

# From Page to Stage and Screen: A Comparative Study in Indigenization of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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In the present research paper I venture to explore the motifs of the translation or adaptation or appropriation of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* by Haralal Roy and Girish Chandra Ghosh in the British Bengal and by Utpal Dutta in the post-Independent Bengal, with reference to the pre-Independent phase of Shakespeare-translation as well as Bishal Bharadwaj's Hindi adaptation *Maqbool*, and thereby, find out the relevance of the Bard in the post-colonial age. To investigate the socio-cultural factors that instigated the Bengali authors to undergo the project is also the objects of my exploration.

The early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed various events that ushered in the Bengal Renaissance, and Shakespeare studies in India in the period along with the establishment of Fort William College in 1800 and Hindu College in India in 1817, undoubtedly catalyzed the Renaissance mind of Bengal. The foundation of Hindu College surely shifted the Bengalis' interest in the stage performances of Shakespeare's dramas to 'Shakespeare studies'. Henry Vivian Louis Derozio and Captain David Lester Richardson popularized Shakespeare among the Indian students. Prof. Shafi Ahmed, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh wrote in his book, *Bangadese Shakespeare* that Shakespeare translation into Bengali started in 1809 when Charles Monckton, a student of Fort William College translated *The Tempest* as a part of his exercise of Bengali writing and did not translate the whole play but a few excerpts which are not available today. Prof. Ahmed also informs that the first initiative of Shakespeare translation was undertaken by Gurudas Hajra in 1848 by writing *Romeo Julieter Monohar Upakhyan*. (Iftekar, 2006, 1). But 1853 is the year of the years when Harachandra Ghosh translated *The Merchant of Venice* into Bengali and named it *Bhanumati Chittabilas*. Then onwards many Bengali authors attempted to translate/transcreate Shakespeare into Bengali. Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's translation of *Romeo & Juliet* appeared as *Charumukh Chittahara Natak* in 1864 and 17 years later as *Romeo-Juliet*. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's transgeneric appropriation of *The Comedy of Errors* is *Bhrantibilas* (1869). In 1877 Pyarilal Mukhopadhyay published his *Suralata*, an appropriation of *The Merchant of Venice*. Rabindranath Tagore, then a boy of 13 translated *Macbeth* in 1874(?) but only a few fragments of it are found. But in the history of Shakespeare translation the most notable person is Haran Chandra Rakshit who translated the complete works of Shakespeare and published it in 1897. He also presented a brief criticism of *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*, with the third volume in 1898. Girish Chandra Ghosh, a dramatist and actor also joined the queue of the translators and published the translation of *Macbeth*. Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* was highly applauded by the audience. His adaptation of *The Tempest* (named *Nalini Basanta*) is a remarkable work in the history of adaptation studies in Bengal. Sourendra Mohan Mukhopadhyay's *Ritimoto*, *Moner Moton* and *Veronar Bhadrarajugal* are transcreations of *Measure for Measure*, *As You Like It* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* respectively. He also translated *Cymbeline* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Jyotirindranath Tagore translated *Julius Caesar* in 1907. Debendranath Basu translated *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Jotindra Mohan Ghosh's remarkable translation work is *King Lear*. Pasupati Bhattacharya translated

*Twelfth Night*. Nagendra Nath Ray Chaudhuri's *Chamundar Siksha* (1915) is an appropriation of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Another appropriation of *The Merchant of Venice* is *Sudkhor O Saodagar* (1915) by Ray Chaudhuri. In the recent past Sudhansu Ranjan Ghosh translated the complete works of Shakespeare. The declaration of Emergency by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi triggered off Utpal Dutta's intension of translating *Macbeth*. As a protest against the Emergency *Macbeth*, the Elizabethan play was situated in the contemporary Bengal.

The dominance of Bengal in Shakespeare and Shakespeare adaptation is captured by Prof. Sukanta Chaudhury who in his article "Shakespeare in India" furnishes an authentic data:

*The Indian National Library in Kolkata made a count of Shakespeare translations and adaptations in Indian languages up to 1964. Out of 670 items in all, Bengali led with 128, followed by Marathi (97), Tamil (83), Hindi (70), Kannada (66) and Telugu (62)... Who knows how many such works might be lying undetected in various languages?*

(<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Criticism/shakespearein/india4.html>. Jan. 15, 2015, pp-4).

