected modernity. Two years after Purnachandra's collection of those essays (*Sahitya Chinta*), Tagore came up with a brief, witty critical review in the famous literary journal *Bharati* (May–June 1898):

Purna Babu (Purnachandra) has attempted to define ideals of literature by comparing between Aryan (Sanskrit) and European literatures ... But we suspect that the Goddess Saraswati (Indian goddess of knowledge) who has so far been liberally blessing the diverse hearts

of the world could suddenly be willing to remain confined only in Purna Babu's strict cordon ... The expanse of imagination is as *vast and mysterious* as the real world itself; *it is not like that one part of the land is surrounded with religious boundaries of the Aryan, and the other part is filled with thorns by the non-Aryans.*

(quoted in Pal:1988, 185, emphasis added, translated)

Tagore strongly upheld Indian classical literature. But, unlike Purnachandra, he was deeply aware of the pitfalls of becoming unreasonably obsessive with it, especially in a 'vast and mysterious' country like India, where internal dichotomies of caste, creed, language, and culture were visibly intense. He realized that to aggressively promote one set of values (Hindu or Aryan) to an impossible extreme in order to fight the immediate aliens would ultimately lead to the disintegration of the country in ethno-cultural-religious lines. It is widely known how even a young Tagore had severely condemned the series of Hindu-Muslim clashes that took place between 1892 and 1893 in Maharashtra and how he had always endeavoured to unite these two major communities.¹² His school in Santiniketan, though modelled on the ancient Indian system of education, used to impart regular lessons in English, as for him, 'moving beyond nativism does not mean abandoning nationality, but it does mean thinking of local identity as not exhaustive, and therefore not being anxious to confine oneself to one's own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, and its limiting sense of security' (Said, *Ibid.*, 277). Instead, Tagore intended to propagate an eclectic system of knowledge/learning where both western and indigenous values would be imparted to the pupils without one dominating the other. Quite naturally, being in an oppressive colonial regime, who was to control the button of that transaction would be quite significant; who would regulate the terms and conditions of such a system became crucial. The issue can be best understood by referring to how Tagore had read two giants of two different cultures, Kalidasa and Shakespeare, when pitted against each other, and how he continued to prefer the Indian even in his post-Nobel era. Nonetheless, history has taught us an unmercifully bitter lesson that colonialism was such a pervasive ideology that a colonial intellectual, howsoever big, remained susceptible to its adumbrations. Dominant discourse ultimately controlled the narrative and got colonial writer implicitly soaked into it. How Tagore, too, after 1910, had responded to the cultural politics of imperialism would be an entirely different debate which I have taken up elsewhere (Mandal, 2020) and could only be briefly discussed in the last chapter of this book.

Be that as it may, superlative genius that he was, Tagore was aware of the thin border between nationalism, mania for one's ethnicity (nativism), and fundamentalism. As discussed in the previous chapter, such realization had made him dare, at a very young age, to challenge the vision of India portrayed

by the most influential writer of the time, namely, Bankimchandra. However, Purnachandra though was a by-product of the colonial education, remained largely unchanged in his aggressive privileging of Hindu values even in his last available writing. That does not suggest that he was unaware of the benevolent aspects of western modernity, history and society. We have seen the glimpses of it in his *Samaj-Chinta: Europeo and Swadeshi Samaj Bishayak Prastab* (“Thoughts on Society: A Proposal on European and Swadeshi Societies”) of 1882, showering extensive accolades on the European idea of liberty and equality followed especially after the French Revolution, the absence which in India he had lamented. Let us though not lose sight of the fact that this had largely remained a one-off early writing of appreciation for the Europeans to contrast Indian’s lack of courage and valour against their servility during his own time. Purnachandra continued to stay committed to upholding supremacy of Hindu traditions and flaunting his nativist cultural mores. Even in his last writing he made an emphatic endeavour to proudly privilege the Hindu scriptures and the Vedas over European sciences. He chooses to demonstrate in them more powerful scientific treaties capable of convincingly clarifying the idea of Creations and, in them will be found not only the science of phenomenal world as explained by European science, but the dynamics of noumenal or spiritual science where Europe could not reach (Basu:1904, *Introduction*, translated).

Undoubtedly, such a nativist nationalist or the radical ‘Caliban’ of Said’s import if rediscovered in its entirety will turn out to be a rich reservoir for one particular brand of nationalism practiced in contemporary India. But ironic, as it may seem, such inflated obsession for native traditions has also stamped Purnachandra out of the annals of extremely productive Bengali literature despite producing some sensationally advanced thoughts. Whether it was right or wrong would be another debate. But the fact that India remained, and still is, a multi-religious, multicultural and eclectically diverse nation strivingly developing way ahead of the other South Asian ex-colonies owing largely to such narrative of nativist nationalism being limited to the fringes. The newly decolonized ruling elite like the ‘Ariel’ of Said, took the best gift of European modernity, reformed the country on the road to progress, reconstructed the young nation with colonial ravages without hesitating to use the tools of the colonizers.

Notes

- 1 An oft-quoted popular poem ‘Bangabhasha’ or ‘Bengali Language’ published along with the collection of his sonnets in 1866; the original Bengali lines go like this:

*He Banga, bhandare tabo bibidha ratan;
Ta sabe, (abodh ami) abohela kori,
Para-dhan-lobhe matta, karinu bhramon
Paradeshe, bhikkhabritti kukkhanе achar!*

Madhusudan Dutta originally wrote the poem as ‘Kavi-matribhasha’ or ‘A Poet’s Mother Tongue’ back in September–October 1860, when he was evidently returning from English to Bengali to produce his future literature, including the most celebrated *Megnathbadh Kavya* or ‘Poem on Slaying of Megnath’, in 1861. See Sachishchandra Chattapadhaya (1911), p. 151, op. cit.

- 2 See Achin Hsiau (2021). *Politics and Cultural Nativism in 1970s Taiwan: Youth, Narrative, Nationalism*, New York: Columbia Press. Hsiau has made a pronounced connection between Taiwanese identity formulated through indigenous literary narratives and Taiwanese national politics in the post-civil war period. The native literature rediscovered thus influenced the new generations to strive for ‘the indigenization or Taiwanization of politics and culture’, which, according to Hsiau, ultimately led Taiwanese to their democracy and peaceful transfer of power from the Kuomintang (KMT) to the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan.

It is evident, however, that in case of my discussion on Purnachandra, I have not really made such an oversimplification between the rediscovery of one’s nativist literature/culture and political liberation. Nonetheless, I have argued that such acute awareness of nativist identity constructed through indigenous literature helped some colonial intellectuals challenge the narrative of cultural supremacy of the British, consequently giving birth to a kind of nationalist consciousness in late 19th-century Bengal.

- 3 For a detailed discussion on nativist movements see,
 Harlow, Barbara (1987). *Resistance Literature*, New York: Methuen.
 Jack, B.E. *Negritude and Literary Criticism: The History and Theory of ‘Negro-African’ Literature in French*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
 Kennedy, E.C. (1975) (ed. & introd.). *The Negritude Poets: An Anthology of Translations from the French*, New York: Viking.
 N’gugi, wa T. (1981). op. cit.
 N’gugi, wa T. (1993). *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, London: Heinemann
 Parry, B. (1994). ‘Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance: Two Cheers for Nativism’, in F. Barker, P. Hulme, and M. Iversen (eds) *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, Manchester: Manchester University.
 Spivak, G. (1985) ‘Can the subaltern speak? Speculations on widow sacrifice’, *Wedge* (7) 8 (Winter/Spring).
 Spivak, G. (1987). *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Methuen.
- 4 Tapan Raychaudhuri (1988), op. cit., has precisely harped on this argument about both dichotomy and intersectionality between colonial modernity and the Hindu tradition and how three principal Hindu thinkers of mid-19th-century Bengal—Bankimchandra, Bhudev Mukharjee, and Swami Vivekananda—negotiated with the problems.
- 5 In a rare instance, Abhishek Sarkar (2016) refers to Purnachandra Basu’s ‘Sahitye Khoon’ (‘Murders in Literature’) once as a footnote; pp. 118–119, op. cit.
 For a translated version of Purnachandra’s essay see Rusha Chowdhury (2021) in *International Journal for Persons with Special Needs and Rehabilitation Management Volume*, vol. VI; ISSN 2321–9254, pp. 103–115 (published from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India).
- 6 See Gauri Viswanathan’s chapter ‘One Power, One Mind’, pp. 68–93, op. cit.
 She has argued that since the mid-19th century, especially after the establishment of direct imperial rule, British education policies towards the native started to be essentially different from what they used to be during the Company regime. With

the introduction of the university education system, more emphasis was laid on utilitarian principles to create 'good' servants/subjects out of the Indians, but it had also incorporated texts/lessons of morality to address the missionaries' demands of Christian ethics within the curricula so that the educated natives did not develop a dissenting or 'immoral' mind against their masters.

- 7 Tagore's *Ghare Baire* ('The Home and the World', 1916) was originally serialized in the *Sabuj Patra* literary journal between April 1915 and March 1916. During the time of its serialization Tagore used to receive letters with adverse reactions against the narrative, and while answering one such criticism, he wrote a reply in the same journal where the comments on Shakespeare's *Othello* were made. See *Rabindra Rachanabali* (1987), pp. 752–753, op. cit.
 - 8 See Chinua Achebe's 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness' accessed through <https://cjuneadams.com/2018/08/13/chinua-achebe-an-image-of-africa-racism-in-conrads-heart-of-darkness/> on 14 December at 00.30 am.
 - 9 See Ania Loomba (1991), 'Criticism and Pedagogy in the Indian Classroom', in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, ed. (1991). *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, Delhi: OUP. She has discussed the predicament of a Shakespeare or English teacher with the historicized and/or New Historicist paradigms of critical apparatuses in Indian classroom in the early 1990s.
- The problem continued long into the beginning of this century as well, especially in the colleges/universities in the non-metropolitan areas where new readings of Shakespearean texts was to be replaced by the mug books with lucid textual analysis of the plays. See Mandal (2011), op. cit.
- 10 See Introduction to '*Othello*', pp. 2–14 in Norman Sanders ed. (1997). *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, Cambridge University Press. Sanders, while discussing the source and issue of race in the play, has correspondingly mentioned various travelogues that Shakespeare might have laid his hands on while writing the play.
 - 11 The resistance to the Bill increasing the age of sexual consent for girls from 10 to 12 years was mounted by the majority of Indians on the ground that it was hurting their Hindu religious sentiments. Prasantakumar Pal (1986), while discussing a very significant public address, 'Hindu Bibaha' ('Hindu Marriage') by Tagore on 4 September 1887 at the Science Association Hall in the central Calcutta informs us that young Rabindranath, visibly taking side against child marriage, had a stupendous task to impress upon the conservatives supporting it. The list includes the who's who of the then Bengali society, like Chandranath Basu, Akkhaychandra Sarkar, Indranath Banerjee, Dr. Gurudas Banerjee, Haraprasad Shastri, and others.
 - 12 For a detailed history of Hindu–Muslim riots in Maharashtra in 1893–1894, see Shabnum Tejani (2011). *Indian Secularism*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, pp. 57–66.

5 Weight of this sad time ...

King Lear and the Fear of the Raj?

The Indians daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and forms ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind.

(C.E. Trevelyan:1838)

I have seen native students who had obtained an insight into European literature and history, in whose mind there seemed to be engendered a spirit of disaffection towards the British Government.

(Major-General Rowlandson:1852–53)

Shakespeare, though by no means a good standard, is full of religion; it is full of the common sense principles which none but Christian men can recognize. Sound Protestant Bible principles, though not actually told in words, are there set out to advantage, and the opposite often condemned.

(William Keane:1852–53)

The three statements coming from three different apparatuses of British rule in India within a span of 15 years are reflective of one of the vulnerable terrains of the Raj, when it came to negotiating with the native intelligentsia through the conduit of English education.¹ Obviously, it cannot be said that Trevelyan's self-assured predilection of a huge prospect of English literature complementing and extending the ideology of the Raj, made barely three years after his brother-in-law's in/famous Minute, was not fully realized. But the Anglicist plan to comprehensively co-opt/subordinate the indigenous intellectuals was only partially successful, as the Indians with 'a native Milton or Shakespeare' did not entirely 'require us to guide them' in the future (Trevelyan:1838, 123). As pointed out in the preceding chapters, contrary to the high hopes of imperialists like Macaulay or Trevelyan, 'the happy affectionate attachment of the people' (Ibid.) of colonial India with the Raj began to crack. English education started to produce astonishingly

counterproductive results inspiring the native intelligentsia to assert themselves and define a structured nationalist thought from the 1860s onwards. The second statement to that extent by a veteran army general, though made five years before the first major native armed uprising, appears to be more realistic. It brings to fore the typical anxiety of an offshore power illegally occupying a foreign territory in the name of civilizing mission: a stunning factual replication of the occasional angst revealed by Prospero in *Tempest*.² The third averment coming from an influential man of Church is brazen about the specific role of the Bard in supplementing 'the Book of God' in order to complement the expansion of Christ's kingdom, a metonymic representation of the Empire: 'the genius of literature ... clearly sees that in the missionary brotherhood she has found the men who are to extend her empire to the ends of the earth, and give her throne a stability that will be lasting as the sun' (quoted in Viswanathan:1998, 81).

This chapter, relying fundamentally on Viswanathan's 'One Power, One Mind' argument, though, moves beyond, to understand 'the Failure of English' vis-à-vis a sublime Shakespearean tragedy *King Lear*. In doing so it focuses first on the play's minimal presence in the colonial curriculum or teaching platter and thereby drawing the spotlight on the consequent non-responsiveness to it from the Bengali intelligentsia in the second half of the 19th century. The chosen timeline appears to be quite significant given the fact that Macaulay's famous declamations on Indian education were less than two decades old. The elite Hindu College in Calcutta had already attained its adulthood. There was no sign of revolution among the 'natives'; Shakespeare had already become a treasured trove for the indigenous intellectuals; D.L. Richardson had achieved the distinction of a great Shakespeare teacher. The future passage of the Empire was turning out to be smooth; and yet, the colonial educationists along with the administrators appeared to have nurtured uncanny fears in teaching or discussing *Lear* to the native elites. Through a brief analysis of the play, this chapter shall try to retrospectively gauge why *Lear* appeared only briefly/intermittently in the 19th-century curriculum when the other three great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*—had been regularly taught/discussed since the beginning of English literary studies in India.

I must admit here that I am a little wary of the fact that how a book dealing primarily with reception of Shakespeare in colonial Bengal/India will also involve possible thoughts/considerations of the rulers relating to the inclusion/exclusion of a particular play in the curriculum. Here, I do not hesitate in confessing that I had to use the word 'gauge' to get some sense of the colonial consternation towards a play like *Lear*. No hard evidence has come by so far to ascertain what actually had gone in their minds in teaching/not teaching the play. But then, should we also not treat absence of any such evidence as an evidence itself, derived out of near silence about such a quintessential tragedy from either side? Can we not, at least now,

afford to ascribe some motive to such an obvious proscription from our own postcolonial position? My inferences, therefore, will be based partially on the nature of reception of *Lear* at its home and largely on the absence of any major response to it in Bengal in the whole of the 19th century.

Pertinently, here I wish to remind my readers about one of the principal theoretical superstructures the book has been relying upon. I refer to the obvious equation between culture and imperialism as also the apparent traffic between literature and culture that has been persuasively explained by Edward Said (1978, 1994). Following him, Gauri Viswanathan (1998), Ania Loomba (1989), and Jyotsna Singh (1996), as this book has demonstrated, have extensively written on the cultural politics of the British imperialism by extrapolating the obvious connection between English literary studies and the passage of the Empire especially in India. Guided by their argument, I have always found it fascinating to know—which is also discussed in the final chapter of the book—how a Shakespearean text could have been first prescribed in Indian curriculum and then how it might have been taught by the generation of teachers for the last 200 hundred years. Overwhelming majority of such endeavours, whether during the Raj or after, have been engaged in creating an image of the Bard as a bare symbol of hegemony. It may be clearer to the readers by now that the subject at hand relates to the formation of English literary canon in India and the enviable position occupied by Shakespeare in it.³ Was/is not he an industry? As discussed in the introduction, Shakespeare had come out of stage to page in England during the time of Dryden and Pope. It started to become a firmly structured discourse in the hands of Dr. Samuel Johnson in the mid-18th century, followed by the highly tempered early 19th century appreciations of the Bard in the hands of Coleridge, Hazlitt, Keats, and Shelley. And when Carlyle equated him with all the wealth, might, and power of the Indian Empire in the early 1840s, Shakespeare had already established himself as an inseparable part of the English nationalist consciousness. The point is, the dominant section of British intelligentsia at home irrespective of their ideological orientations—rationalist, romantic, or Victorian—had been at near consensus in accepting the Bard as a pivotal part of their nationalist articulations, if not the only possible glue to unite the beleaguered nation after the protracted the Civil War years.⁴

Now, the question relating to teaching or not teaching *Lear* in 19th-century Bengal, here, will certainly lead us to the issue: why was *Lear* considered such a complex play even at home? Was it merely because of its 'unactable' gory scenes? Or, was there reason beyond its dramatic or literary merits covertly connecting the affairs of English history or politics with the play? Some leads to these questions may be found in a brief but close look at the principal narrative of the play and what it might have stood for the 19th-century English liberalism, closely complementing the rise of British imperialism. We know that *Lear* is the only play among the four major tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and

Othello) to be set in England, dealing directly with plots from mediaeval English history. But it was dramatized in the early modern time when English history was marked by the gradual rise of capitalist enterprises and slow but steady decline of feudal establishments. The emerging economy demanded faster and aggressive human endeavour, materialistic work ethics, and acquisitive behaviours. The newly educated youth with radical individualism started looking for better prospects in a fiercely competitive society. The thick line between truth and falsity, morality and profanity, and the real and the fake started becoming blurred. In a fluid society where only ends justify means of one's achievement, the contemporary English court was unable to avert the onslaught. Shakespeare has stupendously portrayed the clash between these two differing ideologies in most of his tragedies, but the replication of the trouble, tension, and anxiety of the collapsing feudal makes *Lear* the most exciting one in that series. Lear's realization of the failure of the old-styled state is intensified in his meeting with the Bedlam Beggar and the alien world of 'houseless poverty' (III, iv, 26).⁵ He tries to rationalize such inhuman plight of his subjects and self-reflexively answers: 'Is man no more than this? ... thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal' (III, iv, 92–96). What can be a bigger travesty than this of the Renaissance glories? Lear draws us to the cynicism of the sceptics and the inherent bestiality of man who, because of his instinctive desires for wealth and power, creates poor beggars like Tom. The tragedy of Lear lies in his failure to come to terms with the acquisitive early modern society represented by the likes of Goneril and Regan. He continues to search for the elusive old values, only to be deceived. Shakespeare himself, it seems, at the end shows ambivalence to both, and this is suggested in the inconclusive ending of the play. Dismissing any possibility of 'promised end' or definite resolution, the narrative poses the unresolved question, 'Who is the king in *King Lear* at last?' How is 'order' restored in play? It brings our attention to the noncommittal stance of the people surviving at the end. Lear dies but Albany does not assume 'absolute power'. Instead, he invites Kent and Edgar together to 'rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain' (V, iii, 319). Kent refuses to take charge of the 'cursed state', rather he looks for delight in the old values of his king, preferring a spiritual voyage as, 'my master calls me, I must not say no' (V, iii, 296). The curtains are finally drawn with the following lines by an enlightened Edgar:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.
(V, iii, 297–300)

But they do not in any sense completely rule out the possibility that Edgar wordlessly accepts the responsibility of the kingdom, nor do they force any closure to the fable with unambiguous restoration of power.⁶

This brief historicist understanding of the play suggests that unlike the other three tragedies *Lear* remains unimaginative to any attempt to impose superficial moral order or a clichéd Christian tale of sin-punishment-salvation on it. The ambivalences in the play provide a snapshot of the historical milieu of early modern England and its social, economic, or political volatilities. This, in turn, leads us to a more baffling question: whether the British educationists especially in the mid-19th century both at home and in India in their heart of hearts were wary of the play's conspicuous fluidities? If they had read the play as a Christian narrative like the other three, the inclusion in the curriculum would not have been an issue at all. Even the missionaries in India, by mid-19th century, were gradually reconciling with the Bard by considering him a messenger of 'sound Protestant principles', and as such, the play could have perfectly suited to serve the principle defined as 'diffusive benevolence of Christianity'.⁷ Or, were they, indeed, anxious about the fact that *Lear* was actually undermining the vision of the English Renaissance and laying bare the fractures in the existing polity and its ruling ideology? The fact that Jacobean tragedies in general by being deeply entrenched with the dynamics of contemporary history, politics, and power, were, more or less, making similarly powerful critiques of the so-called human glory and achievement in the Renaissance world, has now been established well.⁸ But unlike the other three tragedies by Shakespeare, *Lear* fails to make any definite attempt to recover the lost political authority in the end and more importantly, there is no restoration of the moral order as the innocent has been subject to inhuman sufferings and sacrifices. In *Macbeth* the protagonist challenges the traditional notion of kingship, but it ends with the recovery of the political power when Duncan's elder son, Malcom, gets his father's 'usurped' kingdom back. In *Hamlet* there is a clear reclamation of political authority by Fortinbras; even in *Othello*, the colonized subject or the racialized hero is decreed to give way to his white subordinate in Cassio; but *Lear* ends with uncertainty looming large everywhere.

