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Macbeth in Nineteenth-Century Bengal: A Case of Conflicted Indigenization [1]

Abstract: Adaptation, a complex bilingual and bicultural process, is further problematised in a colonial scenario inflected by burgeoning nationalism and imperialist counter-oppression. Nagendranath Bose's *Karnabir* (1884/85), the second extant Bengali translation of *Macbeth* was written after the First War of Indian Independence in 1857 and its aftermath – the formation of predominantly upper and middle class nationalist organisations that spearheaded the freedom movement. To curb anti-colonial activities in the cultural sphere, the British introduced repressive measures like the *Theatre Censorship Act* and the *Vernacular Press Act*. Bengal experienced a revival of Hinduism paradoxically augmented by the nationalist ethos and the divisive tactics of British rule that fostered communalism. This article investigates the contingencies and implications of domesticating and othering *Macbeth* at this juncture and the collaborative/oppositional strategies of the vernacular text vis-à-vis colonial discourse. The generic problems of negotiating tragedy in a literary tradition marked by its absence are compounded by the socio-linguistic limitations of a Sanskritised adaptation. The conflicted nature of the cultural indigenisation evidenced in *Karnabir* is explored with special focus on the nature of generic, linguistic and religious acculturation, issues of nomenclature and epistemology, as well as the political and ideological negotiations that the target text engages in with the source text and the intended audience.

Keywords: *Macbeth*, Nagendranath Bose, colonial Bengal, adaptation, literary and linguistic communalism

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Adaptation, a complex bilingual and bicultural process, is further problematised in a colonial scenario particularly inflected by burgeoning nationalism and imperialist counter-oppression. Nagendranath Bose's *Karnabir* (1884/85), the second extant Bengali adaptation of *Macbeth* was written after the First War of Indian Independence in 1857.[2] In its wake came the formation of predominantly upper and middle class nationalist organizations that spearheaded the freedom movement. To curb anti-colonial activities in the cultural sphere, the British introduced repressive measures like the *Theatre Censorship Act* (1876) and the *Vernacular Press Act* (1878). Bengal experienced a revival of Hinduism paradoxically augmented by the nationalist ethos and the divisive tactics of British rule that fostered communalism.[3] This article proposes to investigate the contingencies and implications of domesticating and othering *Macbeth* at this juncture and the collaborative/ oppositional strategies of the vernacular text vis-à-vis colonial discourse. The generic problems of negotiating tragedy in a literary tradition marked by its absence are compounded by the socio-linguistic limitations of a Sanskritised adaptation. The latter testifies the translator's desire to coalesce the nationalist and the communal agenda in his project. The conflicted nature of the cultural indigenization in *Karnabir* is evidenced particularly in the nature of generic, linguistic and religious acculturation, issues of nomenclature and epistemology, as well as the political and ideological negotiations that the target text engages in with the source text and the intended audience.

Urban Bengali Theatre

The urban Bengali theatre of the nineteenth century had three converging legacies – the academic foregrounding of Shakespearean texts, the

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[2] Dubbed as 'Sepoy Mutiny' by contemporary British historians (Kaye 1888-89; Malleson 2006), the Great Uprising brought together, for the first time in Indian history, the 'dispossessed and discontented Rajas [kings] and Ranis [queens], zamindars [landlords] and tenants, artisans and workers, the Muslim priests and intelligentsia and the Hindu Pandits [upper caste religious spokespersons]'who joined forces with the lower caste sepoys and peasantry to fight indiscriminate imperialist exploitation and 'redress their grievances' (Khaldun 23-24).

[3] To cite a few examples, the Hindus paid 10% of their immovable property as punitive fine whereas the Muslims had to pay 35%. The Hindus were allowed to return to Delhi within months of its recapture by the British in September 1857 but the Muslims continued to wait till 1859. At least 24 Muslim rulers and princes were hanged as opposed to one among the Hindus. As early as 1837, Persian was replaced by English as the official language, which undermined irrevocably the prestige of Islamic culture and learning. In Bengal, the perceived opinion was that a majority of illiterate Muslim peasants were led by a handful of upper class members to a corporate rejection of secular education as it did not accommodate instructions on Muslim law, literature, logic, rhetoric and philosophy, nor the study of *Hadis, Tafsirs* and the *Amma Separa*, the thirtieth chapter of the Koran containing the *Book of Common Prayer* that were essential markers of a true Muslim (Sinha 54-55).

European style theatres set up by the British in Calcutta for their own recreation, and the indigenous amateur attempts by the "enlightened" *bhadraloks* to modernise the Bengali stage.