The first Bengali appropriation of *Macbeth* is Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal Natak* which was written in 1874. Thereafter Girish Chandra Ghosh translated *Macbeth* in 1893. Approximately one hundred years after the composition of *Rudrapal Natak*, Utpal Dutta translated *Macbeth*. There may be a critical controversy regarding the nomenclature of Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal Natak*— whether it should be called adaptation or appropriation rather than translation. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* the term 'adaptation' refers to a film/movie, book or play that is based on a particular piece of work but that has been changed for a new situation" (*OALD CD ROM 8<sup>th</sup> edition*, 2010). The *Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies* defines the term 'adaptation' as "A pre-existing work, often literary or theatrical, that has been made into a film" (*ODFS 2012*, 5).

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin the term 'abrogation' refers to "the rejection by post-colonial writers [and by extension even postcolonial film makers] of a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard' English [and by extension any Western text] used by certain classes or groups...." (*PCSKC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2013, 3).

Similarly, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin the term 'appropriation' refers to 'the ways in which postcolonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture— language, forms of writings, film, theatre, even modes of thoughts and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis— that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities. (*PCSKC*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2013, 19).

*Rudrapal Natak* should better be classified as an appropriation since in the play the names of the characters, places, culture, food habits— all have been transformed into typically Indian ones, in order to express the socio-cultural identities of the Indians, especially of the

Bengalis, and any native reader who has not read the source text (ST) can find no trace of Shakespeare in the target text (TT). The setting of the play is Panchanad, i.e. the Punjab. The ‘Sindhu’, ‘Chandrabhaga’, ‘Satadru’ etc., the names of the rivers, the jungle of Ludhiana, the battle between the Hindus and the Muslims, the conspiracy of the *Mahamatra* with the foreign king, the bandit’s decision of giving up robbery, looking at the innocent face of a baby, the poetic justice by giving back the wife and children to the patriotic soldier Ranabir, *Bhoirabi* and *shobsadhak* instead of the witches, *Ramnaam* instead of ‘amen’— all are introduced in order to entertain the Indian, especially the Bengali audience of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Probably keeping them in mind the language of the drama is *chalit* instead of *sadhu*. The theme of *Macbeth* is the revolt of the commonplace people against autocracy but in *Rudrapal Natak* the theme is not so prominent. Although the play begins with the conspiracy of a Hindu with a Muslim, (in the Mughal period, as there is a reference to the Badsha of Delhi), leading to his defeat in a battle, afterwards the victory of Ranabir with the help of the Muslim Emperor of Delhi shows the necessity of communal harmony in the contemporary colonized India and that the autocrat’s or the oppressor’s identity cannot be religiously or racially determined. After the stage performance of *Rudrapal Natak* at the Great National Theatre, Girish Chandra had a discussion regarding *Rudrapal*, with Justice Gurudas Bandyopadhyay, the Judge at High Court. Justice Bandyopadhyay argued “If the plays of Shakespeare are translated into Bengali the language will be enriched but it is very difficult.” (Gangopadhyay, 118, Trans. mine). As a consequence Girish Chandra translated *Macbeth*, eight years after the formation of the Indian National Congress. The Minarva Theatre was inaugurated with this play on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1893. Although the English-employed Judge suggested him to enrich Bengali language by translating English, the purpose of Girish Chandra was a greater one. The Stage Control Act of 1876 imposed a ban on the enactment of any anti-British *swadeshi* play; but this ban was not effective in case of the *Bileti* play *Macbeth*. Unlike *Rudrapal*, Girish Chandra’s play does not show poetic justice to the chief protestor Macduff; rather the wifeless, childless and almost martyr self of Macduff is highlighted. A subtle political message has been tactfully incorporated into the play that the innocent selves of mother and child have no appeal to the English and the struggle against the English must be initiated without any hope. The target audience was the middle class Bengali rather than the masses and so Girish Chandra used the mixture of prose and poetic *sadhu bhasha*, and included song, thereby, ‘deviating’ from the ‘original’ *Macbeth*. Apart from these, the place, time and dramatis personae— all have been kept unaltered. Stage direction is very little and for stage performance it is appropriate.