A play with a course of unmitigated violence, disorder, and moral chaos had undoubtedly influenced the way the play used to be received at home in the 19th century. Did it also determine its canonical considerations in Indian classroom? As a matter of fact, the early 19th century responses to *Lear* had remained mixed, ambivalent if not at times quite negative especially relating to its performances in theatres in England. Critical embarrassment for the play began with Charles Lamb (1811), who, despite finding 'greatness of Lear' in its 'intellectual' and 'not in corporal dimension', was deeply disturbed by the gory scenes of unscrupulous

cruelty by the daughter towards their father in the play and considered the same unactable:

... to see Lear acted—to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting ... We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted ...

(Lamb:1811, 9)

Curiously, before Lamb, German thinker August Wilhelm Schlegel (1808, 236) had severely criticized the play, calling it a drama in which 'terror reaches its utmost height, the science of compassion is exhausted'. 'The principal characters here', he continues, 'are not those who act, but who suffer ... where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages, and given prey to naked helplessness' (Ibid.). However, passionate defences for Shakespeare and the play, too, were quite forthcoming among the early 19th-century English writers of the romantic mould. Pioneering them was William Hazlitt, for whom, *Lear*, though dealing with 'the giddy anarchy and whirling tumult of thoughts', is a play with 'force of passion', 'tug and war of elements of our being', where Shakespeare was 'fairly caught in the web of imagination' (Hazlitt:1817, 122). In fact, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and De Quincey—all were converging on the issue that evocation of mighty passion leading to suffering and sublime tragic sense had made the play stand apart.⁹ But then, why did the early canon makers in India—David Hare and Horace Wilson—being of Orientalist/Romantic blend was wary about teaching not just *Lear* but Shakespeare in general? This explains why they were in favour of prescribing two separate sets of curricula at home and in the colony. For the play to be canonized in India, it had to wait for the arrival of an aggressive Anglicist like D.L. Richardson in the Hindu college nearly two decades after the beginning of English literary studies. Even then, it might have remained on its teaching list for barely two to three years in the early 1840s. We shall return to this issue in a while. Coming back to the Romantics strongly defending the play could be understood from how they had intended to appropriate it to suit their own thought or style of writing. For them, writes W.P. Albrecht (1978, 613), 'the excitement of tragedy was thought to relieve a disagreeable indolence or mental vacuity ... They acknowledged the power of passion to propel the mind—not merely out of selfishness, pride, or lethargy—but into creative process of learning'. It would be too naive to even assume that the curriculum framers of Hindu college were looking up to the natives to be inspired by Shakespeare and write poetry like the Romantics. A play like *Lear* with the bleak vision and unspeakable brutality might have been considered

incompatible with the imperatives of colonial education, which were clearly discerned with the vision to upgrade the native morals.

Going further to the Victorian England, with its staunch moralist outlook, might not offer any better understanding of the play, though it continued to uphold Shakespeare's supremacy as a poet. Who better than Carlyle famously equating the 'poet-hero' with all the wealth of Indian Empire? For a famous late Victorian Charles Swinburne (1880, 170) *Lear* represented 'a world full of death and life without resting-place or guidance ... a fatalism of darker and harder nature ... Requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy, are words without meaning here ... There is no contest of conflicting forces, no judgement so much as casting of lots: far less is there any light of heavenly harmony or of heavenly wisdom ... but the darkness of revelation is here'. But he, too, defends the Bard:

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* is unquestionably that in which he has come nearest to height and to the likeness of one tragic poet on any side greater than himself whom the world in all its ages ever seen born of time. It is by far the most Aeschylean of his works; the most elemental and primaeval, the most oceanic and Titanic in conception. (Ibid.)

The point is, Shakespeare criticism in general flourishing during the 19th century, notwithstanding such ambivalent or negative responses to *Lear* in particular, was carrying forward the good works initiated by their predecessors like Dryden, Pope, or Dr. Johnson. That those English critics were not just strongly defending the Bard, but carefully guarding the tradition of English liberalism or in extension, the emerging imperial ideology, was quite evident in their crafty defence mechanisms. In India whether the early syllabus makers wanted or not, Shakespeare was fast getting assimilated into that ideological foray of British imperialism. Why do I say imperial ideology? Because, it could not have been a mere coincidence that those 100 years of English/Shakespeare criticisms (from Charles Lamb to A.C. Bradley) were also the phase of high imperialism of Britain. Chris Baldick (1983, 3–4) while tracing the social function of English literary criticism considers Matthew Arnold as the leading light who has been 'surveyed as a consistent unit including not only strictly literary but also theological, political and educational works, illustrating the extent to which Arnold expanded the duties of literary criticism into these areas and how, in turn, his conception of society transformed his vision of the function of criticism'. In other words, according to Baldick, Arnold was the first to give the remarkable ideological steam required for literary criticism to obligate its moral and social duties.¹⁰ My point of contention about the role of Shakespeare criticism in the 19th century in

finding compatible 'civilizing and humanizing roles' of his plays in India precisely begins here. The English teachers/educators were acutely aware of the Shakespearean content and pedagogy; both were surreptitiously contributing to construct the image of not just the Bard but English nation in general, and finally its imperial ideology. Edward Said (1994, 9) as mentioned earlier while convincingly establishing the close connect between the culture and imperialism, draws on none other than Matthew Arnold for whom culture is the 'society's reservoir of the best which has been known and thought ... (it) palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile, and brutalizing urban existence. *You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people and society in their best lights*' (emphasis added). The great works of English literature, he goes on to argue, mostly became 'unconcealedly and manifestly' a part of the imperial process and they hardly condemned or ignored their participation in what was an unquestioned reality:

Imperialism's culture was not invisible, nor did it conceal its worldly affiliations and interests. There is a sufficient clarity in the culture's major lines for us to remark the often scrupulous notations recorded there, and also to remark how they have not been paid much attention ... My method is to focus as much as possible on individual works, to read them first as great products of creative imagination, and then to show them as part of the relationship between culture and imperialism ...

(Ibid., 10)

Shakespeare, the most notable and readily available culture hero in England, was not an exception to this tradition of writers Said so insightfully depicted here. A deeper re-evaluation of the historicity of Shakespeare's works may help us recognize that he was producing his great body of literature especially the plays at a time when English colonialism started to grow as an emerging economic enterprise, and it is needless to repeat how he had responded to this new-found source of English revenues in *Tempest*. *Lear*, however, is no way directly connected with the process of colonization. But its presence or absence in the colonial curriculum was certainly a matter of ideological consideration for the British educationalists in India who had acted as an extended invisible arm of the Raj. In other words, like Shakespeare criticisms at home the canon makers in the colony, too, were engaged in an obvious sociopolitical mission in guarding/defending/extending their fascinating surrogate compatriot or 'disguised form of authority' (Viswanathan:1998, 20-21). The point, here, is to recognize the unconcealed efforts of the English/Shakespeare criticism in formation of the fine superstructure of that imperial ideology which founded

itself on the powerful tradition of English literature. As a matter of fact, it is not just the poets, dramatists, or creative writers but the travel writers, journalists, and linguists, as Said (1978) has eloquently put it, even critics of the early modern England were deeply engaged in ideating the principles of early process of colonial expansion.¹¹

Curiously, when it came to transmitting those ideological principles in the richest colony of Britain since the end of the 18th century, the East India officials along with a group of influential Orientalists were uncertain about the import/nature of the education system to be used as conduit to do so. Gauri Viswanathan (1998, 68–93) has, as mentioned in the introduction of this book, elaborately captured the protracted debates between the Orientalists and Anglicists on the one hand, followed by the Anglicists and the Missionaries on the other: the first one centred around the need of western-style education in India, and the second one relating to the predominant nature of that learning—secular or religious. A staunch early advocate of religious teachings was a powerful officer of the Company Charles Grant who as early as 1792 had realized that ‘permanent and indissoluble’ British rule in India could be possible only through ‘superior personal conduct of Britons’, ‘the creation of an image of the English nation as having been “formed by superior lights and juster principles and possessed of higher energies”’ (Ibid., 71–73). Such exalted image of the rulers was juxtaposed with his shrewd castigation of the Hindu Society, its religion, caste system, idol worship, superstitions, and oppressive rites. This was Grant’s powerful prescription for formation of ideal colonial subjects ‘to a disposition thus favorable to us, to be changed thus in their character, but by new principles, sentiments, tastes, leading to new views, conduct, and manners ... which identify their cause with ours, and proportionately separate them from opposite interests’ (quoted in Ibid., 74). Of course, later history of western education in India informs us that Grant’s suggestion of Christianizing principles was not followed by his compatriots who had to artfully allay the fears of their Hindu counterparts while establishing the first government-sponsored higher institution of English learning in 1817. Nonetheless, Grant’s apprehension about ‘dangers of political revolutions’ (Ibid., 72) among the natives was considered, and the same found silent reflections in the canonical principles and pedagogic practices followed even in the early years of English literary studies in India. Were such fears also at play when the colonial educationists were thinking of including Shakespeare or a bleak tragedy like *Lear* in the curriculum of Hindu college since the 1820s?

The question takes us back to the history of Shakespeare teaching and formation of English literary curriculum in the early years of the Hindu college. Despite the absence of any definitive record it is widely accepted, as mentioned in the introduction, that some components of Shakespeare along with ‘European literature’ began to be taught to the senior section (students from 15

to 25 years of age) of the college from its inception. It can be corroborated from the primary objective of the institution which was 'the tuition of the sons of respectable Hindus, in the English and Indian languages and science of Europe and Asia', as laid down in the charter prepared mainly at the instance of the prominent Hindus like Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen in 1816 (Dalmia:1992, 47). If, what the then chief justice of supreme court Sir Edward Hyde had pleasingly recorded about 'the enthusiasm of the prominent pundits, Sanskrit scholars, for the introduction of Western literature', was true, it was quite unlikely that the first Anglo-Indian college of its kind would leave out the Bard from its course.(Ibid.). More so, the indigenous intelligentsia was aware of his popularity through the British theatre and his presence in the Fort William college teaching platter since the beginning of the century (Ibid.). The earliest record of the college text books as a part of the subject called 'English history and literature' could be traced only in 1828 mentioning 'one of the Tragedies' by Shakespeare along with other European texts.¹² We do not, however, know which Shakespearean tragedy was taught then by the first recognized teacher of Shakespeare in India none other than young iconic Derozio who used to share an extremely intimate friendly relationship with his students in the college (Dalmia:1992). But then, teaching Shakespeare itself might have remained a cause of concern for the two British members of the syllabus committee, H.H. Wilson and David Hare. As 'inclusion of Shakespeare in a government textbook', argues Sharmila Mukharjee (2016, 81), 'not only rendered the British vulnerable to charges of purveying immorality and obscenity, it threatened the project of moral and intellectual improvements of subject peoples on which the ethical justification of empire was based'. Hence, it was extremely unlikely that a disturbing tragedy like *Lear* could be part of the early colonial curriculum because the 'assertion of an unambiguous moral code in a canon of literature was crucial for the British as it was touted as a mark of national virtue' (Ibid.). While framing the paper 'English history and literature', Mukharjee (2016, 93) continues, both Wilson and Hare despite being 'ill-at-ease about Shakespeare's compatibility with the civilizing mission' had to concede to other three prominent Hindu members who 'made the first initiative in claiming Shakespeare as an object of academic study in a program of English-style liberal education for their sons, paving the way for his (Shakespeare) inclusion in the government curriculum and textbook publications'. She backs her argument about the anxiety of the colonial educationists primarily by citing two documentary sources: complete exclusion of Shakespeare from the junior sections or the school curriculum which was reflected in the principal English textbook *English Poetical Reader* prescribed for the government schools. More *importantly*, the editorial strategies adopted to 'make Shakespeare compatible with the British civilizing mission', to overcome his 'perceived immorality ... before he could be incorporated into government commissioned textbook' to be studied at the senior levels (Ibid., 94).

Of course, Mukharjee elaborately refers to Richardson's audaciously accomplished *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day with Biographical and Critical Notices* published later in 1840. But it was quite likely that the same editorial principles might have been followed more intensely even in the formation of the 1828 curriculum for 'English History and Literature', purging off any possible 'profanity' in the selection of the sole Shakespeare tragedy. It is also intriguing to underline that, while the Bard was 'banned' in the government-run native schools, the private schools in Calcutta used to teach/discuss/perform his plays in line with the contemporary government schools in his homeland.¹³ Mukharjee's argument about the 'perceived immorality' in Shakespeare gets noticeably intensified in a 'hideously impious' play like *Lear* dealing with unthinkable (female) filial cruelty, torture, and betrayal. Further to this could be appended its susceptibility to subversive political elements in direct reference to English affairs making the first syllabus makers quite anxious about teaching the play even to the senior boys. This may explain the widening gap between two earliest recorded canons of Shakespeare in India formulated within a span of a decade. While the 1828 curriculum had only one undesignated tragedy, Richardson's *Selections* intrepidly prescribed all the four major tragedies, *Midsummer Night's Dream* plus one scene on John Falstaff from *Henry IV* Part I, along with 15 sonnets, three poems from *Passionate Pilgrim* and *Rape of Lucrece*. Richardson's unabashed intent to go against the earlier canon principles by boldly showcasing the Bard to the natives becomes amply clear when he allocates him the maximum individual space in his enormous anthology.¹⁴

But then, the intriguing questions come to our mind at once are: what had really prompted Richardson to radically alter the earlier canon principles by allowing Shakespeare overwhelming domination in the government text book in 1840? And how he had ventured to include a 'bleak', 'unactable' play like *Lear* dealing with 'giddy anarchy'? Answer to the first question may lie in the fact that despite reluctance to include Shakespeare in the earlier syllabi, enthusiasm for the Bard among the Hindu college students, in the intervening period of 20 years between the foundation of the college and Richardson being commissioned by Macaulay to prepare the anthology in 1837, was incredible; it spilled even to indigenous intelligentsia outside.¹⁵ The native boys began excelling in studying, reciting, and performing Shakespeare starting from the late 1820s to the 1830s. One such recitation of Brutus' speech was reported in *Calcutta Monthly Journal* on 11 January 1827 as 'a matter of pleasing surprise to see a Hindoo boy personating the noble Roman, and giving utterance with emphasis and good discretion to the sentiment of Shakespeare' (quoted Dalmia, 48). The same is true, informs Dalmia (1992, 49), about these boys doing well in the examinations held in January 1828 in presence of none other than the then Governor-General Amherst. Completing that were the regular performances of scenes

from Shakespeare plays like *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Othello*, and *Henry VI* among the Hindu college boys from 1827 onwards.¹⁶ The point that I wish to derive is: despite cautiously low presence of Shakespeare in the first colonial curriculum the young Hindu college students started revealing remarkable dexterity in grasping the Bard, which might have encouraged Richardson to do what he did by firmly establishing Shakespeare canon in Indian classroom since 1840. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to infer that such uncanny knack of the Hindu college boys for English literature in general albeit its scant presence in the early syllabus (merged with the subject of 'English history'), which might have prompted the Macaulay-Trevelyan duo to more aggressively launch their English education policy in India by replacing the earlier Orientalist model. Quite ironically thus, this tremendous Hindu college success story remained the prime mover behind the birth of a new discipline called 'English Literature' not just in India but in its original home and elsewhere.

Coming back to my self-posed second question on the inclusion of such extensive component of Shakespeare including the contentious *Lear* play in Richardson's *Selections*, some definite answers can be safely deduced from his shrewd editorial strategies adopted in it. Even more significant is the manner in which he has introduced the Bard—both in the Preface and the short bio-note on Shakespeare—to the natives in 'a want of moral elevation' (Richardson:1840, 15). The second part title of the *Selections* mentioning 'with biographical and critical notices', suggests that both the preface and the brief bio-note are inseparable parts of the *Selection*. They unflinchingly point at the nature of Richardson's pedagogy for teaching those immortal characters created by 'the Prince of Dramatists' (Ibid., 5) as 'genuine specimens of (universal) human nature'. 'Since the time of Shakespeare', Richardson eloquently writes, 'two centuries and a half ... have passed away, and yet *Lear* and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Othello* are as fresh as ever ...*No lecture on guilty ambition leaves so vivid and permanent an impression on the mind as the agony of Macbeth*' (Ibid., 6–14, emphasis added). Further hints of Richardson's teaching prescription surface when he wishes to let 'Milton and Shakespeare instruct the young natives of India how to appreciate the beauty which God has lavished upon them' (Ibid., 16). Finally, he makes the purport of his Shakespeare modules unambiguously clear by carefully charting out:

the duty of every instructor of youth ... to point out for suitable reprehensible and objectionable word, and to make a due distinction between the pure ore and the dross with which it may be connected ... to avoid confounding a representation of character and manners with the personal sentiments of the poet. In the pages of the dramatist (Shakespeare) especially, *are many sentiments and expressions highly*

obnoxious in themselves, but which are not intended for approval or imitation, but rather for our hatred and avoidance.

(Ibid., 18, emphasis added)

In addition to Richardson's strong defence of the 'prince of poets' (Ibid., 5) what is also revealed in the Preface is: how a teacher is exhorted to first establish Shakespeare as the torchbearer of universal values, upholder of morality, and a priest of sound Christian principles. There are bound to be some 'dangerous elements' in his plays because, the 'writer who professes "to hold the mirror up to nature and give the very age and body of the time its form and pressure"', cannot consistently confine himself to pictures of purity and refinement'. But it would be the duty of teacher 'at the close of each play or poem to call upon the student to give as well as he can some description of the performance and to deduce the general moral' (Ibid., 18).