Shakespeare was an integral part of the English curriculum since its inception, [4] even before Macaulay's *Minute* (1835) emphasised the bard's inclusion, arguing that it would inculcate an indelible belief in the superiority of the *masters*' literature and by extension of all things British. Shakespeare's central location in the colonial project was further privileged by nominating the most reputed teacher of an establishment like David Lester Richardson and Derozio of Hindu College to teach his works, and Shakespeare came to be regarded as the most prestigious assignment. *Macbeth*, a particular favourite of Richardson, was included in the Shakespeare collection he edited at the behest of the Higher Education Council in 1840 for the graduate course, and remains a permanent fixture of most syllabi even today.

The success of the imperialist strategy is instanced in the energy and time expended by the newly educated gentry in hosting recitals and performances of select Shakespearean scenes. From 1827 onwards, the students of Hindu College regularly presented excerpts from various Shakespearean plays. Derozio was instrumental in sustaining this enthusiasm as witnessed by the fact that on 18 February 1829, recitations from *2 Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Cymbeline* were executed primarily by his students (Lal and Chaudhuri 24-31). Other contemporary institutions that upheld this tradition were the Oriental Seminary, Metropolitan Academy, St. Xavier's College and David Hare Academy. The majority of these amateur presentations were hosted in the private theatres of affluent Bengalis and catered to an "enlightened" coterie audience. Mimicry was a crucial evaluating parameter for these performances: the supporters of the new theatre movement predicated excellence on the closeness of imitation while the orthodox detractors condemned it on the very same premise, designating such performances as mindless aping tantamount to a betrayal of native heritage.[5]

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[4] Records designate Free School Society established in 1789 as one of the earliest educational institutions meant exclusively for English children. Later, such schools extended their facilities to native students as well. Hindu College, established on 20 January 1817, was the first higher education institution in India to officially incorporate Shakespeare in its syllabus (Ahmed 8-13).

[5] *The Calcutta Gazette* (15 March 1830) lauded the performance of scenes from *Julius Caesar* on 13 March 1830 at the annual function of School Society as exhibiting 'a correctness of enunciation, energy of manner and gracefulness of deportment which would have done credit to *any school in England*' (qtd Lal and Chaudhuri 2001: 25; emphasis ours). On the other hand, an anonymous letter published in *Samachar Darpan*, on 7 January 1832 ridiculed the opening of the Hindu Theatre as a whim of the idle rich who encroach upon the prerogative of the vulgar sorts and appoint English tutors for enunciation and costume to fashion a clownish replication of the masters' craft (B. Bandyopadhyay 1962-63: 11-12).

Such Shakespearean negotiations are not surprising considering the foreign origins of modern Bengali theatre. Within a quarter century of their arrival (1757), the East India Company officials set up a number of European style playhouses in Kolkata where local European actors performed English plays for an exclusively white audience. The foremost among them were the Calcutta, Athenaeum, Chowringhee and Sans Souci theatres. These theatres flourished between 1780 and 1849 by which time Bengali theatre, modelled on them, had come of age. They brought in overseas professionals to assist home productions, introduced women actors, the concept of the proscenium stage, appropriate scenery, lighting, stage props, and costumes, and staged thirty two full-fledged Shakespearean productions (Lal and Chaudhuri 15-23). Gradually the unmixed white audience started accommodating a smattering of the native elite, some of whom spearheaded the indigenous theatre movement.

Given these antecedents, it is understandable that the first full-fledged modern Bengali playhouse was constructed along the lines of Kolkata British theatres with the sole purpose of staging English plays. A committee, headed by Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore, founded the Hindu Theatre which opened on 28 December 1831 with performances of Shakespeare and Bhavabhuti[6] in English translation (B. Bandyopadhyay 11). Although short lived, this effort is indicative of the Westernised Bengali's yearning for a new kind of sophisticated drama. Rajendranath Mitra, writing about the times, iterates that lowly entertainments like *jatra*, *kabi* and *kheur* could no longer please the palate of refined gentlemen and that it was heartening to see *affluent, educated and civilised* men setting up a more tasteful modern theatre that would ultimately oust such obscene, coarse and common amusements (B. Bandyopadhyay 7). The demarcation between high and low culture with reference to new and old performing arts not only fostered a class divide and disjuncted urban from rural entertainment, but also aimed at the erasure of traditional forms, which fortunately survived the onslaught.

Nineteenth-Century Shakespearean Negotiations: *Macbeth*

The early native emulators of Shakespearean drama, therefore, were directing their efforts at a metropolitan theatre exclusive to the English educated Hindu upper and middle class. In the intervening forty odd years between Prasanna Kumar Tagore's Hindu Theatre and Nagendranath Bose's adaptation of *Macbeth*, *Karnabir* (written 1884/85), the Bengali stage had acquired enough maturity and independence to imitate and critique the colonial masters and also rediscover its traditional roots through historical and mythical drama. Although

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[6] Bhavabhuti, a seventh century Sanskrit dramatist, wrote plays like *Uttar Ramacharita*, *Malati-Madhava* and *Mahaviracharita*.