With a different political purpose the postcolonial Marxist and self-declared propagandist dramatist Utpal Dutta translated *Macbeth* in 1975. In an interview regarding the translation and enactment of *Macbeth*, given to Samik Bandyopadhyay in 1989 Utpal Dutta said,

“There cannot be a better play against autocracy than *Macbeth*. There is not a play as good as *Macbeth* against Emergency. It is yet to write. But we knew that the Congress people have not much wit to realise that it is a play written against the Emergency of Srimati Indira Gandhi” Bandyopadhyay, 2006, Preface 1,2. (Trans. Mine)

This remark testifies to the fact of Dutta's Marxist and propagandist purpose. The drama does not show poetic justice in favour of Macduff; there is no extra effort to create the sympathy of the audience for Macbeth. So judged from purposive view point, the drama seems to have violated the Aristotelian formula and bears much more similarities with the purpose of Bertolt Brecht, in which the audience would not be assimilated with the dramatic characters; rather the flow of incidents will agitate the audience and break their illusion and then the audience will protest against the harsh realities. Utpal Dutta's *Macbeth* is purely a political one and so there is no song in order to entertain the audience. In this context it may be recalled that Utpal Dutta joined the Indian People's Theatre Association which was the cultural front of the Communist Party. In the age of Dutta theatre emerged as an established art. So he wrote the details stage directions for sake of future performance. The *chalit bhasha* had already become a literary language and the oral language of the commonplace people was considered the language of theatre. So Dutta used *chalit bhasha* instead of *sadhu bhasha*. Here it is notable that Utpal Dutta's language has much more similarities with Haralal Roy's than that of Roy's contemporary Girish Chandra. The language of *Rudrapal Natak* is as simple as that of the modern theatre. The language of Girish Chandra's *Macbeth* is like that of *jatrapalas*. So far as linguistic and political purpose is concerned Haralal Roy is more modern than Girish Chandra. But judged from aesthetic aspects Girish Chandra's *Macbeth* would win the first place.

In *The Statesman* dated 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2014(in the Tweet page) Shoma Chatterji discusses the question of colonial hangover in the contemporary Bengali film adaptations, which is relevant in the case of Bengali *Macbeth* also.

*Contemporary Bengali Cinema" is an umbrella term that does not necessarily reflect the Bengali identity much less Bengali as a language. Even within the distortions made in celluloid adaptations of literary works, "Bengali Cinema" cannot quite fit into the appropriate qualification. Stories and films are copyrighted from films in other language groups, including Hindi, and characters speak in a mixture of Bengali, Hindi, English, etc, in different variations.*

She also argues that Bengali is a language that reflects a people's culture and reminds us that Bengali as a mother tongue is as important as culture and remains an integral part of our lives. But circumstances forced the people to rethink of their patronising attitude towards those who cannot converse in English without thinking of their capabilities in other fields. Thus the colonial hangover sustains. Fluency in spoken English and the knowledge of English culture and literature have become the benchmark for acceptance in and by the elite society. So translation, adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare have often faced the question of colonial hangover.

But the adaptation of Shakespearean plays does not always bear witness to the fact of colonial hangover; rather the plays were utilized, with a view to acclimatizing Shakespeare in the socio-cultural ambience of Bengal. Moreover, the ever receptive multicultural place like Bengal is always ready to accept and assimilate a rich foreign culture. To make the people know the Western culture is another aim of the adaptation.