Such strong prefatory sentiments about the Bard are bolstered further with the brief bio-note revealing more of Richardson's pedagogic intent for 'the greatest poet' in the world whose 'excellences must be alluded to rather than analyzed' because to 'speak of Shakespeare's genius in a manner at all worthy of the subject, would require unrivalled critical acumen and powers of expression almost equal to his own' (Ibid., xi-xii). Richardson admits that despite 'all his wondrous endowments' he was not faultless but his defects were 'superficial and unimportant' as there was 'something almost super-human in the precision with which he reads the innermost secrets of our nature ... His true and inimitable delineations of humanity are not confined to particular times or countries, and his fame and influence are accordingly independent of those varieties of changes of circumstances and external manners which at last throw into oblivion all those writers who exhaust their powers on local or temporary materials' (Ibid., xii). Such ingenious powers of 'the Prince of Dramatists', Richardson continues, 'enabled him so entirely to forget himself—to enter the hearts of others—and portray men exactly as they are, in every change of position and with all their inconsistencies, both real and apparent ... *Who that has once become acquainted with Lear and Hamlet and Macbeth and Iago and Othello could ever forget them?*' (Ibid., xiii, emphasis added). Such calibrated pedagogic prescriptions have been skilfully intertwined with Richardson's extremely deft editing skills to dispense further with any probability of wrong, misappropriated or 'dangerous' understanding of the 'objectionable passages' in Shakespeare plays by the native boys.¹⁷ The principal purpose of such an elaborate deliberation on Richardson's preface, here, is to understand with amazement how nearly the same pedagogic or critical readings of Shakespeare continued in the same college even after the Raj. We shall come back to this in the last chapter of the book.

Now, could such an astutely planned project of Shakespeare studies proffered in such articulate term in the colonial curriculum, fail to woo and draw the Hindu college students further closer to the Bard? Hence, even if a disconcerting play like *Lear* was taught by a shrewd teacher like Richardson in the 1840s, would it really disturb the stated imperatives of the civilizing mission? That none other than Macaulay, being the then head of the Committee of Public Instruction, was behind the anthology who 'favored me with several hints' (Ibid., 1) would ensure its success by presenting Shakespeare in a cautiously culled version in commensurate with the ideology of the Raj. However, the history of English/Shakespeare studies in India suggests and as this book, too, has been demonstrating, Macaulay's firm belief that 'No Hindu who has received an English education, ever remains sincerely attached to his religion ... if *our plans of education* are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years later' (quoted in Dalmia, 50, emphasis added)—did not quite succeed. A sizable contingent of indigenous intelligentsia from the mid-19th century, as discussed in the preceding chapters, started treading on different direction by refusing to fully function as conduits between 'us and the vast contingent of Indians we govern'.¹⁸

Quite possibly, the realization of the deficiency in Macaulay's model of education in completely coalescing the native intelligentsia into imperial scheme of things and also its vulnerability might have prompted the colonial educationists to give a hard look at the education policy since the 1850s. This may explain the anxiety of Major-General Rowlandson (mentioned in the beginning of this chapter) about the sense of recalcitrance among the English-educated natives, as also the revisions of the existing English curriculum in 1852–53. If we go by Gauri Viswanathan's (1998, 54) list of texts prepared following the Great Britain *Parliamentary Papers* (1852–53), the English syllabus taught then in the government-run educational institutions including Hindu college, astonishingly, of all the four tragedies, left out *Lear* along with the only comedy *Midsummer Night's Dreams* and the Falstaff scene from *Henry IV*. What is also noteworthy in this list was apparent disjunction of the three remaining tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*) from Richardson's *Selections*, which in turn, was prescribed for only poems by Goldsmith, Gray, Addison, Pope, and Shakespeare. Michael Hancher (2014) providing a detailed account of the first text books of English in India appeared to have supported the account of the English syllabus provided by Viswanathan, except correcting the name perhaps wrongly copied by Viswanathan as 'Richardson's Poetical Selections'.¹⁹ Sharmila Mukharjee (2016), too, have concurred with Hancher on this point. Further, S.C. Sanial (1906), a well-known journalist and a man of letters in the late 19th-century Bengal, provides a recollection of one of Richardson's *early* students—we are not told who he was—at Hindu college, wherein, we are informed that

The two poets he pitched upon to teach his boys were Shakespeare and Pope, with whose writings his mind was thoroughly saturated. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and two parts of *Henry IV* ... were what he taught in endless alteration. *He taught them year after year with repetition ...*

(Sanial, 74, emphasis added)

As a recollection of a recollection it was, the 'year after year with repetition' might have been slightly exaggerated as Richardson could have possibly taught all the four tragedies for maximum three years between 1840—the year of publication of the *Selections*—and 1843 when he had to end his first stint in the iconic college owing to health issues. Richardson had come back to the college in 1848, but we do not find any evidence if he had taken up *Lear* again till his resignation the following year after the ugly spat with Bethune, the then head of the Education Council.

Why was, then, *Lear* withdrawn from the existing colonial curriculum in 1852? Astonishingly, no incontrovertible evidence could be gathered thereafter to suggest whether this sublime tragedy was taught or not in the college pioneering Shakespeare studies throughout the whole of the 19th century. Was it the case with other colleges as well after the beginning of university education in India? Krishna Chandra Lahiri (1961, 175–176) while referring to 'a selective survey for the courses for the University's B.A. degree examination during the first fifty years' has listed *Lear* for the years 1861, 1868, 1893, 1895, and 1908. No corroborative evidence could be gathered to confirm whether between 1861 and 1895 the play was actually taught and figured in the examination paper. Calcutta University, then, was only an affiliating university responsible for curriculum formation and examination conduct. My scrutiny of available archived examination papers of the university between 1909 and 1919, however, could not find any question on the play. Does it indicate that *Lear* though might have been placed in the syllabus in those years, it had remained untaught in the affiliated colleges?²⁰ Be that as it may, *Lear*'s fate as a classroom text might have been uncertain in the Hindu college or elsewhere in Bengal, but the play had failed to catch the imagination of the educated Bengalis throughout the 19th century for sure. This could be ascertained, as suggested earlier, from the fact that, when three other major tragedies along with other plays were being repeatedly read/translated/ appropriated/adapted throughout the 19th century, *Lear* was glaringly left out.²¹ First translation of *King Lear* as 'Lear' was done as late as 1902 by an unrecognized poet-writer Jatindra Mohan Ghosh. And if we go by the checklist of adaptations/translations of individual Shakespeare plays provided by Lal and Chaudhuri (2001, 142–144) this was the *forty second* attempt of such Shakespearean recreations in Bengali. In fact,

throughout the entire period of the Raj, *Lear* was attempted for such adaptation only once more in 1921. We shall return to both in a while.

Did, then, Bengali intelligentsia in the 19th century at all make any overtures to such a sublime tragedy by the Bard? First recorded Bengali response to *Lear* of some sort was attempted in the form of the translation of all the 20 Shakespeare stories in *Tales from Shakespeare* by one Muktaram Bidyabagish in 1853. Collectively titled in Bengali as *Shakespeare krita grantha hoite uddhrita apurba upakhyan* ('Enchanting Tales from the Book of Shakespeare') it closely follows the original narrative set forth by Charles and Marry Lamb with only slight alteration of their sequence in the content.²² *King Lear* in the *Tales* becomes 'Lear Nripatir Upakhyan' ('The Story of *King Lear*') in Bengali. An interesting departure is reflected, however, in the graphic narration of the storm scene in the form of an engraving by R.C. Kormokar in the beginning and not in the middle as in the original *Tales* (Figure 5.1). That apart, there is no other notable inflections in the translation including the ending of the original where the ambiguity of Shakespeare's play has been changed in favour of Albany becoming the next king of England. Popularity of the *Tales* is well known but how far its first translation could capture the Bengali reading public could not really be understood. Nonetheless, the ambitious project running into nearly 500 pages in good Bengali in those days appeared to be a significant prose narration in the history of early Bengali literature.

The biggest name to reveal noteworthy interest in *Lear* was none other than Madhusudan Dutta in his play, *Krishnakumari*, in 1861. A favourite student of Richardson and leading a completely unorthodox life since his days in the Hindu college in 1839, Madhusudan gradually became drenched in European culture and way of life, converted himself into Christianity in 1843 while still a student of the college, and started writing poetry only in English till the latter half of his life.²³ As discussed briefly in the second chapter, *Krishnakumari* remains his best dramatic creation demonstrating astute skill in appropriating Shakespearean dramaturgy and introducing a highly mature idea of a tragedy in Indian drama. The plot being taken from famous *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829) dramatizes how both the kings Mansingh and Joysingh threaten to destroy the already beleaguered kingdom of old Bhimsingh in Udaypur.²⁴ At the heart of this political turmoil is Bhimsingh's exceedingly beautiful daughter Krishnakumari who, caught between the marriage proposals from both Mansingh and Joysingh, finally has to end her own life to save her father's rule. Portrayal of the intensely emotive father-daughter relationship between Bhimsingh and Krishnakumari is a reminiscent of the Lear-Cordelia narrative as appears towards the end of the Shakespearean play. The frenzied exclamations in the storm scene of *Lear*—'Blow, winds, crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!'—in the beginning of Act II, Scene ii, was replicated in Bhimsingh's angry invocations of thunder/rain in Act V, Scene ii, in Madhusudan's play:



Figure 5.1 Engraving of the storm scene in King Lear by R.C. Kormokar (Bidyabagish, 1853).

Ah! What a terrible thing! What a fatal darkness! Hey Night! Are you rising to devour me? Such dangerous sound of the thunders! Is it the doomsday? But why doesn't thunder strike my head? O Time, devour me. Hey Thunder, destroy the sinful! Hey Goddess of Darkness! Why keep this fiend alive any longer! Destroy me.

(translated)

Like *Lear* the storm continues in the next scene as well but Madhusudan transplants Lear's frightful concern for the 'houseless poverty' (III, iv) to Krishnakumari who before her imminent end puts her heart for the poor and destitute in such a torrid time:

... What a terrible thunder! ... Oh! What a dangerous storm! Is it the day of catastrophe? This palace is unmoved like a mountain; no need to fear here in such a dangerous storm. But those who are living in huts; God knows how much they are suffering. Alas! May the Almighty save them. Ha Fortune! It's the same human, same wit, same form; but some enjoy unlimited luxury in beautiful gold mansions and some remain houseless and struggle to live under trees ...

(V, iii, translated)

Lear's helpless cry after Cordelia's death—'Cordelia, Cordelia! Stay a little'—has been transposed into the tragic defeat of Bhimsing in protecting his daughter: 'Ha Krishna! Ha Krishna! Let me go baby, let me go!'. Madhusudan's fascination for enactment of the spectacular, bombastic, or robust on stage was honestly borrowed from Shakespearean dramas, which he himself had unapologetically acknowledged in a letter written to his friend and a great thespian of his time Keshabchandra Ganguly to whom, incidentally, *Krishnakumari* was dedicated:

We Asiatics are of a more romantic turn of mind than our European neighbours. Look at the splendid Shakespearean drama. If you leave out the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and perhaps one or two more, what play would deserve the name of romantic. Romantic in the sense in which Sakuntala is romantic? In the great European drama, you have stern realities of life, lofty passion and heroism of sentiment. With us it is all softness, all romance, ... Ours are dramatic poems.

(quoted in Mitra, 76)

Now, do we need to burn much oil to understand where his heart lied even while writing in Bengali? A man full of turbulence, conflicts, and ravages used to have natural propensity to refashion his own life as a drama on stage, transmuted his own internal ruptures into a tragedy. Even

during the last few moments of his life, informs his biographer Jogindranath Basu, Madhusudan had remembered those oft-quoted 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow ...' speech from *Macbeth* (Mitra:1983, 75). Hence, it does not take much to conclude why those lofty storm scenes of *Lear* was recast in order to channel the emotion of an impassioned Bhimsingh who had to pronounce death sentence on his own daughter to save his kingdom. However, unlike the gory ending of *Lear* in Shakespeare, Madhusudan's play ends with the father is left to live and mourn his beloved daughter's death.

Barring such partial borrowings by Madhusudan it is not unsurprising, in line with the argument of this chapter, that in the whole of 19th century we could come across only few scattered responses to *Lear* by the Bengali *bhadralok*.²⁵ In fact, it is better to call them tangential casual references to the play rather than any sort of finely meditated response to it. As mentioned in the third chapter of this book *Lear*'s condemnation of Goneril—'Ingratitude! Thou marble-hearted fiend' (I, iv, l.214)—for curtailing his entourage of 100 knights, has been used by Bankimchandra as an epigraph to the second chapter of *Kapalkundala* to suggest the desertion of Nabakumar by the heartless fellow travellers on their way back from a pilgrimage. Purnachandra Basu (1896, 22) discussed in the previous chapter in his inimitable style condemned the play's hideous show of murder or violence on stage. His admonishment of the Bard appears more severe when he accuses him of making the harmless old man like *Lear* or innocent Cordelia suffer such brutal consequences in the play.

Turning to the 20th century, the first direct response to *Lear* in the form of a translation was done, as mentioned earlier, by Jatindra Mohan Ghosh, a virtually unknown figure in the early 20th-century Bengali literary circle. He had translated *Lear* into Bengali by faithfully following the original play, in his own words, for the purpose of performing at the Chorbagan Union Library. It is a scene-by-scene honest translation of *Lear* starting from the 'Dramatic Personae' to the last dialogue of the original delivered by the Duke of Albany.²⁶ However, one significant intervention was made by the translator even within the framework of that faithful translation: he had named the play simply *Lear* in Bengali instead of the original *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Such deliberate change of the title of the original validates the fact that the translator was attracted more by the human qualities of the protagonist and the unspeakable saga of brutality meted out to him by his wretched daughters. His intent to negotiate with predicaments of an aging father could be proven further from the dedication of his work to his own father Motilal Ghosh, done in such a reverential fashion that the recreation might stand as remarkable testimony of general obeisance to all such elderly fathers in Bengal. It also upheld the observance of Bengali/Indian tradition of respecting the old and

elderly in contradistinction with European culture as reflected in a play like *Lear*. Despite such an honest attempt we cannot ascertain if the translation or the performances of it, if any, had really remained popular during the time. In all likelihood it was not, and one of the reasons was, as mentioned in the third chapter of the book while discussing Girishchandra, that Shakespearean adaptations/translations in general had not really met with much success or popularity on stage especially since the early 1890s. The only other appropriation of *Lear* in the entire colonial period thereafter was attempted in 1921 by another lesser-known playwright Surendrachandra Basu, as *Dharma ba Ratnapuri Natak*.²⁷ Based on the 'shadow' (in Surendrachandra's own words) of the original, the style of titling of the recreation suggests that the *Lear* story has been converted into a binary between 'dharma' or 'responsibility' of offspring towards their old father and their greed for wealth or power. It is not known how this play was received by the contemporary Bengali *bhadralok* who, by then, were completely immersed in various strands of freedom movement and especially the ones led by M.K. Gandhi.

Any recount of *Lear* influencing colonial Bengal cannot really be completed without reference to one of the most popular nationalist poets/lyricists/playwrights of the time, Dwijendralal Roy (1863–1913). Popularly known as D.L. Roy, he took the *Lear* story to an entirely different plane in his most celebrated play *Shajahan* (1909). The historical narrative of the old, weak, and terminally ill Mughal emperor's life during his last eight years (1658–1666) has been recast in the backdrop of contemporary nationalist movement following the failure of anti-Partition agitation, split of the Indian National Congress, and communal discords. Moved by the unending plight and unforgettable lessons of life by an aging ruler/father in *Lear*, D.L. Roy seems to have directly infused the character traits of *Lear* in *Shajahan* who, too, could not hold his four sons—Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad—together; they rebelled to grab power. Aurangzeb being the shrewdest and merciless in his advances finally succeeds to the throne after having neutralized the others and imprisoning his ailing father. But the play and its portrayal of the protagonist become extremely appealing to the contemporary theatre goers owing to its imaginative interventions to and transcendence of the history. The historical Mughal ruler's role as a compassionate father remains entangled in series of deep inner human conflicts: he commands Dara to liquidate his three rebel sons but then immediately sheds tears for them. Much like *Lear* in Shakespeare play, he occasionally asserts his identity as the ruler. 'I am an old man but I am *Shajahan*' (I. vii)—reminding us of *Lear*'s futile reply to Gloucester's puzzlement ('Is it not the king'): 'Ah, every inch a king./When I do stare, see how the subject quakes' (IV, v, ll.103–105). The pitiful self of a father is revealed when he forgives even

the cruel Aurangzeb at the end of the play. Such internal dichotomy of the central figure, his insanity, and the enactment of storm, thunder, and rain (Act ... scene iii) in Dwijendralal's play appear to have been directly borrowed from *Lear*.²⁸

D.L. Roy's fascination for Shakespeare dates back to his student's days in England (1884–1886) in the glowing tribute that he had offered to the Bard during his visit to Stratford:

Standing there (at Stratford) I thought, at this place, which had remained the fountainhead of the endless poetic powers, silently lies the great poet in the dark. The feeling evoked in my mind was inexpressible. The endless wave, the eloquent words of the immortal poet, all is at rest here. Sleep, the blessed poet! Wherever English language will be known your name will not remain unheard ... *And far way on the banks of the Ganges, the verdant sons of the holy land will embrace and admire you as the brother of India's Kalidasa and the dearest poet of the world.*

(quoted in Mitra, 121, emphasis added, translated)

Such flattering eulogies to the Bard while comparing him with Kalidasa was not new to the colonial intelligentsia. What is, however, significant in this adulation is its stunning resonances with Macaulay's famous toast delivered in 1844 to literature of Britain 'which boasts of the prince of all poets and the prince of all philosophers ... *to that literature before the light of which impious and cruel superstitions are fast taking flight on the banks of the Ganges*' (Mukharjee: 2016, 93, emphasis added). Conspicuous subordination of the imperial military conquest to a moral enterprise and the civilizing mission implicit in Macaulay's speech seemed to be reconfirmed by Dwijendralal's bowing down to the Bard and continuation of the cultural logic of British imperialism well into the beginning of the 20th century. Ironically though, Dwijendralal has remained one of the foremost nationalist writers whose patriotic songs are still sung daily in India. His play under discussion, too, used to evoke nationalist sentiments at a time when the entire nation was getting submerged into anti-colonial movements. Of course, the historical narrative of an ageing ruler and his warring sons creating unmitigated chaos and leading the country finally to the beginning of British consolidation since beginning of the 18th century, remained the principal source for the play. But the *Lear* narrative borrowed for the characterization of Shajahan has undeniably transmuted these placid facts of history to an entirely different level through a fascinating dramatization of human emotions, pains, and sufferings into an exquisite tragedy like *Lear*. Significantly, though Dwijendralal has avoided the gory ending of the Shakespearean play, has allowed the old father to live. His Shajahan has forgiven his wayward son Aurangzeb, whose character, too, incidentally,

deviates from the actual history and reveals deep remorse and seeks mercy from his father for his cruel misadventures. D.L. Roy, it is clear, has not really adhered to the Shakespearean norms of violence in the end to evoke a sense of pity and fear followed by cathartic effects; rather, he has revealed more affinity to the Indian classical tradition in order to make it a remarkable modern tragedy.

D.L. Roy was, however, only the second most important figure to have been influenced by *Lear* nearly half a century after Madhusudan Dutta. No other important writer or playwright during that long period had been found to even touch the 'dangerous' play to find inspiration. Curiously, even the stage history of the play starting from the earliest recorded evidence of Shakespeare performance in 1780 to the end of the Empire in 1947, stumbles upon more startling facts: in the entire period of colonial domination *just one performance of only one scene* (Act III, Scene iii) was staged and that too, by a British actor at Chowranghi Theatre way back in 1832.²⁹ Undoubtedly, *Lear* was designated as the most difficult play to be performed on stage by the 19th-century critics at home. But then, why? C.F. Tucker Brooke (1913, 88) was one of the early critics to ponder over the reasons behind such negative readings of the play in the 19th century: 'why is it that King Lear, perhaps the most passionate, the noblest, and even most personal of Shakespeare's works ... a poor stage play?' One of the reasons, he surmises, has been owing to the protracted misreading of the play or the casual audience unable to understand the unusual degree of 'personal work' with 'philosophic rather than dramatic ideas' in it. To him, despite its 'black pictures of meanness and hypocrisy' it is a 'play of good cheer, a powerful witness to the presence and potency in this world of faith, hopes and charity' (Ibid., 97), and

The end of the play clinches the moral. Evil has consumed itself and vanished like the shadowy negation that it is, while righteousness, purer and nobler for the late struggle, triumphs in the bright memories of Cordelia and Lear and in the living of figures of Kent, Edgar and Albany. This, surely, is the purest philosophy which can reveal itself on the stage only to the spectator capable of reading behind the superficial hyperboles of tragic usage *a particularly simple and universal story of everyday humanity*.