Shakespeare had a profound impact on the contemporary dramatists – Madhusudan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra and Dwijendralal Roy[7] – productions of Shakespeare, translated or adapted, only began in 1870 with a private performance of *Prabhabati* (*The Merchant of Venice*) at the Beniatola residence of Kartikchandra Bhattacharya (Lal and Chaudhuri 96). There is no record of Bose's *Karnabir* ever having been performed. That there were more adaptations than translations in the initial stages testifies an awareness of the distinctive foreign-ness of the plays and the need for indigenisation in order to conform to the cultural and aesthetic parameters of the Bengali theatre which had begun to establish its own identity.

The raison d'être for shying away from Shakespeare were both linguistic and generic. The exuberance of Shakespearean language replete with verbal nuances, literary allusions, and the sheer abundance of figures of speech, idiomatic phrases and colloquialisms make inter-lingual translation seemingly impossible especially where the target language is primarily rhythmical, melodious and un-accented. Bengali syntax is quite unlike English in its subject-verb arrangement and the construction of interrogatives and imperatives. For instance, sentences generally end with verbs while interrogatives frequently omit the subject altogether. Ajit Kumar Ghosh suggests incorporating Sanskrit words abounding in conjunct consonants to infuse a masculine effect but such words do not cohabit naturally with spoken Bengali (38). Blank verse, intrinsic to Shakespearean plays, was alien to Bengali literature until Michael Madhusudan Dutt invented the *amitrakshar chanda* [unrhymed verse] for alienation effect in his poetic drama, *Meghnadbadh*, but its lofty rhetoric is unsuitable for dialogues.

Sanskrit aesthetics, to which Bengali literature written by Hindus traditionally adhered, discourage unhappy endings (and therefore tragedy) on philosophic grounds.[8] The Hindu theory of *karma* and rebirth, premised on the

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[7] Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), a pioneer of modern Bengali literature, who incorporated western forms and themes in his writings, was an iconoclastic, versatile genius equally adept at writing plays, farces, novels and poems. Dwijendralal Ray (1863-1913), a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society and a British civil servant, was known for his patriotic plays and songs, and Hindu devotional lyrics. For further details, see <http://calcuttaglobalchat.net/calcuttablog/dwijendragiti/>.

[8] Judhistir Gope dismisses sociologist Max Weber and philologist E. Windish's contention that Sanskrit drama was influenced by Greek drama citing this very reason and points out that with the exception of Vas's *Urubhanga* and *Karnavar* tragedies are rare in Sanskrit literature (2000: 129-42). Sukhendu Gangopadhyay reiterates this observation citing Bhavabhuti's play *Uttar Ramcharit*, which deviates significantly from its source by uniting Ram and Sita whereas in Valmiki's epic, *Ramayana*, they are permanently separated (1989: 50-51). Bengali theatre carried this legacy forward as instanced in Girishchandra Ghosh's *Avimanyubadh*: its opening performance on 26 November 1881 at the National Theatre concluded with the death of the hero as in Vyas's epic *Mahabharata*, but failed to draw the audience forcing Ghosh to resurrect the hero and accommodate a scene of conjugal bliss in subsequent productions (Chowdhury 1959-60: 115-16).

belief that the sufferings of present life are just punishments for misdeeds in previous life, which in turn would be adequately compensated for in afterlife, is incompatible with the tragic vision preoccupied with the "here and now" (Choudhury 78). Tragic denouement evoking pity and terror prioritises human potential, keeping providential design at bay; but unquestioning faith in life's *grand design* and continuity beyond death is not conducive to the sense of waste endemic to the fall of the tragic hero. In fact, a report on the first performance of *Rudrapal*, the earliest extant adaptation of *Macbeth* (1874), in *Indian Daily News* (4 November 1873) brands it as an "English *romance*" (1873: 3; emphasis ours), signalling an attempt at re-categorising the play under a more familiar label to mitigate its generic alien-ness.

One reason for *Macbeth*'s popularity during this early phase is that it is the only one among the "four great tragedies" which metes out adequate retribution for evil deeds. In the nineteenth century, Kali Prasanna Ghosh extolled the ethical and moral aspects of the tale and labelled Shakespeare a conscientious preacher apportioning just punishment for the villain (Choudhury 80). A contrasting view is forwarded in 1895 by Purna Chandra Bose's delineation of tragedy as a *crude but faithful manifestation of the savage, aggressive nature of the Europeans* and *Macbeth* as a graphic illustration of this trait (qtd Ahmed 1988: 203). The first response exemplifies the reverential adulation that Macaulay anticipated in his *Minute*, while the second is a more complex instance of ideologically conscious appropriation for indigenous purposes: authored by the greatest English writer, *Macbeth* provides authentic proof of the habitual brutality of the British race for the colonised people.