Unfortunately *Macbeth* is yet to be adapted into Bengali film. It is adapted, rather better be said appropriated in the Hindi movie *Maqbool* (2003) directed by Vishal Bharadwaj. The following tables show how the names of the characters have been indigenized in the Bengali adaptation and the film. Although the film is based on William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* it locates the incidents in the contemporary Mumbai underworld, which is not a 'faithful' representation of an actual incident but very easily could be one. The protagonist Maqbool is the chief assistant to the underworld don Jahangir Khan known as Abba Ji. Nimmi, Abbaji's wife who has an illicit connection with Maqbool seldom resembles Lady Macbeth except in the case of her craziness as a consequence of her guilty feelings of slaying the sleeping man who was her own husband. The transformed activities of the three witches are situated in the contemporary Mumbai and played by the three corrupt policemen cum astrologers who are regularly bribed by Abbaji but who predict Maqbool's "ascension of the throne" of the underworld by superseding Abbaji. The roles of Macduff and Fleance are played by Riyaz Boti and Guddu respectively. The death of Abbaji, the tragic end of Maqbool and Nimmi— serve the poetic justice. Bharadwaj knew it quite well that a seventeenth century *Bileti* drama with the theme of king's battles, role of the witches and fight with swords would not have any appeal to the twentieth century Bollywood audience; and so it must undergo the process of mutation. As a result by way of abrogation Bharadwaj deviates from the path of faithful adaptation and he interpolates and extrapolates wherever he found it necessary and so the film justifies the remark of Alain Resnais quoted by Robert Stam in his edited book *Literature and Film* that "adapting a novel without changing it is like reheating a meal." (Stam, 2005,16). So the question of fidelity does not arise here because Bharadwaj has skillfully 'domesticated' the ST as the table shows.

#### Indigenization of *Macbeth*

Drama	<i>Rudrapal</i> (1874)	<i>Macbeth</i> (1993?)	<i>Macbeth</i> (1975/2006)
Author	Haralal Roy	Girish Chandra Ghosh	Utpal Dutta
Names of characters	Indian	Unchanged	Unchanged
Wars between	Hindu-Muslim	Unchanged	Unchanged
Place	Panchanad (Punjab)	Unchanged	Unchanged
Songs	No	Yes	No
Purpose	Hindu-Muslim fraternity	Unchanged	Opposing Emergency Of Indira Gandhi

Actor/Actress	Character in the Film	Character in the ST
Irfan Khan	Miyan Maqbool	Macbeth
Tabu	Nimmi	Lady Macbeth
Pankaj Kapoor	Jahangir Khan (Abbaji)	Duncan, King of Scotland
Om Puri	Inspector Pundit	Witch
Nasiruddin Shah	Inspector Purohit	Witch
Piyush Mishra	Kaka	Banquo
Ankur Vikal	Riyaz Boti	Macduff
Ajay Gehi	Guddu	Fleance
Masumeh Makhija	Sameera, Abbaji's	Malcolm

	daughter	
ShammiNarang	Mr. Bhosle	
PubaliSanyal	Riyaz Boti's wife	Lady Macduff
Master Raj	Riyaz Boti's son	Macduff's son
Gyanchand Rikki	Mughal	Macdonwald
Manav Kaushik	Asif	Cawdor
Vinod Nahardih	Chinna	

The Bengali *Macbeth* as well as the Hindi film adaptation testifies to the fact that the tradition of Bengali drama is not the tradition of a local or state tradition; rather it is a part of a global tradition and in question of modernity it has established coordination with the dramatic literature in general. It also proves that the intention of intercultural harmony that influenced the dramatists to translate and Indianize *Macbeth* was at least fulfilled.

The last words regarding translation, adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare in Bengal were uttered by Tagore in his sonnet on Shakespeare in which he argued that

“When by the far-away sea your fiery disc appeared from behind the unseen, O Poet, O Sun.  
England’s horizon felt you near her breast, and took you to be her own”

but

“after the end of centuries the palm groves by the Indian sea raise their tremulous branches to the sky murmuring your praise”  
(<https://books.google.co.in/books?id=771f9>. Pp. 599).

Thus Shakespeare in course of long time surpasses all the spatiotemporal barriers. So translation, adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare in Bengal cannot be considered a colonial hangover, as very often considered; rather it is the postcolonial attempt to graft Shakespeare into the native culture and, thereby, contemporize and universalize the Bard by reinterpreting him in the successive ages.

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