(Ibid., 98, emphasis added)

This was perhaps the first emphatic defence of the Shakespearean play after A.C. Bradley's somewhat ambivalent reading in the beginning of the 20th century. For Bradley, *Lear* is distinct from other Shakespearean tragedies and, 'that it is really a dramatic poem, destined for the study rather than the stage, and intrinsically incapable of acting' (quoted in

Ibid., 88). It is evidently clear that Tucker Brooke was blaming it on the intellectually deficient audience, if not those 19th-century critics, for such a terrible misreading of the play dealing with 'a particularly simple and universal story of everyday humanity'. Years after Brooke, J.C. Maxwell described the play as a simple Christian tale: narration of Lear's crucified state and his endurance to such unbearable pain, his ultimate recognition of 'ripeness is all' leading him to a hallowed grandeur, where he stands as a symbol of suffering section of entire humanity and its capacity to withstand and transcend the same.³⁰ *Lear*, nevertheless, continues to somehow haunt the Indian intelligentsia even in the post-Independence period for quite long ironically though, it started to assume blazing popularity in Britain replacing *Hamlet* since the 1960s.³¹

Returning briefly to the moot questions in the end: why such a quintessential Shakespearean tragedy was considered risky to be taught to the native students? Did the colonial educationists fear that its teaching might turn out to be counterproductive with its potential to expose the narrative of English liberalism indivisible to the imperatives of civilizing and/or colonizing missions? Some answers to these questions have been attempted in this chapter. The anxiety on part of the colonial educationists I have tried to attribute to the fact that *Lear* as a play, strikes flat at the very roots of liberal humanist tradition founded in Renaissance England. It might have been considered too vulnerable in potentially laying bare the fractures or the hidden barbarity of English civilization from all sides, and yet, in the end it did not repair the cracks or restore the moral/political order. Further, considering all aspects of the matter especially after Richardson's strong pedagogic principles, can we not say that the classroom teaching of Shakespeare was thought to be a surrogate plan to manipulate the native intellectuals? Indeed, transmitting superior English moral and cultural values to the indigenous intellectuals so as to prepare them as their future conduits to rule the vast colony, remained a common motive of colonial education. May be because of that, the canon makers after Richardson, paying heed to 'wise men' like Major-General Rowlandson and Rev. William Keane, might have realized that *Lear* could possibly run the high risk of generating radically disconcerting discourses in Indian classroom which in turn might fail their project of 'civilizing mission'. The play's portrayal of gory violence, brutality, treachery, and betrayal from one's own, the unscrupulous machinations of religion, power, and ideology of Jacobean rule, could have made the Indian elites critical of the superior morals or cultural norms of their colonial masters. Therefore, Shakespeare in *Lear* only remotely defines Trevelyan's 'best and wisest' Englishman with the potentials to deflect the native elites from forming the 'higher ideas of our nation', and hence the finely meditated exclusion of the play from the regular teaching platter during heyday of British imperialism in India.

Notes

- 1 Trevelyan's statement appears in C.E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of People of India*, p. 152, op. cit.
For more on the averments made by Major-General Rowlandson and William Keane, see Viswanathan, p. 176, op. cit.
- 2 Prospero in *Tempest* being a classic prototype of a colonialist, consistently remains anxious about possible subversive acts, from Caliban from whom he has forcibly taken the island away. See Mandal (2002), op. cit., for more on the Prospero-Caliban relationship.
- 3 Till the end of the last century Shakespeare used to be studied as a separate paper of 100 marks each in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in nearly all Indian universities. In the last one decade or so, the heavy Shakespeare components have been curtailed in many universities including the one where I teach. But we have still retained a 50 marks compulsory paper on him in both the courses.
For the argument, see Mandal (2002), (2011), and (2020), op. cit.
- 4 Shakespeare began to emerge as a near-consensus culture hero to hold the beleaguered English people together: a powerful symbol of English nationalist consciousness on the one hand and a literary classic to combat the critical (international) onslaught of the French plays and criticisms on the other.
See Michael Dobson's *The Making of the National Poet Shakespeare: Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.
- 5 All the quotations from *King Lear* are taken from the *New Cambridge Shakespeare* Edition, ed. Jay L. Halio, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- 6 The end of the play remains ambiguous and uncertain raising questions in the minds of the audience/reader: is Edgar reluctant to accept the charge of the state when he talks of obeying time? Is he calling for Albany himself to 'obey' the time and accept, not shirk, the responsibility that is solely his now, and that with the death of all of his kin, the absolute power has passed into his hands? Or, the repetition of 'we' suggests that Edgar may be calling for the two of them to share the charge of the state.
- 7 See Viswanathan, pp. 85–86, op. cit., for more on the issue of Christian Shakespeare in India.
- 8 See Dollimore (1985), op. cit. He was one of the most influential early critics to embed Jacobean tragedies with the dynamic interplay of ideology, power, and religion in early modern England.
- 9 See W.P. Albrecht, p. 613, op. cit.
Apart from his detailed discussion on Hazlitt and *Lear*, Albrecht also refers to Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and De Quincy defending Shakespeare in *Lear* commonly on the ground of being a play dealing with 'some mighty Passion' (Coleridge), 'fierce dispute' (Keats), 'sublimest tragic composition' (Shelley), and 'height, depth and breadth of human passion' (De Quincy).
- 10 Chris Baldick argues how since mid-19th-century English criticism started performing an ideological role by eliciting the civilizing and humanizing aspects of English literature. See Baldick (1983), pp. 59–75 op. cit.
- 11 See Said (1978), 'Introduction', p. 10, op. cit.
- 12 Derozio's biographer Thomas Edwards (2003) has listed the following curriculum followed in Hindu college in 1828 as part of the subject called English history and literature: Goldsmith's *History of Greece, Rome and England*; Russell's *Modern Europe*; Robertson's *Charles V*; Gay's *Fables*; Pope's Homer's

Iliad and Odyssey; Dryden's *Virgil*; Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Shakespeare's one of the Tragedies.

See Thomas Edwards, *Henry Derozio*, Calcutta: Radiance.

For Derozio's teachings, see Sharmila Mukharjee (2016), pp. 106–108, op. cit.

- 13 Shakespeare's presence in the schools can be ascertained from the fact that in December 1822 some of students at the famous Drummond's Academy in Dharumtola (Esplanade now) had some piecemeal performances from Shakespeare's *Merchant* in its own theatre hall, where Derozio as a boy of thirteen played a remarkable role of Shylock. The culture caught up fast with other schools and colleges like David Hare Academy, Oriental Seminary as well; and since then celebration of the Bard through performances from his plays by Indian students within their college/university premises has remained a permanent affair.

See Sanat Mitra (1983), p. 27, op. cit.

- 14 Out of the whole 1,635-page anthology containing 109 poets Shakespeare alone was allocated about 309 pages. For a detailed discussion on Richardson's *Selections* and editorial strategies, see Sharmila Mukharjee (2016), pp. 98–127, op. cit.
- 15 Manju Dalmia discusses in detail how the Hindu college boys were quickly picking up Shakespeare since 1827 not just in their classrooms and examinations but in performing scenes from his plays in English. Such unprecedented enthusiasm from the native boys for Shakespeare in particular and English literature in general had greatly impressed even the then Governor-General Amherst and his wife not to mention other British officials in India. One newspaper report published in *Calcutta Monthly Journal* on 11 January 1827 had reflected the moods of the British:

This is truly the most interesting Institution, and will, we have no doubt, prove a very effective engine of improvement. The youth educated at this College will acquire a taste for European literature which cannot fail of leading to more important results, and of greatly ameliorating the state of society.

(see Dalmia:1992, 48–50, op. cit.)

- 16 See Lal & Chaudhuri (2001), pp. 24–26, op. cit., for some detail of these performances by the Hindu college boys.
- 17 For a detailed discussion on Richardson's editorial strategies, see Sharmila Mukharjee (2016), pp. 98–127, op. cit.
- 18 Quite ironically, though, as it has been elaborated in the preceding chapters of this book, those English-educated native intellectuals though remained disobedient to the Empire stayed faithfully committed to the Raj of the Bard.
- 19 After citing Viswanathan's list of the texts in the mid-19th-century government curriculum which also included the three tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*—Hancher (2014) writes, 'she (Viswanathan) is *right* to head the list with textbook, which is mentioned in *many other government reports of the period* (apart from the 1852–53 Parliamentary papers) ...' (emphasis added). It proves beyond further doubt that the mid-19th-century canon makers in India had excluded *Lear* from the syllabus after D.L. Richardson's departure from the college. However, Hancher has not ventured to elaborate why the 1852–53 curriculum omitted the play, one of the strong points for this chapter to be conceived in this book.
- 20 Calcutta University examination papers for B.A. courses between 1909 and 1919 can be accessed at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501586/mode/1up>

- 21 Since 1853 with the maiden venture by Harachandra Ghose’s *Bhanumati Chittabilas Natak (Merchant)*, Bengali intelligentsia continued such recreations of Shakespeare as discussed in the second chapter of this book.
- 22 In the original *Tale*, *Lear* follows *Cymbeline* but precedes *Macbeth*, but in the Bengali translation the narrative appears after *All’s Well that Ends Well* and before the *Merchant* story. See Bidyabagish (1853), op. cit.
The Bengali translation can also be accessed at <https://bn.wikisource.org/wiki>
- 23 On account of his conversion, he was compelled to leave the college midway, resumed his education at Bishop’s College between 1844 and 1847, and since then started producing his writings exclusively in English though without meeting any real success. As discussed briefly in the second chapter he returned to his mother tongue only towards the latter half of his life with *Sarmistha* (1859), first major play written in Bengali blank verse.
- 24 James Todd’s (aka Col. Todd) *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, published in 1829, remained an extremely popular travel narrative in India. It may be accessed at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.23699/mode/1up>
The play *Krishnakumari* in Bengali can be accessed at <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a8>
- 25 One very significant but quite unknown appropriation of *Lear* was, however, attempted in Marathi by the late 19th-century playwright/director of the then western province by the name of Shankar Moreswar Ranade in 1881. Titled as *Atipida Charit Natak*—a play of inhuman suffering—in Marathi it transforms the tragedy with happy ending sans any death throughout. I could not gather much information either on the play or the playwright except the fact that Shankar Ranade had played a tremendous role in training none other than the future great Dadasaheb Phalke in dramatic art during the turn of the last century by casting him in various roles in Shakespearean plays. However, lack of any good research on this adaptation may also indicate its poor reception during the time. In fact, I had contacted some of Marathi friends in Bombay University, and even, they appeared to have expressed their ignorance about such an adaptation. See Sisirkumar Das (1997), p. 46, op. cit., has referred to this very significant Marathi adaptation of *Lear*.
B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), the revered future Dalit icon and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, had glimpses of his own Shakespeare as well. Though not quite known in the academic circles, his adaptation of *Lear* in Marathi as *Shaani Mulagi* (1908, ‘Clever Girl’) for an amateur performance in the community function in the *chawal* (squatter) he used to live in is an amazing endeavour. Without any shred of doubt, it would take serious effort and intellectual dexterity for a 17-year-old to adapt the Shakespearean play in an Indian language considering the problematic play it had remained.
For information on Ambedkar’s adaptation of *Lear*, see Yogesh Maitreye, *Indian Cultural Forum*, April 30, 2020. While still a student of Elphinstone college, Bombay Ambedkar had adapted *Lear* in Marathi as *Shaani Mulagi*.
- 26 Jatindra Mohan Ghosh’s translation can be accessed at <https://bn.m.wikisource.org>
- 27 See Lal & Chaudhuri (2001), p. 143, op.cit. One rare collection of this play is preserved in the National Library in Kolkata. Unfortunately, it has not yet been made accessible for general use so far.
- 28 See Sanatkumar Mitra (1983), pp. 134–141, op. cit. He has presented a meticulously detailed discussion nearly pinpointing the borrowings from *Lear*.

D.L. Roy's play *Shajahan* in Bengali can be downloaded at <https://archive.org/download/in.ernet.dli.2015.265920>

- 29 The lone storm scene with Lear's famous declamations was performed by Mr. Stoqueler in the then Chowringhee Theatre along with performance of scenes from other plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II.iii), *Coriolanus* (III. i, iii), *The Taming of the Shrew* (I), *Twelfth Night* (I. iii), *Hamlet* (I.iii), *Henry IV Part II* (IV.ii), and *Tempest* (V).

See Lal & Chaudhuri (2001), p. 143, op. cit.

- 30 Keeping this orthodox line of interpretation in mind, J.C. Maxwell (1947) went to extent of saying that *King Lear* was a Christian play about a pagan world.

See J.C. Maxwell, 'The Technique of Invocation in *King Lear*', in *Modern Language Review*, 45(1950).

- 31 Kiernan Ryan (2002) maintains that since the 1960s *Lear* has 'usurped the throne occupied till then by *Hamlet* as Shakespeare's masterpiece and keystone of the canon'. To validate his contention, he brings in R.A. Foakes (1993) who in *Hamlet vs. Lear* contends that '*Lear* will continue to be regarded as the central achievement of Shakespeare, if only because it speaks to us more largely than the other tragedies to the anxieties and problems of the modern world. Plethora of stage productions and filmic adaptations of the play since the 1980s also prove the unprecedented popularity of this play well into the present century'. See Jay L. Hallo, pp. 54–64, op. cit.

In contrast, *Lear* in India continues to remain less popular play on stage well after the Raj, though it started to be taught more often in the curriculum since the 1960s. First stage production of it in Bengali was done in Calcutta as late as in 1986, as *Raja Lear* ('King Lear') by a group called Theatron at the Academy of Fine Arts, Rabindra Sadan. See Lal & Chaudhuri, p. 116, op. cit.

Later, however, films such as *The Last Lear*, or novels such as *We That Are Young*, have tended to find some resonances with *Lear* with the postcolonial situation today, but neither really could catch much of popular imagination.

6 And the Bard Raj Continues ...

Nationalism, Shakespeare, and Postcolonial India

... Indian Empire or no Indian Empire; we cannot do without Shakespeare! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day; but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us; we cannot give up our Shakespeare.

(Carlyle:1840)

... the England of trade, commerce, imperialism and the penal code has not endured but the imperishable Empire of Shakespeare will always be with us. And that is something to be grateful for.

(C.D. Narsimhaiah:1964)

Shakespeare is one of the greatest universalists. The withdrawal of Britain from India in 1947 as a political force hasn't seriously affected the study of Shakespeare in our colleges and universities.

(K.R.S. Iyenger:1964)

(Shakespeare) is always a super hit (in India) because Shakespeare's tales and human conditions are quite timeless, space-less and cultureless—they are simply human.

(Atul Kumar:2012)

When an atrociously apocalyptic pronouncement of Thomas Carlyle reducing the worth of one of the most fascinating countries in the world to a playwright found remarkable resonances in two of the most influential post-Independence Indian literary critics followed by a contemporary thespian, one might have little suspicion regarding the Raj of the Bard after end of the Empire.¹ This chapter of the book, though moving to a more familiar territory and nearly an exhaustive domain of scholarly engagement often classified as 'postcolonial Shakespeare', endeavours to add to it a relatively less traversed subject of 'nationalism' practiced vis-à-vis Shakespeare in postcolonial Indian context. In doing so, it relies on some representative responses coming from three principal segments of

independent India: engagement of Indian intelligentsia with Shakespeare, some stray reactions from political/administrative classes to the Bard, and his reflections in the popular culture, namely, Indian cinema. As the chapter unfolds these three distinct sections of Indian ‘Shakespeare industry’ (Iyenger:1964, 1) may not always complement each other. At times they even remain completely unconnected and, yet, are bound by a common thread of bardolatry which remains unimpeded since the inception of Shakespeare in India. Their spontaneous attempts to more aggressively ‘own’ the alien writer as ‘India’s Shakespeare’ seamlessly connect them with their colonial counterparts as described in the preceding chapters. There can be two cardinal ways of interpreting the unhindered flow of the Bard immediately after the Independence and continuing well into the present. First, it revalidates the cultural logic of imperialism so powerfully wielded with Shakespeare or English literary studies in colonial India. Second, it brings to fore the attempts of re-appropriation of the global icon as India’s Shakespeare as kind of strategy—both conscious and unconscious—to remain untroubled by the indignities of colonial past. Both seem to uncannily tie us with the rise of Shakespeare or English literary studies in colonial India, which had produced the most enduring ideology of the Empire and its natural corollary in the English-educated Bengali *bhadralok* or the indigenous bourgeoisie. Neither does really challenge, as Loomba (1989, 21) argues, ‘the ideological premises of English studies but reinforces their claim to universal value, rationality and truth’ and ‘such an appropriation rests on the obliteration of cultural difference’. Jyotsna Singh (1996, 132) seems to have gone further in stating that owing to ‘the 19th century consensus between the rulers and the elite Indians about the role of English studies in building a civic society, the passage of Shakespeare from the British Raj to postcolonial education in India has been relatively smooth one’. To validate her contention further, she too, cites C.D. Narasimhaiah’s glowing tribute to the Bard on his quatercentenary birth celebration in India:

... to us educated Indians, the coming of the British ... meant among other things, the coming of Shakespeare, of noble speech and brave deeds and so Shakespeare must have a special significance in India. Until recently for 150 years or so (since 1835), we have learnt English through Shakespeare, and thanks to him the learning has been so pleasant and profitable. *In deed to most of us, English educated Indians, Shakespeare’s characters, the situations in his plays, and those memorable lines of his have become almost as intimate a part of our lives as those of the best of our own writers. Shakespeare more than the English monarch, seems true and vital link between India and England.*

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 133–134, emphasis added)

After persuasively pointing out the miraculous realization of Carlyle's visionary statement Singh talks about the role of such English-educated elites in furthering the passage of the 'colonial book' into postcolonial India, and how they find 'an accommodating ideal (in Shakespeare) for continuing class and linguistic divisions within the new nation-state' (Ibid., 133). This chapter, in that context, intends to factor in the issue of Indian nationalism, not so much its success in achieving liberation, but failure to address the plight of the depressed/marginalized, and the role played by Shakespeare/English studies to that effect. Needless to repeat how the obvious limitations of such nationalism was prophetically predicted by two of the most influential thinkers of modern times: Rabindranath Tagore over 100 years ago in his famous Nationalism series lectures, and M.K. Gandhi since 1930s with his protracted disagreement with the first recognized future Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, on the issue of conceiving an industrialized nation-state, following with his rejection of the Partition in 1947.² The profound premonition that both Tagore and Gandhi also had was about the problematic nature of the national elites owing to their schooling in the colonial system of education intrinsically allied with a myopic vision of India. Endeavour, or the lack of it by their postcolonial equivalences in not reaching English studies to people, is a testament to that; Shakespeare, too, has generally failed to penetrate deep into the masses and remained mostly subservient to the select and the rich for long.³ That does not mean that 'nationalism' as a movement in India was a stark failure. Quite contrary to Tagore's public disavowal of the term, it remained an extraordinarily organized and protracted mass agitation precipitating the ouster of the alien forces; and who better than Gandhi in achieving such a feat? But then, did Gandhi, too, in his heart of hearts understand the dangerous consequences of such a nationalism? Some answers may lie in Gandhi's unflinching faith in Tagore's political wisdom. Despite Tagore's stated disagreement with his movements (since the Amritsar massacre of 1919), Gandhi used to seek blessings of his *Gurudev* ('great Mentor', the way Gandhi used to address Tagore) before undertaking any new political venture, not to mention the one of most famous enduring friendships they had.⁴

Edward Said (1994, 269) while acknowledging the power of nationalism as 'the mobilizing force that coalesced into resistance against an alien and occupying empire' on the part of the colonized subjects, largely concurs with Tagore by calling it 'a deeply problematic enterprise' because most of its leaders were by-products of the colonial system. After independence, he argues, following the oft-referred Fanon principles that the 'national bourgeoisie and their specialized elites ... in effect tended to replace the colonial force with a new class-based and ultimately exploitative one, which replicated the old colonial structures in new terms'. Said's *Tempest* fable of Ariel, as discussed earlier, where the silky being Ariel remains a former collaborator of imperialism but assumes the role of national bourgeoisie later, appears to have uncanny

resemblances with both the independent intelligentsia and the political class in the newly decolonized India as the chapter proceeds to demonstrate. The first of Said's two Calibans—'aware of and accepting his mongrel past but not disabled for future development' (Ibid., 258)—representing every subjugated community even after independence, may have distant resonances in the intellectual forces leading the intense Left Wing Extremist movements in the 1960s. Quite intriguingly, the nativist Caliban of Said, too, may have some distant equivalences in the religious revivalists who started making deep incursion in Indian consciousness since the late 1980s. Their ideology has gathered nearly an unchallenged proportion in the very recent past. A plethora of English-speaking erudite intellectuals have been vociferously trying to redefine their national identity by rediscovering the religious/cultural ethos of not just pre-British but pre-Mughal past.⁵ Unsurprisingly, the argument of this strand of 'nationalists' draws inspiration largely from the late 19th-century cultural rejuvenation which has been defined by Bagchi (1989, 9) as 'the evocation of the Hindu Brahminical golden age conducted (sic) within the protective umbrella of English literary values'. Concurring with Bagchi, Ania Loomba (1989, 23) traces echo of similar sentiments in the presidential address of an English teachers' conference held in 1941, which, had strongly asserted that the task of correlating the Hindu and Western canons could only be performed by critics of English literature. In other words—and this is deeply paradoxical—even the nativist Caliban of Said remains caught in the hegemony of English while attempting to rediscover his precolonial past. What, however, Said's otherwise incisive theory does not appear to pay any specific attention to are the majority of Indians who, unlike both Ariel and Caliban, do not have the access to the colonial language or Shakespeare, remain excluded from the larger scheme of women's or minority rights movements in India for a very long time to come. Here, I have in mind over 70% of India's population belonging to the socially depressed classes largely living in the peripheries of India.⁶ What do really Shakespeare and nationalism mean to them? This chapter by bringing in some of the popular filmic adaptations of Shakespeare will also try to figure out how far the Bard has actually penetrated into the Indian subalterns.