Adaptation, more than translation, necessitates the homogenisation of the source text in a manner that neutralises foreign-ness while fostering an interest in the narrative. This exercise proves particularly problematic in a context foregrounding nascent nationalism and colonial repression, more so when the source text is Shakespeare, the "ultimate" literary production of the master race. So the act of adapting Shakespeare into Bengali is not merely a literary exercise but a political engagement that simultaneously upholds and challenges the indigenous social codes. It requires an iconoclastic cross-cultural approach that extends the margins of inherited tradition and homogenises alien components with the purpose of synchronising two very dissimilar socio-cultural systems bound in a hierarchic, exploitative relationship. It is a *vertical and horizontal* engagement with the source text to subvert and/ or sustain the hierarchy.

Macbeth lends itself amenably to such negotiations. The morally satisfying ending would be apposite in the depressing aftermath of the Great Uprising (1857). Accursed time finally redeemed through the restoration of the legitimate line of Duncan holds out an optimistic hope for a defeated populace who had recently attempted a similar restitution by resurrecting the Mughal heir,

Bahadur Shah of Delhi, as the emperor of "free India." *Macbeth* also exemplifies the solitary alienation of a frustrated overreacher consumed by his megalomania and the spiritual crisis between desire and conscience, which could be read as a providential indicator of the inevitable self-destruction of the encroacher: a wishful but predictable fantasy of the colonised psyche. Given Bengal's proclivity towards pro-democratic movements both before and after India's independence, *Macbeth* proves a fertile ground for experimenting with depictions of a despotic regime and its disastrous consequences. Thus mainstream orthodox readings that would be dismissed as conventional today were radicalised by the late nineteenth century colonial context.

Bose's *Karnabir*: Indigenised Conflict/ Conflicted Indigenisation

Nagendranath Bose was a pioneering editor who completed the compilation of Rangalal Mukhopadhyay's *Bishwakosh* (*Encyclopaedia*) and published Jadunath Sarbahdikari's riveting first hand account of the 1857 uprising in Benaras, naming it *Tirthabhraman* (*Pilgrimage*), which denotes his attitude towards the Great Uprising. He is said to have assisted in developing the story line of *Hariraj* (1896), Nagendranath Chaudhuri's popular adaptation of *Hamlet*. His independent forays into the theatre include *Karnabir*, a hundred and seventy-six page, five act adaptation of *Macbeth* in prose and poetry, and *Dharmavijay ba Shankacharya* (*The Victory of Religion or Shankacharya*) (1889-90) based on the life of an eighth century Hindu guru and philosopher from Kerela (Sen Vol. III, 1995: 222, 51, 386). There is no extant record of any of these plays being staged. As the titles suggest, Bose was infused with nationalist sentiments with a predominantly Hindu orientation. This preoccupation impacted his search for cultural equivalents to give his adaptation "a local habitation and a name" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.17) and transcreate the tragedy of self-destructive ambition into a fictional-historical narrative of national calamity under tyrannical foreign yoke. In many ways, *Karnabir* inhabits the borderline between the original and the derivative like the burgeoning nationalist organisations which grafted enlightened European ideas of freedom and democracy over nationalist aspirations.

The geo-political re-situating of action in the text reveals significant efforts at domestic contextualisation. It involves a shift in communities as well. The geographical equivalents of Norway and Scotland are respectively, Nisagarh, a fictional site, and Jaipur, a powerful Hindu kingdom in Rajasthan, a state south of Delhi. The battle between Norway and Scotland is converted into a combat between *Jabanraj* (a Muslim king) and *Jaipurraj* (a Hindu Rajput ruler), adding a religious angle to the political conflict. Although medieval Indian history provides several instances of battles between the Hindu Rajputs of Rajasthan and the Muslim Sultanate of Delhi, there is a definite communal bias

in the nomenclature as *Jaban*, a derogatory epithet used by the Hindus to designate "pagan ungodly Muslims," would automatically classify *Jabanraj*/ Norway as the wrongful aggressor. Such identification parallels the post-1857 British categorisation of the Indian adherents of Islam as "rascally Muslims" (Strachey 380)[9] and feeds the colonial regime's divisive tactics by fostering a self-emaciating internal otherisation. Dunsinane hills become the Araballi ranch, leading to confusing geopolitical signifiers, but Bose is less concerned with historical or geographical accuracy than with contextualising the conflict from a Hindu perspective.[10]

The entire action of the play being located outside Bengal is an instance of eminently acceptable domestic alienation as the Bengalis are not traditionally considered warlike nor is their past dotted with glorious battles. The available annals of the Hindu dynasties of Bengal are not overly scarred with evidences of treachery and regicide. So the gory mayhem of *Macbeth*, ill-suited to the Bengali locale, is transposed to the martial community of Rajasthan. This transference ignores the one single historical equivalent in Bengal's recent past which could have accommodated the story of *Macbeth* with all its shades of violence, intrigue and betrayal. The British colonial enterprise in India began with Robert Clive's decisive victory over the young, charismatic Muslim ruler of Murshidabad, Nawab Siraj-ud-daullah, at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The Nawab and his loyal aide Mir Madan (Hindu) would have won but for the machinations of his trusted general, Mir Jafar (Muslim), and treasurer, Jagat Seth (Hindu), who assisted the British for their own vested interests. Relocation along these lines would have *Duncan-ised* a Muslim ruler and hinted at a nationalist discourse overriding the communal divide by aligning the shadowy British presence with the witches. However, such conceptual appropriation was unlikely given the government's censorship of the theatres and the Hindu orientation of the adaptation.[11]

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[9] Strachey further designates them as inherently bigoted, treacherous, anti-progressive and as prime instigators of the rebellion (380).