Shakespeare and Post-Independence Indian Academia

Let us begin with some seminal but not exhaustive representations of the dominant trend of post-Independence Shakespeare discourses in the academia and their intersectionality with contemporary Indian politics and culture. As suggested in the introduction, the enthralling classroom engagement with the Bard by famous teachers in the postcolonial India continues to carry forward the unenviable teaching legacy of Richardson not just at the first Anglo-Indian college (turned into a fledgling Presidency university few years ago) but in a

host of institutions higher learning in postcolonial India. Rare attempts were made till the turn of the present century to reverse the Shakespearean discourse that used to follow the century-old colonial model of teaching set forth by Richardson as elaborated in the previous chapter. The typical features articulately adumbrated by the iconic teacher in 1840—study of the images, the plot, style, characterization, good-evil moral conflict, and strict depiction of scenes—continued to be on the postcolonial Shakespeare teaching platter. Not to obviously forget how they would be packaged with the stupendous acting skills of many such teachers bringing in mesmerizing sonority and enthralling classroom experiences.⁷ Supplementing Richardsonian methodology were the most enduringly powerful parameters set by A.C. Bradley (1904) and the New Critical school. Post-Independence Shakespeare teaching by an array of legendary teachers/scholars largely remained embedded in either of these teaching modules without developing a distinct Indian response or attempting to dismantle the symbols of hegemony intrinsic to the colonial Bard. On the contrary, much like their colonial counterparts they continue to find an instrument of dominance over the lesser mortals or non-English speaking mass of independent India till the end of the last century.

The remarkable Richardson success story is brought in here to demonstrate the long-lasting legacy of ‘such’ English/Shakespeare teachers in Indian classroom. It may not be an exaggeration to aver that the craze for Shakespeare and English literature among the educated Bengalis grew exponentially, as suggested before, owing largely to Macaulay’s brazen attempt to anglicize governmental functioning/job market on the one hand and well-articulate teachers like Richardson on the other. It was these influential teachers who contributed to the rise of Shakespeare in particular and English literature in general not just as a highly attractive/job-fetching subject of study but a marker of prestigious cultural symbol in Indian social and intellectual spheres. Eulogization of the Bard by the likes of Shibnath Shastri (1903, 104) in the colonial era that ‘there was no poet equal to Shakespeare and that English literature was best in the world’ seems to have resurfaced in more intense avatar in the two statements from two post-Independence intellectuals quoted in the beginning of this chapter. Undoubtedly, they indicate that the same tradition of bardolatry and market value of English studies determined the unassailable status of Shakespeare even 100 years after Richardson’s departure from India. Quite curiously, humming about him in the iconic Presidency college corridors among the teachers/students would continue long after India’s political liberation. Unsurprisingly, in the *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* (first published in 1966), the sublime quotient of the glorious quartercentenary birth celebration of Shakespeare in the college featured Richardson as well. Editor of the volume, Taraknath Sen (2016, vii), one of most revered Shakespeare teachers of the post-Independence era, paid a glowing tribute to ‘DLR’ in the introduction of the book by calling him a ‘genius’, which may somewhat

remind us of Macaulay's short panegyric on his Shakespeare teaching way back in 1838. It was owing to Richardson, Sen (2016) goes on to demonstrate that a long line of remarkable Shakespeare teachers was produced. Such adulations undoubtedly merge the indomitable journey of the Bard with the legacy of the first icon of a Shakespeare teacher in India.

This list of illustrious Shakespeare teachers includes Richardson's compatriots like Charles H. Tawney, John Mann, Henry Rosher James, J.W. Holme, and equally gifted Indians like H.M. Perceval, Manmohan Ghose, and Prafullachandra Ghosh, among many others.⁸ Their teachings of Shakespeare continued to resonate in the hearts and minds of their students turned into illustrious teachers themselves long into the postcolonial India. How did they carry forward the Richardson pedagogy? Tarak Sen (1966, viii) by referring to Tawney's edition of *Richard III* brings the 'quality of his Shakespeare scholarship' and an account of how 'Richardson's legacy of outstanding Shakespeare teaching was well maintained and enriched' by him:

The introduction (to *Richard III*) contains a rather remarkable *study of the character* of Richard III, rich in what De Quincey called the sympathy of understanding as opposed to the sympathy of approbation. "It is true", writes Tawney, "that Richard's character is not calculated to awaken tragic pity, but it is almost too great to beg for it." The annotations are strewn with glimpses of Tawney's learning, of particular interest for Indian readers being observations like the following: "*This superstitious custom is found in many countries. See the note in my translation of Katha Sarit Sagara...*" (Ibid., emphasis added)

One wonders at the inventiveness of reading a late 16th-century Shakespearean play soaked in bloodbath and terrifying supernatural prophecies, intertextualized with a large collection of innocuous tales compiled by the 11th-century Indian writer Somdeva, which were meant for pure recreation.⁹ One also does not lose sight of the way such Shakespeare teaching gets approbation from a highly acclaimed post-Independence Shakespeare scholar of Sen's stature.

The illustrious league of Indian Shakespeare teachers was no different either. It begins with the Anglo-Indian Perceval (Professor of English, 1880–1911), who 'combined a penetrating critical insight and a command of precise and pointed phrase ... His contribution to the elucidation of textual cruxes in Shakespearean drama was outstanding' (Ibid., viii–ix). Another celebrated teacher, Manmohan Ghosh's (Professor of English, 1896–97, 1903–21) style of teaching was reverentially recounted in 1964 by one of his famous former students, the first Indian Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Mr. Phanibhusahan Chakraborty:

He entered the heart of the play to be read, but it was the entry of a loving and like-minded artist into the workshop of another ... He would enter it with the mind of a creator and explore to the depths the impulse from which it had sprung and the process of its birth ... he would leave us outside, proceed inside himself, and, from there, would go on discovering to us the play's artistry, its evolution, and its *mode of character-delineation ... interpretation of the play's characters, architecture, atmosphere, technique and style that accompanied the recreation ...we experienced The Tempest being created anew before us ...* (quoted in *Ibid.*, x–xi, emphasis added)

The trite tradition of rhetorically loaded textual explanations and ontological character analyses continued with one of the last celebrated Shakespeare teachers of the late colonial India, Prafullachandra Ghosh (Professor of English, 1909–1939), who, with his 'richly modulated voice, ran with an assured command from one end of the vast Shakespearean gamut to the other, *giving each note its exact due and making it a live experience ... all its fluctuations of mood and tension, of style and rhythm ...* Altogether his teaching of Shakespeare brought to the learner an opulence of satisfaction—sensuous, emotional, intellectual—that was unique of its kind' (*Ibid.*, xi–xii, emphasis added). Interestingly, Tarak Sen had remained a favourite student of this teacher with whose retirement 'a whole epoch in the history Presidency college had definitely come to an end—an epoch of glory, greatness and power' (*Ibid.*, xi). And undoubtedly, he himself was one of the most revered Shakespeare teachers of independent India and a fountainhead of outstanding Shakespeare teachers coming out of the iconic college.¹⁰

Now, what was the nature of Shakespeare criticism followed to supplement such a pedagogy? It has already been suggested that Shakespeare for them was an ahistorical writer, a universal genius which had, incidentally, remained the exact motive of Samuel Johnson's reading of Shakespeare as 'a poet of nature', whose 'characters are not modified by the customs of particular places unpracticed by the rest of the world ... they are genuine progeny of common humanity ... ' (Johnson:2018, 3). As discussed in the previous chapter, it was Dr. Johnson after strong defences of the Bard by Dryden and Pope against the French, gave the much-needed spin of universalism to Shakespeare by portraying him as the 'mirror of life' for all, in all ages. Thereafter, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt and one of the most powerful English voices of the 19th century, S.T. Coleridge shrewdly appropriated him as an undisputed genius chronicling the history of the brave nation. The mantle would be carried forward ably by one of Richardson's great friends at home Dequincy not to mention Thomas Carlyle followed by another influential Victorian critic Edward Dowden through his series of writing on Shakespeare.¹¹ Following the Victorian moralist model would come A.C. Bradley, the most authoritative of all of

them, and with his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), it is not just the rich tradition of Shakespearean literature but Shakespearean criticism itself had become a huge industry.¹² It started generating wide range of penetrative Shakespeare scholarships, different and opposing schools of criticism, various seminars/symposia/conferences, and above all, an uninterrupted classroom interaction with Shakespeare.

Needless to reiterate that the overall engagement of these renowned Shakespeare scholars/critics has remained focused on studying the plays based on a teleological and ontological principles of being, and they had tremendous impact on the pedagogic practices followed long into the independent India. The famous thespian, writer, and director Utpal Dutta as early as in 1972 challenged such apolitical/ahistorical readings of Shakespeare and strongly postulated a political Shakespeare.¹³ Of course, Dutta could not cut much ice among them. But surprisingly, after the arrival and gradual rise of the Cultural-materialist and new Historicist schools of critical engagements in the West through the 1980s, the traditional pedagogy continued to dominate Indian academia. Even the excitingly new readings by some Indian critics since the early 1990s, by not just historicizing the Bard but locating him in the complex history of colonialism in India, needed to wait till the turn of this century to gather some significant popularity in Indian universities.¹⁴ Added to such protracted apathy for such 'political' Shakespeare was the failure of the Indian academia to interrogate him from a (postcolonial) Indian perspective. The kind of the image of the Bard created by such tradition of teaching remained largely exclusionary or elitist as it had remained during the colonial era. Even those great post-Independence teachers taught Shakespeare in an exclusive English language and thus keeping the Bard inaccessible to the vast contingent of the natives incapable of communicating in the colonial language. While emphasizing the role of pedagogy in the dissemination of Shakespeare, Sisir Kumar Das (1997) gives a compelling argument why no Indian response to the Bard could be evolved:

The mode of dissemination of Shakespeare texts played the most significant role in the formation of the relationship between the Indian intelligentsia and the bard, and it also caused a sharp rift in the Indian literary community itself ... *The Shakespeare that emerged in Indian classroom was not primarily a creation of the Indian aesthetic consciousness, but mainly, if not entirely out of the received readings of Shakespeare ... by the British critics. The Indian academic activity was not expected to question or challenge the existing paradigms of criticism; but accept the greatness of the bard as an undisputable fact of literary history.* The academic reception of Shakespeare within the rigidities of an imposed critical framework was further obtruded,

ironically by the dominance, and exclusive use, of English language in scholarly communication. It remained encoded and frozen in an alien language.

(Das:1997, 42–43, emphasis added)

Undoubtedly, it appears intriguing that even after Independence, and despite having great models like Tagore, Aurobindo, or even a Jawaharlal Nehru to some extent, the Indian teachers had largely remained disinclined to develop an independent indigenous critical schools to study Shakespeare in postcolonial classrooms. Let us, here, revisit how Tagore had studied Shakespeare and more importantly, how the first Prime Minister of India carried it forward in his book, *The Discovery of India*, which remained extremely popular in independent India. In addition to Tagore's remarkably insightful anti-colonial reading of the *Tempest* or English literature in his 1902 essay, which was available also in English, and his other English writings as discussed before, I would like to list his last public address *Crisis in Civilization* published in English in May 1941. Delivered originally in the vernacular on the occasion of celebration of his last (80th) birthday, Tagore, herein, ventures to re-evaluate his attachment to English liberalism transmitted through:

... the stately declamations of Edmund Burke, with Macaulay's long-rolling sentences; discussions centred upon Shakespeare's drama and Byron's poetry and above all upon the large-hearted liberalism of nineteenth-century English politics.

(Tagore in Das:1996, 726).

Interestingly, these very lines along with extensive quotations from Tagore's final speech prominently figured in Nehru's *Discovery* originally published in 1946—I shall return to this in a while. Tagore in this speech had radically altered his faith he had towards the great tradition of English and their literature in the post-*Gitanjali* or Nobel era.¹⁵ Howsoever difficult it is for Tagore to come to terms with this 'change' in his attitude, the public address delivered a few months before his death salvages the wounded self of the creative genius, who now refuses to be governed by subordinating his 'implicit consent' (Gramsci:1976) to the English cultural dominance. It brings to the fore the Tagore who, as discussed earlier, prior to 1910, was deeply involved in conscious cultural and political struggles for independence of his motherland. This was a Tagore who actively took part in radical politics, led series of procession on the streets of Calcutta during the anti-Partition movement. This Tagore ventured to invent an indigenous and anti-imperial educational system or pedagogy for the colonized in Santiniketan. This was the Tagore who, while comparing

Sakuntala with *Tempest*, could at once dismiss Shakespeare by preferring Kalidasa over him. My contention, here, is, in *Crisis in Civilization*, at the age of 80, we rediscover the vintage Tagore who exposes the hollowness of English liberal tradition transmitted through their literary texts which had remained the potent mask for conquering nations like India. For Tagore now, the violence or rapacity involved with the actual process of colonization is no different from the assault on the culture of the target nation: all the three 'Cs'—cane, cannon, and canon—merge to create the biggest and longest living Empire on this planet. Yet, Tagore as an anti-colonial critic of Shakespeare remained unrecognized in Indian academia till the beginning of this century.¹⁶

Let us briefly turn to another controversial nationalist, Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950), once a propagator of violent extremism detached himself completely from Indian politics for the last 40 years of his life despite his friends and countrymen remained plunged in the freedom struggle. An immensely erudite scholar and a great critic of Shakespeare, he did not figure in the core chapters largely owing to the fact that his radical nationalist phase—in fact his engagement with Indian politics—remained short-lived. He moved out of the British colony to live as a sage and spiritual seer in Pondichery, the then French colony after 1910.¹⁷ Aurobindo remained most typically ambivalent though he had developed a distinct Indian response to Shakespeare. In one of his essays, 'Indian Literature' (1918) he acknowledged the greatness of Greek or Shakespeare drama and that Sanskrit drama could not attain that height not merely because lack of any tragedy in Sanskrit but 'due to the absence of any bold dramatic treatment of the great issues and problems of life' (quoted in Das:1997, 46). But in his widely acclaimed critical writings *Future Poetry* published around the same time, he traces 'crude tendencies of the occidental mind rioting almost in the exuberance of a state of nature' in Elizabethan poetry, and the same is contrasted with 'an immense intellectual development and excessive almost over-cultivated refinement' of classical Sanskrit poetry (quoted in Samik Sen, 61). However, he finds, 'an extraordinary basic kinship between these two very widely separated great ages of poetry ... the dramas of Kalidasa and some of the dramatic romances of Shakespeare'. 'The kinship arises', he continues, 'from the likeness of essential motive and basic psychological type, and emerges and asserts itself in spite of the enormous cultural division' (quoted in *Ibid.*). Aurobindo's attempt to achieve a quintessential confluence between two playwrights widely separated by their times, countries, and cultures was nothing new. But then, what is quite significant is his drastic change of guard in his 1929 essay 'Sanskrit Drama' where he severely admonishes the European or Shakespearean dramas while upholding the supremacy of Indian classical dramas:

To the Hindu it would have seemed savage and inhuman spirit that could take any aesthetic pleasure in the sufferings of an Oedipus or a Duchess of Malfi or in the tragedy of Macbeth or Othello ... The Hindu mind shrank (sic) from violence, horror and physical tragedy, the Elizabethan stock-in-trade ... Certainly if we expect a beautiful White Devil or a Jew of Malta from the Hindu dramatist, we shall be disappointed; he deals not in these splendid or horrible masks. If we come to him for a Lear or a Macbeth, we shall go away discontented; *for these also are sublimities which belong to cruder civilizations and more barbarous national types; in worst crimes and deepest suffering as well as in happiness and virtue, the Aryan was more civilized and temperate ...*

(quoted in *Ibid.*, 59, emphasis added)

This Aurobindo certainly appears to be a remarkable cultural nationalist flaunting the supremacy of his own culture against that of the Bard. His critique of European civilizations assumes further significance considering the extremely crucial phase of the Indian National Movement during which this was produced. Unfortunately, in case of Aurobindo, too, we have shown little or no enthusiasm to receive his anti-colonial readings of Shakespeare plays. In reality it has remained an academic practice among us not to consider an English canonical text or Shakespeare as entrenched in the process of imperial expansion until some Western criticism directs us to do so (Mandal:2002). ‘The Indian academic activity’, cogently argues Sisir Kumar Das (1997, 43), ‘was not supposed to question or challenge the existing (old colonial) paradigms of criticism’ but to gratefully conform to them to continue with the image building exercise of the bard as the most ‘prestigious and dominating cultural symbol’. So, even in our readings of their literature, should we say, we have provided our implicit consent which we used to normally give to the western cultural dominance for long?

Shakespeare and Indian Politics

What about, then, the politicians’ Shakespeare in India? And who better than the first Prime Minister of India to begin with? As briefly mentioned Nehru (2008, 163–164) paying a glowing tribute to the first Nobel Laureate of Asia not just for his unparalleled contributions to Indian literature, culture, and education but for his insightful understanding of politics, active participation in freedom movement, and vision of a nation tottering under an offshore dominion strongly suggests that post-Independence India already had a powerful global icon in Tagore to follow.¹⁸ While showcasing the past glories of India and critically unmasking the ingrained hypocrisy of British liberalism Nehru endorses Tagore’s contentions in *Crisis in Civilization*. Reverentially

placing him alongside Gandhi for his ‘immense service to India’, he accords him with the honour of ‘India’s internationalist par excellence’, but a person deeply rooted in India’s soil and could bring into ‘harmony the ideals of the East and the West, and broadened the base of Indian nationalism’ (Ibid., 187). Unsurprisingly Nehru’s own understanding of Shakespeare or western literature, as reflected in his book, remains embedded in such eclectic principles though he emphatically exhibits the finer aspects of Indian literature and culture. Despite acknowledging the force of Greek or European dramas he strongly bats for the superiority of Indian classical play and especially Kalidasa for his extraordinary poetic powers to interweave ‘external nature’ with ‘human feeling’, ‘human heart’ with ‘natural beauty’:

Kalidasa understood in the 5th century what Europe did not learn until the 19th, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world was not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realizes the dignity and worth of life that is not human. That Kalidasa seized this truth is a magnificent tribute to his intellectual power, a quality quite as necessary to great poetry as perfection of form.