[10] The Araballi range is located south-west of Jaipur, not between Jaipur and Delhi. This is not problematic as Nisagarh, being a fictional state, can be situated anywhere south of Araballi although it cannot be then identified with Delhi located north of Jaipur. Conversely, if Nisagarh is envisaged as the Muslim kingdom of Bijapur, south of Araballi, then there are no instances of a direct battle between the Bijapur Sultanate and the Hindu Rajputs.

[11] The valorisation of Siraj-ud-daullah as a nationalist figure began with Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in the early twentieth century as did tales of heroic opposition to foreign invasion by the Marathas, Sikhs and Rajputs. Tagore's collection of narrative poems, *Katha o Kahini* (*Tales and Stories*) (1900), and Abanindranth Tagore's (1871-1951) *Rajkahini* (*Tales of Kings*) (1909; 1931) – fanciful, quasi-historical tales of Rajput princes – are the most famous instances. They fed the Indian independence movement's growing need for indigenous heroes of resistance with one important distinction: Siraj was the sole Mohamedan figure, the rest

Bose's christenisinging of the major dramatis personae foregrounds moral signifiers with interesting ramifications. Bijoy (victory), Sudhi (good), Debi (goddess), Kesari (hero) and Ananda (happiness) invoke their respective counterparts – Banquo, Macduff, Malcolm, Donalbain and Duncan – fairly loosely, though Singha (lion), a common appellation in Bengali literature for the Rajputs to indicate their brave, warrior-like orientation, is appended to all dramatis personae in the "right." The supporting cast is indigenised without particular reference to their attributes with names like Shaktidhar (Lennox), Mrityunjoy (Cathness), Nayanpal (Angus) etc., meaning "the powerful," "the immortal" and "the nurturer of eyes" respectively. Malina, the name allotted to Lady Macbeth, with implications of both "dirty" and "worn," underscores the author's preference for moral signifiers. Bose's attempt to domesticate the source text by allocating mythological, historical or semi-historic names is not entirely successful. For example, Birbal (Menteth) and Padmini (Lady Macduff) are both misnomers. Birbal, a principal courtier of Akbar,[12] is celebrated for his wit and cleverness, attributes not reflected in Menteth while Lady Macduff is no match for Padmini, the legendary queen of a medieval Rajput king of Chittor who preferred self-immolation to dishonour in the hands of Alauddin Khilji, the emperor of Delhi.

The choice of "Karnabir" for Macbeth is simultaneously apt and problematic and akin to modern readings of the protagonist as a complex anti-hero. "Bir" meaning "brave" is suffixed to Karna, the name of a famous warrior-king in the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*, who fights alongside the Kauravas against his own brothers, the Pandavas. Being illegitimate, he had been disowned by his mother Kunti at birth and later befriended by Duryodhan, the leader of the Kauravas. He learns of his true origins on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra when Kunti comes to plead for the safety of her legitimate offspring. Deeply hurt, Karna refuses to betray his friend and switch sides as urged but promises not to kill any of his brothers thus living up to the epithet of *data* (generous) ascribed to him for his legendary munificence. Unable to defeat him in a straight forward encounter, Arjun (the third Pandava) kills him unfairly with the assistance of Lord Krishna. Although Macbeth is tricked to his doom by the witches and his heroic courage and fighting skills align him with Karna, his "illegitimate" aspiration of becoming king can only be partially equated with Karna's "illegitimate" birth as the latter is scrupulously faithful to his

were 'Indians' (a homogenous category that excluded the Islamic people) pitted against the brutal might of the Muslim invaders or rulers.

[12] Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1542-1605), or Akbar the Great, the third Mughal ruler, was a contemporary of Elizabeth I and equally illustrious. Though a practising Mohammedan, he was noted for his religious tolerance: several of his courtiers and generals like Birbal and Mansingh were Hindus. He also introduced a new religion, *Din Ilahi*, which incorporated Hindu and Islamic components in equal measure.

benefactor. Moreover, Karna is far more noble and large-hearted than Macbeth and is more sinned against than sinning. Both, however, succumb to a prophetic death. Bose's renaming thus transmits the complex nuances of the protagonist's character and authorises the exploration of interesting parallels beyond the text.