(Ibid., 75)

To validate his contention and to show the distinct qualities of Sanskrit plays, Nehru extensively cites famous French Orientalist and Sanskrit scholar/teacher of remarkable repute Professor Sylvain Levi and his doctoral dissertation *The Indian Theatre* (1890):

The essential basis of Greek drama is tragedy, the problem of evil. Why does man suffer? Why is there evil in the world? The enigma of religion, of God. What a pitiful thing is a man, child of a day, with his blind and aimless strivings against all-powerful fate ...

(Ibid., 77)

And he contrasts this sharply with Indian classical drama where:

In deed there is no tragedy at all, for a tragic ending was not permitted ... Accident or evil without cause was ruled out ... no intervention of blind forces against which man has to fight ... The plays and Sanskrit poetry in general were in full accord with the Indian spirit, and there were(sic) few traces of any rebellion against it ... Yet there is no meek submission to fate; the hero is always a man of courage who faces all hazards ... There is nothing like the fierce tempests of Greek tragedy. But it is very human and there is aesthetic harmony and logical unity about it.

(Ibid., 78–79)

He follows his argument up by quoting renowned American naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch who rejects European or Shakespearean tragedies in favour of Sanskrit plays like *Mrichhkatika* by Sudraka as 'genuine example of pure art theatre' which accompanies:

real wisdom of the East ... in a tenderness far deeper and truer than the traditional Christianity ... such a play can be produced only by *a civilization which has reached stability* ... through all the problems it faces ... *Macbeth and Othello, however, great and stirring they might be, are barbarous heroes because the passionate tumult of Shakespeare is the tumult produced by the conflict between a newly awakened sensibility and a series of ethical concepts inherited from the savage age ... Nowhere in our European past do we find, this side, the classics, a work more completely civilized.*

(Ibid., 79–80, emphasis added)

Arriving at the end of a book dealing with reception of Shakespeare and Indian nationalism, one does not need to dive deep to understand what the first future Prime Minister of India was trying to achieve here and in his book which he was writing barely years before the exit of the colonizers. It can be classified, in today's postcolonial parlance, as an emphatic writing back to the Empire by locating the idea of India in precolonial glories, flaunting the same in contrast with barbarous, savage, and tumultuous European civilizations and thus, demolishing the very narrative of colonialist cultural supremacy. Shakespeare being the most treasured jewel of the British culture finds himself diminished in Nehru's firm display of superior Indian values transmitted through Sanskrit plays. One does acknowledge that Nehru, unlike Tagore, did not remain a trained or an organized cultural/literary critic.¹⁹ What Nehru, however, does here by following Tagore's anti-colonial readings of Shakespeare or western literature can be said to be an official endorsement of Tagore's powerful literary criticism in English especially after his assumption of Indian Prime Ministership.²⁰ Yet, the post-Independence scholars of English/Shakespeare studies remained disinterested in rediscovering or carrying forward that powerful tradition of Indian literary criticism so articulately formulated by Tagore as also by Aurobindo. Was it always owing to their uncritical commitment to the British literary criticism that they failed to take such an insightful Indian critical tradition forward? Sisirkumar Das (1997, 47) puts it bluntly that despite the end of the British rule that 'the legacy of the Empire still persisting in Indian psyche' is 'manifested in the form of an aggressive Euro-centrism, a factor determining and conditioning the Indian response to Shakespeare'.

Quite naturally, in line with the dominant trend of Shakespeare studies, many of the prominent former nationalists turned post-Independence statesmen/politicians, whether they had training in English literature or not during the colonial era, continued to carry the sense of Euro-centrism. Political

independence did not really inspire them to fiddle with an independent cultural bend of mind in the sense of Said's theoretical Ariel or first Caliban after Prospero's departure in the play. The Bard continued to shape their ideological underpinnings and remained their unchallenged culture hero. The last Governor-General (1948–1950) of India (first from Indian origin), who later, went on to hold the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Nehru cabinet, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari (1878–1972) remained a symptomatic case in point. Gopal Krishna Gandhi (2022) informs us that, while welcoming the second President of India, one of his fellow former nationalists, S. Radhakrishnan to his home town in Madras (now Chennai), Rajagopalachari relied heavily on Shakespeare's *King John*: 'To gild refined gold, to paint lily/To throw a perfume on the violet/ To smooth the ice, or add another hue/Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light/To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish/ Is wasteful and ridiculous excess' (IV ii). Interestingly, G.K. Gandhi, himself an erudite scholar, used to quote both Shakespeare and Tagore at the drop of his hat during his tenure as the Governor of West Bengal.²¹

There were, however, another class of remarkable political statesmen/nationalists, who much like their literati compatriots as discussed earlier, could show flair to appropriate the Bard to their own advantage. Young Ambedkar's audacious attempt to adapt *Lear* in Marathi has already been noted. Later as a student in Columbia University in a letter to his friend in India, he quoted Brutus's famous speech—'There is a tide in the affairs of men/ Which if taken at the flood leads on to fortune/Omitted the voyage of their life is/Bound in shallows and miseries' (IV iii ll.218–221)—to describe the self-inflicted problems among the some of the oppressed communities as they were not opting to send their sons to English schools.²² Lala Har Dayal Mathur (1884–1939), an extraordinary polymath and a revolutionary nationalist, much like Nehru staunchly flaunted ancient Hindu drama against Shakespeare. In his widely celebrated treaties on human development, *Hints for Self-Culture* (1934) written towards the end of the Raj, he admonishes poetry with 'ghastly images of slaughter and bloodshed' as no art but 'a morbid and miasmatic exhalation from the worst and lowest elements of human nature'. He traces such 'a terrible holocaust as occurs in the closing scenes of Shakespeare' with 'a brutalizing effect on the spectators' (Har Dayal:1977, 177). Most imaginative appropriation of Caliban's iconic lines—'You taught me language and my profit on it/Is I know how to curse ... ' (I ii ll.366–367)—can, however, be found in his elaboration of how language and nationality are inextricably connected and how diversity of languages is at the heart of 'hatred, suspicion and bloodshed' (Ibid., 265). The remedy that he recommends is 'unification of language' when 'only one language is employed as the medium of communication throughout the world', which is not mentioned but understandably it was English. While speaking about fostering and strengthening universal unity he ropes in Shylock and how, according to him,

Shakespeare has put 'a complete plea for human unity into Shylock's mouth'. Citing that famous speech of Shylock—'I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes ... If you poison us, do we not die?' (III i)—he strongly pushes for abolition of such racist discrimination, or else, 'if you are ever tempted', he warns the white (Christian) colonizers, 'to scorn or wrong a brother-man of another race or creed, remember the pathetic plaint of Shylock, the Jew' (Ibid., 266).

Possibilities of terrible misappropriation of Shakespeare by Indian political class for self-assertion are also quite palpable in contemporary India. Back in February 1996 when one prominent politician was being put in jail for charges of financial bungling he put up a resilient face by quoting Hamlet's monologue 'Fight for the last straw when honour is at stake' (IV iv).²³ However, the most hilarious but potentially dangerous (mis)appropriation of Shakespeare's quintessential romantic hero Romeo was attempted by one of the (federal) State governments in 2017. In an attempt to nab the eve-teasers or the unsolicited 'Romeos' the government raised a quick action force consisting of police officers naming as 'Anti-Romeo Squads'. For the Bard to realize the fate of his young lover boy being chased by police because he is now a veritable *mawali* (rascal) or *asamajik* (anti-social) or a *chichore* (a profligate), might make him anxiously stir even in his four-century-old cold grave.²⁴

Examples of quoting or misquoting the Bard for good or at least innocuous purposes are also in plenty. One former Finance Minister while presenting the national budget in the Parliament quoted, somewhat appropriately, from *Hamlet*—'I must be cruel only to be kind'—to justify some harsh measures he had to take against foreign investment.²⁵ In 2016, the then Education Minister during a raging debate in Parliament on the unfortunate death of a Dalit student, in her impassioned defence of the government referred to *Macbeth*—'Fair is foul, foul is fair'—and blamed the Opposition for twisting or inverting the situation for narrow political gains.²⁶ Can the India's highest judiciary in the country be far behind in showing reverence to the Bard? One Judge of the Indian Supreme Court while adjudicating an alleged telecom scam in 2012 mentions *Henry IV*—'uneasy lies the head that wears a crown'—to describe the apparent procrastination of the then Prime Minister's Office in taking timely action to avert wrongdoings.²⁷ While delivering the verdict in favour of decriminalization of same sex love the then Chief Justice of India cited those famous lines from *Romeo and Juliet*—'What's in a name?/ That which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet'—to stress on the fundamental characteristics and essential qualities of human beings rather than their sexual orientations.²⁸ Only two years ago during the winter and amidst raging COVID-19 pandemic, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the highest regulatory financial organization of the country, with slightly misquoted lines—'the winter of our discontent will be made glorious summer'—from

Richard III, made an endeavour to cheer up the market as well as the countrymen living under the shadow of economic crisis.²⁹

The incumbent Prime Minister of India, known for his dramatic oratory skills (especially in Hindi) and for his natural alacrity to quote from Indian Scriptures or writers/thinkers like Kabir, Bankimchandra, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Tagore, had one rare occasion of mentioning the wily Bard. In one of his signature monthly radio speeches in 2017, he acted almost like a teacher and meticulously explained the meaning of forgiveness in the ‘mercy’ speech by Portia:

Shakespeare in his play, ‘Merchant of Venice’, while explaining the importance of forgiveness, has written, ‘Mercy is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes’ meaning, the forgiver and the forgiver and the forgiven both stand to receive divine blessing.

(*The Hindu*:2019)

How does, then, one of his bete noires in the opposition politics fare with Shakespeare? Days before the first lockdown in the country (23 March 2020) he had an interview with an author sitting apparently in an airport before his departure.³⁰ While asked about the political volatility of the country during the series of intense protests against laws like abolition of Article 370 or Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 passed in the Indian Parliament, he recalls Polonius’s oft-quoted line in *Hamlet*—‘though this be madness, yet there is method in it’ (II ii). To answer the question on fake news, he resorted to *Macbeth*’s ‘What! Can the devil speak true?’ (Banquo: I iii). He went on to tackle the interview by variedly quoting from the Bard, proceeded finally to board the flight with a sombre one from Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*: ‘Farewell, fair cruelty. Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow’ (I, v).

The noteworthy politician/thinker to have dense knowledge on Shakespeare and the colonial history attached to him is, undoubtedly, Shashi Tharoor serving his third consecutive term as a Member of Parliament from the Opposition bench. A distinguished scholar, writer, and an extremely articulate orator, he reignited the two-century old Kalidasa-Shakespeare debate by making a strong case for the Indian classical writer in an international literary festival held in India in 2017. ‘We are taught Shakespeare in school’, he wonders, ‘but not Kalidasa. And that’s a shame. We continue the British way of education. We are missing out on learning about our heritage’.³¹ Tharoor’s swashbuckling attack against the cultural politics of British imperialism by according equal honour to Kalidasa was only a cryptic reminder of his spine-chilling account of the colonial history he had already published as *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* in 2016. However, it is deeply

ironic that a book running down the much-valORIZED narrative of the 'civilizing mission' and finds nothing beneficial or redeeming about the imperial rule in India, has to be epigraphed with lines from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: 'But it is strange/And oftentimes, to win us to our harm/The instruments of darkness tell us truths ... '(I, iii) (Tharoor:2016). But Tharoor being an astute appropriator of the Bard was trying to equate the apparent act of benevolence of the Empire with the equivocal prophesies of the weird sisters. Banquo's profound understanding that despite bearing apparent truth, 'the instruments of darkness' or by comparison, the subtleties of the Raj can turn out to be extremely dangerous in the long run if taken at the face value. Tharoor's breathless narration of colonial misrule, chaos, killings, oppression, and plunging of hapless Indians into a protracted saga of darkness, must be read, much like Nehru's, as a passionate uncovering of the hollow claims of cultural supremacy or liberal values of the British. The obvious irony of himself being a 'beneficiary' of the same English (colonial) education/language is boldly acknowledged and answered: 'Ironic, yes, but only to a point ... I delighted in the language on its own terms, as a pan-Indian language today, and *not as symbol of colonial oppression*' (Ibid., 165, emphasis added). He admits that 'English was undoubtedly Britain's most valuable and abiding legacy to India, and educated Indians', but the Indians could turn the 'language of imperialism into language of nationalism' it has now become a language of pleasure as it grants 'access to a wider ideas and entertainment' (Ibid., 166). This also explains Tharoor's tailor-made attraction for Shakespeare, without, of course, forfeiting his love and admiration for the great Indian classical writer or the gloried ancient past. Further, as an important politician and adept thinker, Tharoor appears to have consciously crafted his strategy to distinguish himself from the contemporary exclusivist Hindu revivalism which, according to him, threatens to undermine the secular democratic principles of the country. Undoubtedly, he does not vouch for replacing Shakespeare by Kalidasa in the school curriculum or English with Sanskrit in India, nor does he fanatically propose to raze down the colonial edifices. What he essentially wishes is, to consciously relive the history of Empire as a ghastly nightmare and not as benefaction. But then, the same British had brought Shakespeare to us? Tharoor argues in similar line that the beautiful creations of the Bard can be read and enjoyed while at the same time denouncing their colonial legacy. The underlying principles of Tharoor's deliberation may be said to be found in the self-assertion of an English-speaking Indian diaspora living in the UK, in their reclamation of the Bard on the one hand and placing Tagore alongside him on the other.

Tharoor's deeper engagement with Shakespeare can be found in his attempts to interpret the most impactful post-Independence political leaders/upheavals starting from the first recognized Prime Minister to the

incumbent one, by fascinatingly reconfiguring *Julius Caesar* into that context. His recent article— ‘We want no Caesars: What Indian politicians can learn from Shakespeare’s play’ (2017)—is a superb example of how the issue of ‘power, its acquisition and exercise, its temptations and abuse, its dependence on public support and elite acquiescence’, and the principles of ‘honour, loyalty, fraternity and democracy’ extracted from a 17th-century tragedy can offer some hard lessons for Indian politicians. While cautioning such political leaders who, riding on their unchallenged popularity, tries to refashion themselves as tantalizingly close autocrats like Caesar, Tharoor writes,

Three times in our nearly 70 years of Indian democracy, a national leader has become so popular as to threaten (in some critics’ opinion) the idea of democracy itself. Cassius’s observation on Caesar’s power— *Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world/Like a Colossus, and we petty men/Walk under his huge legs, and peep about/To find ourselves dishonourable graves*—sounds like many similar comments made about India’s founding Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi, and the current leader, Narendra Modi.

(Tharoor:2017, emphasis original)

For Tharoor, Nehru being a principled democrat was ‘no threat to Indian democracy’ neither did he want to become a Caesar. Rather, if ‘Julius Caesar’, Tharoor argues, ‘had behaved like Nehru, he would never have come to an untimely demise at the hands of his own colleagues’ (Ibid.). At one level, Tharoor’s Nehru narrative pitted against the Caesar’s serves not just as a counterpoint to a temporary dictator like Indira Gandhi in 1975, but it also makes a serious intervention in the original plot of the play. The most remarkable connect of contemporary politics with the play, however, is the use of extraordinary oratory and eloquence for political gains. Those highly emotive, fiery, and yet cogent speeches used first by Brutus to deflect public attention from Caesar and, then the loyalist Mark Antony reversing the same in order to avenge the killing of Caesar, may remind us of fragility of Indian voters to get swayed by such articulate political rhetoric. Who better than the current Prime Minister of India, who, according to Tharoor, ‘owes his position today more to his oratory than to any other quality, let alone any actual accomplishment’ (Ibid.). Well, the jury is still out on it if the Indian people are intelligently so deficient to choose their leader for two consecutive terms only on the basis of public relations management. Nonetheless, Tharoor’s underlying principle of organized political rhetoric in catching popular sentiment to one’s own advantage in a democracy is absolutely spot on. What is, however, slightly overstretched is his comparison of Caesar’s killing with

three major assassinations post-Independence India has seen—that of M.K. Gandhi and two former Prime Ministers, Indira and Rajiv Gandhi—as none of these were caused for the political power as is the case in the play. Be that as it may, someone like Shashi Tharoor, to me, makes a classic connect between an ‘academic’ Shakespeare and a ‘political’ Shakespeare, a visible bridge between the elite intelligentsia and the hardcore politicians in contemporary India.

Shakespeare in Contemporary Indian Cinema

Beyond the bounds of elite classroom discourses or succulent political utterances how has the Bard fared in the eyes of the common people? Though the nucleus of the book has confessedly remained about academic reception and pedagogy of Shakespeare in India, I wish to end it with a brief exploration of popular reflections of the Bard through some filmic narrations derived out of his plays. One may wonder, why not then post-Independence theatrical representations? Well, this particular space has been covered quite exhaustively by a host of scholarly works for the last 50 years or so.³² Supplanted with this is my understanding of the term ‘common people’ who living largely beyond the metros or even major urban centres cannot have any access to theatre. Nor do such productions always deal with masala elements—in Harris’s (2018) sense—suited to the taste of such a vast contingent of Indians ranging from the subalterns to the middle classes.³³ Overall declining trend of the art itself since the rise of cinema in India is a major issue hitting the popularity of the Bard among the theatregoers. In any case the book that I have undertaken to write can no way claim to be comprehensive or even touch upon the inordinately vast critical materials which are being continuously mined in the field commonly classified as ‘Shakespeare in India’. At the same time, I also acknowledge that a plethora of rich scholarships have been emerging on what can be termed as ‘popular Shakespeare’ or what Jonathan Gill Harris (2018) has brilliantly termed as ‘Masala Shakespeare’ in India since the turn of the present century.³⁴ By tangentially running through some of the films produced since the 1960s, my endeavour, here, will be limited only to gauge the position of the Bard in contemporary popular culture and to somehow remotely segue it with the popular sentiment generated in late 19th-century Bengal through the contemporary theatrical adaptations discussed earlier.