The foreignness of the play is most effectively neutralised by replacing the witches with *bhairabi*s, which also completes the total Hinduisation of the target text. The *bhairabi*s are not supernatural beings but female devotees of Lord Siva and his consort, Goddess Kali. Proficient in black magic, and vested with occult powers to raise the spirits, they are believed to be as unpredictable, vengeful and malevolent as the witches though not invariably so. One important distinction is that they are not devil worshippers but legitimate and revered practitioners of the *tantrik* cult.[13] Hecate becomes *Kalbhairabi*, i.e., "the chief *bhairabi*"; and the *bhairabi*s engage in various cabalistic rituals that intensify the bleak, sombre, foreboding atmosphere.

Bose endeavours to replicate the aura of uncanny terror and eerie enchantment through the grotesque rituals and bizarre incantations and invocations of the *bhairabi*s. Yet the mystery and amazement of the original is lacking partly because of the different religious contexts. *Macbeth* opens with three apparitions amidst calamitous weather on a barren heath exchanging cryptic, enigmatic sentences and flitting away with a grim ironic comment on the inter-changeability of "foul" and "fair" (1.1.11-12). [14] The play is firmly embedded within a Christian matrix that denounces witches and black magic as unequivocal manifestations of evil. The Hindu religion in contrast, *accommodates* Goddess Kali and the associated *tantric* cult within its seamless bounds thereby legitimising the obscure yet potent occult practices closely paralleling black magic. Although few actively embrace the *tantric* cult because of the rigours and dangers involved, the average Hindu is not compelled to castigate it as unmitigated evil. So the element of demonic horror and aversion suggested in the original is missing.

Bose's consistent application of Hindu myths extends beyond nomenclature to allusions and parallels. The Sergeant who rescues Malcolm from captivity (1.2.3-5) is likened to Bhima, the most powerful and fearless of the five Pandavas in *Mahabharata*. Bose maintains the same figure of speech but amplifies Malcolm's simple comparison "like a good and hardy soldier" (1.2.4) to imbue the minor character with mythological attributes, "like the indomitable, awesome hero, Bhimsen."[15] The parallel is more in keeping with the spirit of the

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[13] The *tantrik* cult is an esoteric, disturbingly powerful but legitimate branch of Hinduism. It is also a significant component of certain Buddhist sects.

[14] All citations of *Macbeth* are from the Arden edition by Kenneth Muir.

[15] Phonetic transcription: '*durdam bhīṣan bīr Bhimsen sama*.' Bhimsen, fabled for his strength and bravery, was the only Pandava to protest against the Kaurava's public molestation of Draupadi, the

original simile than an exact transliteration. Similarly, Macbeth hacking his way through the ranks of the rebels to reach their commander (1.2.19-20) is compared to Arjun, the third Pandava, a marksman beyond compare instrumental in winning the battle of Kurukshetra: "he continued to fight as gallantly as Arjun/ Until he confronted the infidel general." [16] By likening Macbeth's prowess to that of Arjun, Bose not only glorifies him but also suggests his crucial role in Scotland's victory against the Norwegians. The rich image of "Valour's minion" (1.2.19) is not reproduced but is abundantly compensated for by its substitution with "Arjun" for an audience who require no further elaboration. Again, young Siward, killed in an unequal duel by Macbeth (5.7.5-11), continues the epic parallel with a reference to Abhimanyu: "like Abhimanyu, the efflorescence of courage and bravery." [17] The correspondence is inexact as Abhimanyu, the adolescent son of Subhadra and Arjun, was collectively slaughtered in an unfair encounter by the Kaurava generals who hemmed him in contemptuously tossing aside his call for individual combat, but the impression of savage butchery is replicated in both instances. Bose's stratagem of providing cultural equivalents instead of literal translation proves a deviously effective homogenising policy that extends the associative parallels beyond the prescriptive limits of correct representation but *within an overarching Hindu framework.*

This is reiterated in the second instance cited above where *mlechcha*, a derogatory term akin to *jaban* implying "a heathen unclean Muslim" elides the territorial and religious subtexts, providing a communally charged moral reading of the encounter. The persistent alignment of Duncan's party with the Pandavas – the underdogs in the battle of Kurukshetra fighting for justice and their rights – also introduces a crusader element aimed at intensifying the native reader's horror vis-à-vis Karnabir's subsequent betrayal. Shakespeare's Macbeth metamorphoses into "an untitled tyrant bloody-scepter'd" (4.3.104) from "Bellona's bridegroom" (1.2.55); Karnabir becomes all this and more – his makeover entails the additional transformation of a god-fearing Hindu into an ungodly Muslim conforming the stereotype of the infidel as an unrepentant repository of such vices.

Anticipating perhaps, the insurmountable linguistic problems that a direct encounter would provoke, Bose frequently devises means to circumvent close literal transposition and is content to prioritise indigenisation over an alienating accuracy. His preference for acculturation through mythological allusions acknowledges by default the complexities of negotiating the fine line between mimicry and familiarisation and the wide gulf between the semantic,

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wife of the five Pandavas, after she had been pawned in a game of dice by their eldest brother, Yudhistir.

[16] Phonetic transcription: '*yujhite lāgilā Arjun samān/ yatakṣan nā pāila mleccha senānire.*'

[17] Phonetic transcription: '*Abhimanyu sama sei birendra śobhan.*'

stylistic and figurative components of the two languages. Yet he does establish a semblance of equilibrium between the poetic substance of *Macbeth* and *Karnabir.* Following fairly closely the prose-verse division of the original (Chakraborty 35-40), Bose experiments with linguistic devices like figures of speech to lend a local colour. His onomatopoeic version of "In thunder, lighting, or in rain?" and the ensuing "hurly-burly" (1.1.2-3) as "*kad kadākad – jhimik jhimik padbe yakhan jhamjhame*" and "*hudum hudum jhanāt jhanāt*," though not literal translations, succeed in conveying the violent, chaotic topsy-turvydom ushered in by the witches. Bose's deployment of native historiography and mythology to relocate incidents and situations in a familiar context and linguistic devices like onomatopoeia to re-produce an enigmatic effect found several emulators.[18] Yet Shafi Ahmed labels Bose's language as "austere" probably due to the excessive use of Sanskritised Bengali that hinders the flow of colloquial speeches and tends to make the prose passages stilted and artificial (152).

Bose's signal contribution lies in the innovative choice of metre and form for the verse passages. The balanced admixture of *tripadi payar* and *amitrakshar chanda* is symptomatic of the hybridisation inevitable in a colonial scenario. *Payar* is a four line unit of two couplets with a caesura after every twenty eight syllables and a rhyme scheme of *abcb*, i.e., rhyming consecutive couplets. It is one of the most assimilative and ubiquitous verse forms in Bengali that continuously absorbs new elements and re-invents itself while retaining its basic format. *Tripadi payar* is a specific variation of same formula that splits the couplet into three units [*pad*] in a 2:1 ratio, each of which can be uttered normally without a pause. Traditionally used for extended descriptions of incidents and situations it adequately projects the ups and downs of the battle recounted by the Sergeant albeit eliminating several details (1.2.25-33):

> *ei hinduder jay   ei mleccha parājay*
> *   ei ei ei hala – kothā ude gyāla.*
> *ābār yaban rāj   bājāiyā raṇasāj*
> *   laiyā natun senā ākramite ela.*
> [Now the Hindus are on the verge of victory and the heathens about to be vanquished/ There, there! It is imminent, but alas, the opportunity is swept away!/ Again the infidel [Muslim] ruler, with jangling armour/ And a new army, makes a fresh assault.]

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[18] Thespian Girishchandra Ghose's 1892 translation amplifies the witches' conversation through a profusion of alliterative and onomatopoeic sounds that echo Bose: '*yakhan jharbe meghā jhupur jhupur/ cak cakācak hānbe cikur/ kad kadākad kadāt kadāt/ dākbe jakhan jhanjhane?*' (1900-1901). Munindranath Dutta emulates Bose's rhyming couplet to produce a close parallel of 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' (1.1.10): '*bhāla moder manda, manda moder bhāla*' (1919).

But the regular cadence of the rhyming four-liner is ill-suited to portray the magnitude of subterranean horror implicit in the Messenger's terse report of the approaching Birnam woods (5.5.33-35),

> *praharī haiya   chinu dñādāiyā*
> *   yemati acal śire*
> *kari nirīkṣaṇ   netra koṇāban*
> *   āsiche kramaśa sare*
> [As I was standing guard/ With steadfast attention,/ My eyes noticed the Kona forest [Birnam woods]/ Gradually advancing towards us.]

Elsewhere too, Bose's frequent use of *tripadi payar* to impart brisk, even chilling information, like Macbeth's "She should have died hereafter" (5.5.17), undermines the dramatic effect.

On the other hand, *amitrakshar chanda*, a radical take-off on the *payar* inspired by Shakespearean blank verse, was conceived by Madhusudan Dutt for his self-styled "epicling" *Meghnadbadh* (*The Slaying of Meghnad*) (1861) based on Valmiki's *Ramayana* but modelled on European classics.[19] It comprises twelve-syllabled lines and a movable caesura that occurs at the end of a thought unit, as in blank verse, enabling a prolonged, unhindered flow of rhythm and expression. Essentially a metropolitan Europeanised form, it was devised to facilitate Dutt's declared project of "making a regular Iliad of the death of Meghnad" by engrafting "the exquisite graces of the Greek mythology on our own" without undermining the "*Hindu character* of the poem" (1860; cited in Gupta ed. 551, emphasis ours).[20] *Meghnadbadh* illustrates the coming of age of urban Bengali literature which consciously appropriated and deployed occidental influences to simultaneously modernise and uphold its *Hindu character*. The latter is further ensured by the profusion of chaste Sanskrit and Sanskritised Bengali in the text.[21] There is little evidence of *amitrakshar chanda* in the works of Bengali Muslims, which reinforces the paradox of utilising *heathen* components to *purify* one's own literature and distance it from unholy contamination of the Islamic variety. Bose's adoption of *amitrakshar chanda* and *tatsam* vocabulary (i.e., words derived from Sanskrit) to render soliloquies