Beginning with *Othello*, it is needless to reiterate the popularity enjoyed by the play in every segment of India’s interfaces with the Bard—be it in the classroom, academic discourses, or theatrical adaptations since the mid-19th century. On the big screen starting with the Bengali blockbuster *Saptapadi* (1961) to the relatively recent Bollywood megahit *Omkara*

(2006), the Moor of Venice seems to have sustainably remained a ‘curled darling’ of the ‘base Indian’. No prize for guessing that an intensely bullied ‘black’ of early modern England could easily connect with the much-maligned oppressed ‘brown’ of India in both colonial and postcolonial times. Incidentally, the narrative of the novel-turned-Bengali film set in the last years of the Raj has also been racialized with a blatant display of hatred towards the protagonist (Krishnendu) through words like ‘blacky’, ‘brute’, or ‘uncultured’ by an arrogant ‘white’ woman, namely, Rina Brown.³⁵ The entire action of the film, though, gets turned on its head after a scintillating one-off scene (V, iii) performance of Othello by Krishnendu, ironically cast opposite to Rina, who plays Desdemona, in a cultural event held at their medical college in colonial Calcutta. Subsequently, Rina falls in love with Krishnendu, he converts himself into Christianity as per the condition of marriage imposed by her British father. Krishnendu’s caste Hindu father emotionally blackmails and persuades Rina to call off the marriage. A few years later, the couple eventually reunites in a remote village in the middle of the raging Second World War with the possibility of a happy ending to the film in sight. Now, even a bare reading of this narrative suggests that *Saptapadi* is much more than *Othello*. The popular Othello narrative infused in the film plays an important but only a temporal part. It gets radically re-appropriated, vehemently pushed back, and a remarkably refreshing middle-class tragic comedy comes to the fore in keeping with the sentiment of a newly liberated bourgeois nation-state. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the novel was written barely ten years after India’s Independence, when, after two centuries of frightful servitude, the beleaguered nation was trying to crawl back on its own under the charismatic leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Incidentally, the famous novelist Tarasankar Bandopadhyay shared a strong bond of mutual respect and admiration with the first Prime Minister of India.³⁶

Omkara, on the other hand, is admittedly an adaptation of the Shakespearean play. It may be considered a 21st-century tribute to the Bard by Vishal Bhardwaj who on his own part has tried to remain reasonably faithful to the essence of the Othello story. But, it is baffling why an extraordinary soldier, outstanding poet/orator, and a passionate lover, ‘a far more, fair than black’ army General, could be turned, from the very beginning of the film, into a hardcore criminal whose only quality seems to be loyalty to his political boss Bhaisaab (Duke?). He wins elections for him by threats and intimidation in an undisclosed region of North India. Some answers to this riddle may be found in what ‘constitutes appropriation, being cognizant of the tensions between veneration or resistance towards the original work’, and how such appropriations ‘mediate between the elite, Western intellectual associations with the plays and local,

non-metropolitan cultures and knowledges of the Indian Sub-continent' (Singh:2019, 13). In other words, while localizing/regionalizing a widely celebrated global play, 'individual artists or auteurs, or individual craft-person possessed of a distinctive vision' may have such fantastic designs to emulate and yet, reverse the original narrative to suitably describe his own national and regional cultures (Ibid.). It must have taken boundless courage and imagination for the Indian film-maker to transmute a widely celebrated 'Noble Moor' into a veritable mafia or a *Bahubali* who shoots, kills, or breaks law at will in a Hindi heartland of the 21st-century India. Herein lies the precise contentious issue about this otherwise fine appropriation of the Shakespearean play. The point is, has such a supercharged, highly spicy, and easily marketable political narrative of one region of contemporary India been consciously appropriated to relate to a play like *Othello* where what matter most is not politics or state but race, gender, and domestic violence? That does not mean that Indian equivalence of race (?) and caste has not been used in *Omkara*. But mafia politics or *Bahubali* raj suffused with indiscriminately violent shooting spree has pushed back those three themes—caste, gender, and domestic violence—in spite of being extremely relevant in contemporary India. The most sensational moment of departure, however, occurs in the film when towards the end Indu/Emilia kills her husband Langda/Iago in a fit of remarkable feminist rage (see Figure 6.1). This incredible intervention into the Shakespearean play by Bhardwaj deserves unreserved accolades albeit his uneventful presentation of caste/race in the film.

The point is: do we remember *Omkara* as a 'low' caste talented Indian tied with a 'high' caste beautiful lady as *Othello* is perpetually remembered for being black Moor married to a white woman? Dare I say, in his first



Figure 6.1 Indu/Emilia kills her husband Langda/Iago in a fit of remarkable feminist rage. Picture taken from YouTube @Omkara, 2006

Shakespearean attempt of the trilogy of sort, *Maqbool/Macbeth* (2004) he has chosen a similar ‘sellable’ theme of the dark underworld located in the Mumbai region. The only remarkable ‘quality’ of *Maqbool/Macbeth* seems to be his sharp-shooting skills apart from being a forgiving husband/lover of Nimmi/Lady Macbeth who, in strange contrast with the original, sleeps or has to share bed with Abbaji/Duncan for *Maqbool*’s rise. Similarly, as discussed later, the protracted political problem of insurgency and military retaliation in Kashmir has been deliberately chosen as the locus of the third film in the series *Haider/Hamlet* released in 2014. Notwithstanding such critical notes, I find it a delight to watch two of the most celebrated Shakespearean tragedies being fortuitously reconfigured as such magnificent travesties of the two most widely celebrated tragic heroes. Read from this perspective the films might strike flat at the age-old image of the wily Bard as the undisputed global (elite) icon owing to such glorious reduction of him to cater to the popular tastes of dingy mafia politics in the postcolonial world of the developing nation.

Turning to Shakespearean comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*, as mentioned earlier, has remained vastly popular even a century after its first appropriation as the *Bhrantibilas* narrative by great Vidyasagar. The Bengali filmic adaptation by Manu Sen in 1963 of the same name is still considered as an extremely entertaining movie.³⁷ The film follows the original narrative appropriated by Vidyasagar. However, unlike it, the film locates the plot in a modern-day India. Both the characters of Chiranjib/Antipholus played by matinee idol Uttam Kumar, and the servants’ roles—Kinkar/Dromio—by equally popular comedian Bhanu Bandopadhyay, the film narrates the story of a Bengali merchant from Kolkata who along with his servant travels to a small town for a prescheduled business purpose. Without knowing that they have two identical twins already living in that town causes all sorts of confusion and hilarity leading finally to reunification of all with their mother in Calcutta. Interestingly, the director of the film does not mention Shakespeare but Vidyasagar as the source of his narrative, possibly suggesting that he took the story to be original creation of the great Bengali mind. Remarkable popularity of *Brantibilas* on screen led to its first remake in Bollywood in 1968 as *Do Dooni Chaar* (‘Two plus two = four’) directed by Debu Sen following nearly the same story line with famous singer/composer/director Kishore Kumar playing doubles in the lead roles. But it did not really achieve much success owing to its poor narration and slapstick comic portrayal of the other doubles.³⁸ Some 13 years later came another Hindi version *Angoor* (‘Grapes’) directed by a very popular and respected Bollywood writer/director/lyricist Gulzar, whose Bengali connections were, too, well known. Gulzar depended on the original Shakespearean play, recreated the shipwreck, and followed slightly different narration than the original Bengali remake. Unlike Manu Sen, Gulzar respectfully

acknowledges Shakespeare and begins the filmic narration with a glowing tribute to the Bard and his *Comedy*, and even ended with merrily mentioning Shakespeare as the 'boss', the ultimate creator of such fun and mirth.³⁹ Antipholus from Syracuse here becomes a detective novel aficionado Ashok played by the star of the time Sanjeev Kumar and his servant Dromio/Bahadur played by popular Hindi comedian Deven Verma. Two years later Sanjeev Kumar/Ashok getting the film-fare award for the best actor and Deven Verma/Bahadur for the best comedian was a testimony to the film's prolonged popularity.⁴⁰ The gripping tale of the *Comedy* does not really end with this hit in the late decades of the last century. A very recent remake of it in *Cirkus* ('Circus', 2022) directed by very popular Rohit Shetty of *Golmaal* ('Mess') series casts a contemporary superstar Ranveer Singh playing the lead doubles of Roy/Antipholus. Making drastic changes to the original this film presents the two sets of identical twins deliberately separated at their birth by a new character playing the role of a scientist working on the theory of nature vs. nurture.⁴¹ The film though remains a box office hit with collection of whopping Rs 27.95 crores in the first week has not really achieved the status and critical acclaim of either *Brantibilas* or *Angoor* owing to its slapstick scenes and bizarre deviation from the original narrative which had already stood the taste of time.

Romeo and Juliet as mentioned before was the first Shakespearean play to be narrativized in any Indian language in 1848, was a darling to the colonial intelligentsia. The intensity of its appeal has remained the same even in the postcolonial era. Very recently it has witnessed at least three major back-to-back appropriations on the celluloid: *Ishaqzaade* (2012), *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela* (2013), both in Hindi, and *Arshinagar* (2015) in Bengali. But first significantly close and remarkably popular adaptation of the widely celebrated Shakespearean love story was *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* ('From Doomsday till Doomsday') in Hindi, accomplished in the summer of 1988. Directed by Mansoor Khan, the film actually was the launching pad for both Amir Khan and Juhi Chawla, two major future superstars of Indian cinema. Without acknowledging any debt to the Bard, conception of the narrative has been ascribed to the producer of the film Naseer Hussain, which might have been a deliberate ploy by the producer/director to keep it absolutely Indian. Closely following the essence of the adventurous Shakespearean romance, the film beautifully unfurls the gripping tale of two love-at-first-sight young minds, Raj/Romeo—Rashmi/Juliet, belonging to two bitterly inimical Thakur families of Dhanaraj Singh/Montagu and Ranadhir Singh/Capulet at Dhanakpur village. The disapproval of the affair by their respective families makes them elope with the help of Shyam/Benvolio and Kavita/Juliet's nurse only to be chased down by a henchman hired by Ranadhir/Capulet, who shoots Rashmi dead causing Raj stab himself and die beside Rashmi. The film ends with

both the rival families running towards the lifeless lovers as the sun is seen to be symbolically setting behind them. The film has made remarkable interventions into the original Shakespearean tragic romance in order to adapt to the late 20th-century Indian ambience, including its setting largely in the countryside of National Capital Region. Its unmatched popularity even among the rural Indians with overall business of Rs. 50 million in those days has been a testimony to the popular appeal of *Romeo and Juliet*.

A quarter century later *Ishaqzaade* ('Children of Love' or 'Rebel Lovers') films the Shakespearean narrative by recasting it into an intriguing love story between two members of two rival political families in an undisclosed location in Rajasthan. But the spicy twist to the tale: they belong to two different religious denominations, Hindu and Muslim. Parma/Romeo belonging to the Chauhans led by his grandfather Surya Chauhan/Montagu is pitted against a practicing Islam Zoya/Juliet from the Qureshis of Aftab/Capulet. They start their journey as political rivals during an election campaign where Zoya owing to Parma's nuisance against her father slaps him. The original uncomplicated romance gets compounded as the vengeful Parma pretends to be enamoured by Zoya. She reciprocates after a lot of persuasions, the couple elopes, Parma apparently converts himself to Islam as Pervez and a show of marriage takes place, leading to its consumption in an empty train compartment. Parma reveals his tricks on Zoya saying their marriage has been stage-managed as he wanted to take revenge for his public humiliation. The Chauhans celebrates their son for 'becoming a man' and taking such a 'sweet' revenge. An angry Zoya lands up at the Chauhans in an attempt to avenge her insults. Parma's widow mother takes side with Zoya and tries to convince her *maawali* (ruffian) son about the sanctity of the marriage. She gets killed accidentally by Surya for sheltering the Muslim girl, and this reverses the whole story as Parma now realizes his mistake. The couple elope again, eventually get genuinely married without changing their religion. The act appears to be blasphemous to both the rival families, and they chase them as the couple choose the college where Zoya remains a brilliant student of Chemistry as their shelter. Both Surya and Qureshi now come together and take a vow to kill the intercommunal couple to save their honour and political career. The hapless lone lovers try to retaliate with guns only to realize that they are outnumbered by the militia of their families. They finally decide to shoot each other to immortalize their love. The director Habib Faisal signs off with a moving message over the dead bodies of the lovers: thousands such lovers are killed every year in India only because of falling in love outside their caste, community, or religion. Produced with a budget of Rs 16 crore, the debutant Arjun Kapoor and not-so-familiar Parineeti Chopra in the lead

roles, and amassing Rs 67.64 at the box office (Rs 132 crores in total including overseas collection) along with many awards/accolades, suggests that the film was a huge hit. The radical Indian interventions made into the western narrative with topical issues like political violence, communal hatred, and honour killing still prevailing in some parts of the country were well received by people. They made the globally celebrated romantic tragedy and the international icon completely localized. The film, nevertheless, was also criticized especially for displaying gender discrimination relating to premarital sex and the related celebration of manhood while the girl got chastised for the same act. Employing excessive violence was also an issue the urban/metropolitan audience found difficult to relate.

Made only a year later *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (translate loosely as 'A Dance of Bullets: Ram-Leela') follows *Romeo and Juliet* more closely though the saga of indiscriminate violence becomes more intense in this film. Located in an imaginary village in the federal state of Gujrat it retells the exciting love story of Ram/Romeo and Leela/Juliet belonging to two 500 years' rival clans—Rajadi/Montague and Sanera/Capulet—who deal with unlicensed manufacture and sale of guns and ammunitions. Written and directed by highly reputed Sanjoy Leela Bansali, who, unlike the earlier film, acknowledges the Bard in the very beginning. He makes many departures in the film one major being the character of Dhankor Baa (Sanera) replacing Mr. Capulet as the head of the family. Her character may be regarded as an interesting feminist spin to the Shakespearean play, who unlike the original Capulet witnessed a change of heart and wanted to end the long ugly wars between the families by marrying the lovers after having killed the principal conspirator Bhavani/Paris. But by then, it was too late as Ram and Leela oblivious of Leela's mother's realization decide, much like the earlier film, to kill each other by shooting (see Figure 6.2). The film ends with the two dead bodies being given the status of love martyrs as both the warring families come together to cremate them. With a whopping Rs. 88 crores budget the start-studded film—Ranvir Singh and Deepika Padukone in the lead roles and veteran, Suprya Pathak as the Capulet—collected massive Rs 200 crores in the box office apart from bagging many prestigious awards, which is an obvious pointer of the Bard's unfading popularity in contemporary India.

Two years down the line the Bengali filmic adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* as *Arshinagar* ('Mirrorland') by highly acclaimed actor/director Aparna Sen—whose earlier use of Shakespeare in *36 Chowringhee Lane* was quite riveting—was a regrettable flop in Bengal. Admittedly taken from Shakespeare, the narrative is set in an imaginary land where two land mafia families—the Mitras and the Khans—belonging to two different religious denominations, Hindu and Muslim, respectively, are at loggerhead with each other over business. Oblivion of their family feud both Ranajit/Romeo and



Figure 6.2 Climax murder scene Ram/Romeo and Leela/Juliet willingly killing each other. Picture taken from YouTube @Goliyon Ki Ras Leela, Ram Leela, 2013.

Julekha/Juliet get Cupid-struck at their first meeting despite the man being 10 years older. The intercommunal love affair leads to severe communal riots ending finally in the killing of the lovers by the rioters of both communities while they were trying to escape. The moving narrative, many ways reminiscent of *Ishaqzaade*, attempts to bring to fore the hypocrisy of Bengali upper-class liberalism irrespective of religion. But the film failed to capture the imagination of the Bengali audience largely owing to poor representation of the story. What played really havoc on the smooth sail of the plot was the use of completely unrealistic rhymed conversations among the characters whether they were engaged in romance, gunfight, or mourning a death. Furthermore, the locus of the play, though unspecified, the shooting spots and use of the language make it easily identifiable with the city of Kolkata where, in reality, despite latent communal chasm people of all communities have cohabited peacefully for long. Hence, the film laden with violent riots might not have gone down well with the people of the city. The overall failure of the film in

Bengal and overwhelming success of its Hindi counterpart may also suggest that what might be natural in a north Indian ambience may not be quite fitting in Bengal, a state known for its communal peace and harmony even during severe national crises in the past.⁴²

Last, but no way the least, the Shakespearean play that still deeply lingers in the minds of Indians is *Hamlet* which had witnessed its first transculturation in India/Bengal as *Amarshingha* carried out by Pramathanath Basu in 1874. Last decade of the 19th century saw three back-to-back Bengali Hamlets before Nagendranath Chaudhuri's adaptation *Hariraj* was popularized on stage by the great thespian of the early 20th century, Amarendranth Dutt in the year 1900.⁴³ Advertised at times as 'Hindu Hamlet', *Hariraj* significantly deviated from the original plot leaving out the madness, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, players or the mousetraps, and was depicted as 'a melodramatic tale of murder, revenge, passion, and death' (Lal & Chaudhuri:2001, 157). It is completely coincidental that *Hariraj*, too, used the Kashmir valley with its beautiful gardens and rivers as the backdrop of the play and not the gloomy castle of Elsinore. That the Indian enthusiasm about the belligerent Prince of Denmark has not really waned in the post-Independence India can well be ascertained from an illuminating article by Paromita Chakravarti (2016) dealing with three Bengali stage appropriations of it.

But the recent filmic version as *Haider* by Vishal Bhardwaj has taken it to an entirely different level. Set in the mid-1990s Kashmir during the height of insurgency, and intertextualized mainly with Basharat Peer's spine-chilling first-hand account of the then life in the valley, *Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir* (2010), the film seems to have brilliantly reconfigured *Hamlet's* 'rotten Denmark' with the ruined valley strewn with expansive graveyards on the one hand, and 'unweeded garden' or ravaged paradise on earth on the other. Jyotsna Singh (2019, 177–194) has so convincingly argued about the multiple layers of *Haider's* negotiations with *Hamlet* that any repetition of the same will be completely redundant. Nonetheless, the journey of a young man from a gentle studious college student to an unwilling militant, and how it finds chilling resonances with contemporary reality of the valley needs to be told in a nutshell. This will also bolster our understanding of how the Shakespearean narrative has been simultaneously adhered to and transcended with. Dead King Hamlet of the original recast as a soft-spoken sensitive doctor Hilal Meer is betrayed by his brother Khurram Meer/Claudius to the Indian military for secretly extending medical aid to a dreaded terrorist. He is apprehended and his wife Ghazala/Gertrude taken out of the house before the soldiers blows it up along with those terrorists. *Haider/Hamlet* rushes back from his university located in the North Capital Region of the country and enquires about his father's

disappearance only to discover his mother happily remarried with his uncle. With the help of his childhood sweet heart and a journalist Arshia/Ophelia, Haider unsuccessfully searches for his father only to be acquainted with a strange separatist figure Roohdaar. He claimed to have known Hillal who before his execution as per the dictate of his uncle, had told him to pass the message to Haider to avenge his death. This strange militant indoctrinates Haider into terrorism. Consequently, Haider kills Khurram's police officer Pervej/Polonius who was also Arshia's father, leading to her trauma and subsequent suicide. Meanwhile, after learning about her husband's killing Ghazala, too, contacts Roohdaar and turns into a suicide bomber killing the militia raised by Khurram but leaving him alive. Haider rushes to the sight of the blast in an attempt to save his mother but finds grievously injured Khurram whom he, too, leaves to suffer. The film ends with Haider walking away ignoring his uncle's repeated pleas to kill him amidst the heap of half-burnt dead bodies on the snow-laden streets of picturesque Kashmir valley.

Even a plain reading of this core narrative helps us conclude how Bhardwaj has made insightful interventions into *Hamlet* to give it an Indian flavour during the troubled times in Kashmir. Raising the problematics involved in the 'politics and poetics of appropriation' Singh (2019, 194) explains how the 'film moves beyond the familiar issue of a veneration or resistance toward the original'. 'Instead in *Haider*', she argues, 'Shakespeare's play is refracted through postcolonial history of the sub-continent, with a close-up of the ravaged beauty of Kashmir' (Ibid.). *Hamlet* in her opinion provides 'a distinct emotional language to understand the disintegration of the characters caught in sundered relationships in the midst of betrayal and violence in *Haider*' (Ibid.). Without any doubt, the film has remained the best of Bhardwaj's trilogy on Shakespeare with nearly flawless reconfiguration of the *Hamlet* story into the man-made hell out of God-created heaven on earth. Nonetheless, one may find it difficult to escape the absence of the super subtle dynamics of unresolved inner conflicts, angst, and procrastinations of the quintessential tragic figure in *Hamlet* manifest through those iconic speeches like—'To be or not to be ...'. *Hamlet*'s predicament stems not merely owing to his father's murder by his uncle, maternal betrayal, or incest but also because of the profound political problem in the state of Denmark which he finds 'out of joint' and wants to 'set in order'. But *Haider*'s narrative starts mainly on personal level and getting automatically imbricated into the political realm of intensely insurgent Kashmir valley. This may also explain the radically ingenious way of ending the narrative where both Haider and Khurram live suggesting that unlike, the original play, the film does not forecast any closure of the personal issues or restoration of political order in the end. Realistically Bhardwaj could not have afforded

to continue Kashmir as Denmark as the problems of insurgency continued albeit in lesser degree when he was making the film in 2014. Here lies the deliberate choice of mid-1990s Kashmir as the backdrop which, re-imagined through the present and by way of the Bard's play, finds a deep connect not just nationally but globally. Read from such perspective *Haider* appears to be a remarkable film which simultaneously localizes a globally celebrated play and globalizes the plight of local people in the violence-struck region of a South Asian country. The film's thumping box office success smashing over rupees 530 million against a budget of 350 million suggests once again how the Bard recast with such emotively burning topics catches the attention of the nation at large.

Despite *Haider's* enviable success across the globe noted Bengali singer and filmmaker Anjan Dutta does not find real Hamlet in *Haider*. 'Everyone is all out', he writes, 'to praise the stunning visuals of Kashmir, the darkness of its politics, deprivation, the greyness of the bridge over Jhelum ... No one seems to be bothered about Mr. Shakespeare in all this' (quoted in Chatterjee:2016). Dutta did not refrain only in rubbishing *Haider* but went on to articulate a rejoinder in the form of his own *Hamlet* as Bengali *Hemanta* (2016). Relocated in the dark underbelly, slightly over-imaginative though, of Bengali film industry in Kolkata loosely referred to as Tollywood *Hemanta* is an ultramodern *Hamlet*. He goes to the United States at young age to study film, comes back after training to learn that his father and the owner of a production house was killed three years ago. His actress mother Gertrude/Gayetri is married to his uncle Kalyan/Claudius and living happily. It raises his suspicion, which gets intensified through some ghostly messages on his cell phone, that his uncle was responsible for his father's death. After a lot of theatrics, the narrative finally leads to the suicide of his mother and killing of himself and his uncle by deliberately causing the car accident while coming back from his mother's funeral. Shakespearean narratives about Ophelia and Horatio have been honestly followed in the character of Olipriya and Hirak, respectively. However, the film could not really mark any imprint in the minds of the Bengali audience owing probably to the constricted sight of the film industry being recast as the crime-prone state of Denmark. Larger parts of Bengal might have rightly failed to connect with the limited city space of the metropolis.

The number of filmic appropriations of the Bard in the last two decades or so have increased so exponentially that they might remind us of the zeal with which the colonial intelligentsia had started to follow him since the mid-19th century.⁴⁴ As I arrive at the concluding part of this book, I find it difficult to escape the question: is this the continuation of the same sense of bardolatry? More poignant, or, any less? Despite the films' radical interventions into the plays of Shakespeare by making the 'firangi' writer an Indian (Harris:2018), the underlying principle of the Bard's universality

remains the same if not more intensified. It appears, as if, Shakespeare remains an automatic choice for India's self-definition both in elite and popular discourses even in the post-Independence India. Our national poet Tagore remains only in the fringe in the pan-Indian popular or academic discourses, does not really count as much as the Bard does. Quite ironically though, on the initiative of a group of English-speaking Indian diaspora living in the UK, Tagore's bust has been placed alongside Shakespeare's in his birthplace. Is the endeavour a legacy of the symptomatic feeling of inferiority of the colonial intelligentsia that their distant descendants still needed to put up their own national poet alongside the Bard? Does 'the book' of the erstwhile Empire still remain a major referential point for the postcolonial intellectuals for their own assertion? Or, does it really make an emphatic statement about India's self-esteem transmitted through the first non-white, non-European Nobel Laureate? As discussed in the previous chapters of this book, Shakespeare began to be compared with the classical Indian writer, Kalidasa by the 19th-century Indian elites with an attempt to forget colonial indignities notwithstanding the great Sanskrit poet was mostly portrayed in lesser light. Do we still need to prove a point to the ex-colonial nation about our cultural self-esteem? If you have Shakespeare, we have Tagore. Or does the meeting of the Bard and Tagore symbolize confluence of minds, sombre metonymic meeting of two nations sharing deeply unpleasant past?

Be that as it may, one averment can safely be repeated in the end that the dominant narrative of India and Indian nationalism has long been defined, controlled, regulated by the English-speaking minority in India long after 1947. 'During the transfer of power during the Independence', argues Loomba (1989, 31), 'the Indian bourgeoisie found the continued use of European language advantageous for social and political control. They could maintain their own privileged position through their monopoly over colonial language'. She continues with the same eloquence:

English was not just 'a window on the world' but remained central signifier of social difference although the difference itself shifted from one of race to that of class, and tied in both with the current brain drain and internal cultural imperialism. *Because English Literature is well-entrenched in general education, it continues to be posited as a measure of learning.*

(Ibid., emphasis added)

Without an iota of doubt, till the end of the last century, Shakespeare remained the principal pivot of this 'English Literature' and 'it was argued that if a student could not comprehend Shakespeare, s/he did not deserve to graduate!' (Ibid.). The introduction in this book has already foregrounded how Shakespeare had served as the most fascinating instrument in advancing the

cultural logic of British imperialism. How he started to foster the rise of English-educated homegrown bourgeoisie whose distant descendants surfaced as the rulers and their intellectual aides in the newly decolonized nation. The 'prince of poet', an axis of imperial ideology, continues to live on with the 'liberated' bourgeoisie of indigenous make, a transmuted postcolonial version of Macaulay's 'brown sahibs'. They have found in him and English literature/language, as Loomba has persuasively argued, a readily available weapon of socio-economic, politico-cultural control over the Indian mass, the perpetual wretched of the earth, or the hapless Indians living largely at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The free political gentry were more than eager to carry forward the colonial legacy of governance by picking up English as the language of bureaucracy, legal system, and official means of correspondence. It is undeniable that the newly independent ruling oligarchy was not entirely unaware of what they were doing: perpetuation of the colonial apparatus which kept majority of Indians deprived from enjoying the fruit of real liberty and thus excluded from the core project of postcolonial nation building. The old nationalist narrative of colonial era continues with enviable ease and in many new changing avatars even as India celebrates 75 years of its national Independence. Better parts of India's free rule were effectively being controlled by a miniscule of the five percent English-educated nobilities/gentries, most of whom were grounded in their country but groomed by the colonial system of education either here or abroad.⁴⁵ An unchallenged sense of entitlement drenched them before they were violently shaken by a new force since the mid-1980s. These new political groups proceeded in completely opposite direction to formulate their idea of India by reviving the primordial past or a deep nation which, for them, existed in the pre-Mughal era. It may sound sweepingly generalized statement but the postcolonial Indian political theatre or narrative of nationalism has fundamentally remained an ugly contest between these two ideologically antagonistic dispensations: the highbrowed English-educated elites allied with their political counterparts and the overwrought primeval plutocrats in cohorts with the political bigots. We, the perpetually colonized mind, the cultural hybrids, or the hapless 'half-sahibs', continue to give voice to our anxious self, consciously oscillating between the frightful colonized past and betrayed decolonized present without any possible extrication from either: hence, a book like this, and hence this Shakespeare and the endless Empire.

Notes

- 1 Carlyle's oft-quoted statement was made in 1840 during one of his lecture series on *Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*, delivered between 1837 and 1840 to varied audiences in London. Quoted in Jyotsna Singh (1996), p. 121, op. cit.
C.D. Narsimha, one of the most influential Shakespeare scholars post-Independence India, is quoted in Ania Loomba (1989), p. 22, op. cit.

K.R.S. Iyenger, too, remained an equally gifted critic of Shakespeare and wrote a glowing tribute to the Bard during his quatercentenary birth celebration in India, whereby he was visibly exalted to find the thriving ‘Shakespeare industry’ in India. See Iyenger (1964), p. 1, op. cit.

Theatre director Atul Kumar, widely known for his *Piya Behrupiya* (from *Twelfth Night*) performed in London Globe in April 2012, made this statement in an interview to Pheroze Vincent of *The Hindu* dated 12 August 2012. See Panja & Moitra Saraf (2016), p. 10, op. cit., for further detail.

- 2 Tagore’s apocalyptic vision of nationalism practiced in India in his lecture, ‘Nationalism in India’ can be found in Sisir Kumar Das (1996), pp. 453–466 op. cit. For a brief discussion on it, see Mandal (2017), op. cit.
- For Gandhi’s critique of Nehru’s idea of India and discussion on it, see Partha Chatterjee (1986), pp. 85–130, op. cit.
- 3 Nandi Bhatia (2004:5) makes a strong case relating to abysmal popularity of Shakespeare in India in 1911, with only 1% literacy in English and 6% in the vernaculars. 100 years later, as per the 2011 census, 10% of Indians have speaking power in English against the figure of 45% in Hindi, the most spoken language in India.
- 4 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1997), op. cit., has captured a series of fascinating debates between these two of the most influential minds the world has ever seen, as also a deep lasting bond and friendship between them.
- 5 Foremost among such contemporary historians propping up a unique sense of Hindu revivalism are Hindol Sengupta and Sanjeev Sanyal. See Hindol Sengupta (2015). *Being Hindu: Old Faith, New World and You*, New Delhi: Penguin. By the same author published in 2018 was *The Man Who Saved India: Sardar Patel and his Idea of India*, New Delhi: Penguin Viking. Sanjeev Sanyal’s very recent (2022) book *Revolutionaries: The Other Story of How India Won Its Freedom*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, has a unique take on the Hindu revolutionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries’ India.
- 6 The socially and economically depressed classes in India known as SCs, STs, and OBCs constitute over 70% of the country’s population at the moment.
- 7 Viswanathan (1998), Loomba (1989), and Singh (1996), op. cit., have harped on these points and acting skill of a classroom teacher in the colonial era.
- 8 See Hema Dahiya (2014). *Shakespeare Studies in Colonial Bengal: The Early Phase*, London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing for the history of Shakespeare teachers in colonial Bengal.
- 9 The 11th-century poet Somdeva being the court poet of King Ananta of Kashmir wrote these stories (between 1063 and 1081 CE) to entertain the queen Suryavati. The story narrates the adventures of Udayana, king of Kosambi, and his son Naravahanadatta. The marriage of the latter with various damsels of terrestrial or celestial origin and his elevation to the rank of king of the Vidyadharas, a class of heavenly spirits, are the leading topics of most of the books, but they merely constitute the skeleton of the composition, the substance being made up of stories growing out of these circumstances.
- 10 See the report in *The Telegraph* published on 12 July 2009 some of his former students turned illustrious Shakespeare teachers themselves, paying homage to their ‘mastermoshai’ (a great teacher) on the occasion of his birth centenary celebration. The report can be accessed at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/web-bengal/in-memory-of-mastermoshai/cid/1266570>

See also M.J. Akbar, journalist turned very controversial politician and a former student of Professor Sen, reminiscing his favourite teacher while writing

an article on *Macbeth* on the occasion of Shakespeare's quatercentenary death anniversary. The article can be accessed at <https://openthemagazine.com/lounge/books/macbeth-out-out-brief-candle/>

- 11 See the previous chapter of this book for some discussion on these Shakespeare critics.

Edward Dowden's *Shakespeare, His Mind and Art* (1875), based on the analysis of teleological principles of life, traces a distinct 'late phase' in Shakespeare's career, whereby, through *Tempest*—Shakespeare signalled farewell to creative oeuvre and thus putting the play entirely in an essentialist frame negating the historicity of its creation. It remained one of the influential books to understand the Bard for a long time to come.

- 12 A.C. Bradley (1904), op. cit., was considered the most popular and influential Shakespeare criticism throughout the last century; it saw a series of reprints and editions throughout the last century and even in this century, the last one by Palgrave, London, 2007. Students/scholars even in the beginning of this century found a group of teachers strongly recommending *Shakespearean Tragedy* as the seminal critical text for their understanding of Shakespeare.

- 13 Dutta started implementing his version of Shakespeare on theatre by taking him closer to the mass. He used to severely deride performances that used to be oriented towards understanding the psychology of Shakespeare characters without analysing their historical milieu. See Utpal Dutt's *Shakespeare-er Samaj Chetana* in Bengali ('Social Consciousness of Shakespeare'), Calcutta, 1972.

- 14 Viswanathan (1998), Loomba (1989), and Singh (1996), op. cit., pioneers in the field of such remarkably unorthodox interpretations of the Bard but remained quite unpopular among majority of Indian university teachers till the beginning of this century. See Mandal (2011), op. cit.

- 15 See Manojit Mandal (2020), op. cit.

- 16 See Mandal (2002), op. cit., for Tagore's anti-colonial reading of *The Tempest*.

- 17 Non-inclusion of Aurobindo does not suggest in any way that his diverse range of responses to Shakespeare is not significant, and in fact, researches are being carried out on that front.

See K.D. Sethna (1965). *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a good and old collection of Aurobindo's critiques of Shakespeare though remained barely popular among Indian universities.

Samik Sen (2021). 'Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare', op. cit., is a good compilation of Aurobindo's writings on Shakespeare.

- 18 Nehru on Tagore: 'He was no politician, but he was too sensitive and devoted to the freedom of the Indian people to remain always in his ivory tower of poetry and song. Again and again he stepped out of it, when he could tolerate some development no longer, and in prophetic language warned the British Government or his own people. He played a prominent part in Swadeshi movement that swept through Bengal in the first decade of the 20th century, and again when he gave up his knighthood at the time of Amritsar massacre'.

- 19 Tagore started regularly writing and delivering his critical pieces in *English* at world stage since 1912 till the last public address in 1941.

- 20 Since the Independence *Discovery* began to be extremely popular among the educated Indians and remained so even recently. On 30 May 2014 one of the most reputed and largest circulated dailies, *The Times of India* had carried a report that even 50 years after his death Nehru's *Discovery of India* remained a bestseller in India. The report may be accessed at <https://m.timesofindia.com/>

- city/mumbai/nehru-discovery-of-india-remains-a-bestseller-50-years-after-his-death/articleshow/35791589.cms
- 21 In a very recent newspaper article 'How Shakespeare Entered Rajaji's Mind and Stayed', Gopal Krishna Gandhi paid a glowing tribute to both Raja Gopalachari and his flair for the Bard. See *The Hindu* dated 24 December 2022.
 - 22 See Yogesh Maitreye. *Indian Cultural Forum*, 30 April 2020 for more on this.
 - 23 Sisir Kumar Das (1997, 40), op. cit., informs us how the politician's attempt to articulate himself via Hamlet's line was ridiculed by one newspaper stating that Iago's 'put money in thy purse' would have been the right choice.
 - 24 In a very recent newspaper report dated 26 January 2023 carried by the prestigious *The Indian Express* put out the comparative data of eve-teasing since the establishment of Anti-Romeo Squads by the Uttar Pradesh government in 2017. It showed that the squads each of which comprises a police sub-inspector with at least two constables including a woman, had registered 14.56 lakh of 'eve-teasing' cases in 2022 against half the number in 2017. The report may be accessed at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/lucknow/activity-of-anti-romeo-squads-increased-in-last-5-yrs-govt-data-8405104/>
 - 25 I have depended on Vikram Singh Thakur's feature article, *Where art thou, Shakespeare? The Bard's Name is Invoked Left, Right and Centre*, published by the highly reputed daily *The Hindu* on 2 June 2019, for the quote delivered live by the Minister in the Indian Parliament during his budget speech. The newspaper article may be accessed at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/where-art-thou-shakespeare/article27401088.ece>
 - 26 The honourable minister in question was Smriti Irani. See Vikram Singh Thakur (2019), op. cit.
 - 27 The Honourable Justice (rtd.) A.K. Ganguly of Indian Supreme Court was the principal judge to adjudicate the cases in the alleged scams. See Vikram Singh Thakur (2019), op. cit.
 - 28 See Vikram Sing Thakur, op. cit.
 - 29 See Vikram Sing Thakur, op. cit.
 - 30 The well-known but much maligned politician Rahul Gandhi depended most on *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* to articulate the contentious contemporary political/social issues but the array of politically surcharged questions posed by the interviewer might have been prescheduled ones, as it normally remained in such one-on-one conversations. The interview of Indian National Congress Member of Parliament taken by the writer/journalist Sriram Karri, *The Asian*, 5 March 2020, can be accessed at <https://www.asianage.com/opinion/oped/050320/when-shakespeare-speaks-on-indian-politics.html>
 - 31 See Shomini Sen, in the news portal *news18.com*, quoting Tharoor from Jaipur International Literary Festival January 2017. The report can be accessed at <https://www.news18.com/news/books/we-are-taught-shakespeare-in-school-but-not-kalidas-and-thats-a-shame-shashi-tharoor-on-british-raj-in-india-1339120.html>
 - 32 Starting from Utpal Dutt's *Shakespeare-er Samaj Chetana* in Bengali ('Social Consciousness of Shakespeare') in 1972 to Jyotsna Singh's *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2019), op. cit., list of outstanding works dealing with post-Independence Shakespeare on stage is really long to accommodate in any book.
 - 33 Utpal Dutta's *Jatra Macbeth*, a mixture of Shakespearean dramaturgy and indigenous melodrama, remained extremely popular among the rural audiences, but it was a short-lived singular venture by the great thespian in the 1970s. See Raha (1978), op. cit.

- 34 Harris (2018), op. cit., is one of the most comprehensive books dealing with popular Shakespeare, especially on the big screen, in post-Independence India.
See also Poonam Trivedi & Paromita Chakravarti (2019), eds., *Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: Local Habitations*, New York: Routledge.
- 35 For a detailed discussion on *Saptapadi* and *Om Kara* see Trisha Mitra's 'The Othello-figure in three Indian films: Kaliyattam, Omkara and Saptapadi' in Shormistha Panja & Babli Moitra Saraf (2016), eds. pp. 95–106. op. cit.
- 36 Apart from being a writer Tarasankar was actively involved in reconstruction of the newly liberated nation under Nehru. He became a nominated Member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from the Indian National Congress between 1952 and 1960, and then became a President-nominated Member of the Indian Parliament at the behest of the then Prime Minister Nehru. He was conferred with two of the highest civilian awards in India: Padma Shri (1962) and Padma Bhushan (1969).
- 37 See Brian Hatcher (2014), pp. 158–159, and Suddhaseel Sen (2021), pp. 167–168, op. cit., for a discussion on *Bhrantibilas* film.
- 38 See Jonathan Harris (2018), p. 28, op. cit., for a discussion on the film.
- 39 Suddhaseel Sen (2021, 168) may have it completely glossed it over when he writes that like Manu Sen Gulzar, too, did not acknowledge his indebtedness to Shakespeare as they were 'possibly trying to ensure that the general audiences for whom the films were meant did not feel alienated by the name Shakespeare'. S. Sen (2021), op. cit.
- 40 For a detailed discussion on *Angoor* see Jonathan Harris (2018), pp. 29–32, op. cit.
- 41 For the plot of the film and its success check [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cirkus_\(film\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cirkus_(film))
- 42 One of the most devastating communal riots took place all across northern parts of India in 1984 after the assassination of the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards. However, the city of Calcutta, despite having sizable Sikh population remained absolutely peaceful. Even during the last major protracted Hindu-Muslim riots of 2002 in the federal state of Gujarat Kolkata/Bengal was completely undisturbed.
- 43 See Rangana Banerjee's *Hamlet, Hariraj and a Bengali Fair* incorporated as 'Appendix D' in Lal & Chaudhuri (2001), pp. 155–163, op. cit.
- 44 Two interesting 'eclectic' appropriations were made recently in Bengali: *Hrid Majharey* ('In My Heart', 2014), taking bits and pieces from *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*; and *Julfikar* (2016), punching together two narratives from *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The first one did not do well in the market but remains a critically acclaimed unique venture, but the second one was popular though largely owing to its star-studded production.
See Jonathan Gill Harris (2018), op. cit., to get the number of adaptation done on Shakespeare, especially in this century.
- 45 Majority of the rulers of post-Independence India, including the former Prime Ministers, who have ruled for the better parts of the last 75 years have remained western-educated intellectuals, starting from Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, and the last former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Sing. In India we still have a Chief Minister (the head of a federal government), who cannot properly speak any other Indian language than English.

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