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[19] Though less ambitious in scope, *Meghnadbadh* may be compared to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as a similar attempt to re-read the classics. However, Dutt's work is hailed as ground-breaking as it contemporises *amitrakshar chanda* to communicate the marginalised outlook of the designated villains of *Ramayana* – the *asuras* – through their heir apparent Meghnad. It ushers a modernist perspective in both form and content and would parallel a *Paradise Lost* narrated entirely from Satan's viewpoint.

[20] Letter to Rajnarayan Bose 14 July 1860; Undated letter no. 60 to Rajnarayan Bose 1860.

[21] To maintain the lexical purity of his work, Dutt coined 800 new Sanskrit based words and enriched the Bengali vocabulary introducing verb-nouns and gerunds in the process.

like "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" (5.5.19-28), adeptly transports the sombre pathos of the lines:

> *āji nahe kāli kimbā duidin par,*
> *nirdişta samayāpekşī mānabnicay*
> *bişam mṛtyur pathe habe agrasar*
> *yabe yabe nibhe yābe, kşanik bartikā*
> *e jīban bicañcal pratibimba prāy*
> *ran□gabhūme hatabhāgya nater matan*
> *ei dambha, krodh, - punaha nāhi śonā yāy*
> *ei bṛthā arthahīn kalpanā nicay*
> *mūrkher mukhei śudhu bhāla śobhā pāy.*

  [Whether today or tomorrow or two days later/ Mankind is bound by prescriptive time/ He shall advance towards inexorable death/ As and when the brief candle is out./ This life is a veritable moving shadow/ Like the hapless actor on stage/ This pride, anger – will be heard no longer/ All this futile, meaningless fancy/ Best suits the mouth of a fool.]

  But it also aligns him *lexically and stylistically* with the reactionary ideological matrix of urban Bengali Hindu high culture and its collaborative role in the colonial project even as it ekes out a distinctive identity of its own. Further, the use of *tripadi payar* for less inspired passages alongside *amitrakshar* soliloquies implies a hierarchy of verse forms where the popular and more secular format is branded as inferior to its more elevated, sophisticated and *uncontaminated* counterpart.

  Bose's adaptation does not take major thematic liberties but radically otherises the context to indigenise the play. The incorporation of epic parallels and medieval Indian scenario mitigates the confusions caused by the differences between the source-text and the target-text and simultaneously enlarges the ideological parameters to include a religious slant. Bose experiments with several domesticating strategies to arrive at an acceptable hybridisation, but this does not align him with modern adapters who become virtual makers of meaning providing radical new interpretations with provocative socio-political localisation. The repositioning of *Macbeth* in the nineteenth century Bengali milieu is effected through an eclectic time-space retreat into a fictional past that simultaneously Indianises and alienates by relocating outside Bengal.

  Paradoxically, internal distantiation operates in the process of seeking appropriate cultural and linguistic equivalents as well because it eschews much of available traditional resources, especially popular forms of entertainment and colloquial usage with its rich amalgam of non-Sanskrit vocabulary. Shakespeare's England was pervasively Christian and the dramatist was working

primarily within a monotheistic ethos (albeit with fierce sectarian rivalries) where the general connotations of "God," "Christ," "devil" etc. would not be widely divergent. Although the majority of the affluent, educated nineteenth-century Bengalis practised Hinduism – a polytheistic religion accommodating numerous gods and sanctioning idolatry – there was a substantial community of Muslims whose religious tenets and originary impulse were closer to Christianity. The sacred language of the two communities is also different – Sanskrit and Arabic respectively – leading to distinctive usage of Bengali in the two communities. Owing to the historical contingencies mentioned earlier, the Hindus and Muslims lived in mutual segregation that adversely affected Bengali culture and language as a whole. *Karnabir* is consciously confined within a Hindu Bengali ethos through its exclusionist preference for Hindu mythological parallels and Sanskritised Bengali. Consequently, it fails to access the storehouse of Bengali vocabulary or literature enriched by Urdu, Arabic and Persian.

There is a further sectarian bias within the communal regional parameters set for the adaptation. The literacy rate for the third quarter of nineteenth century in British India was as follows: 1881 – 4.8%; 1891 – 5.6%; 1901 – 5.3% (*Population of India*, 70). Bengal's literacy rate, while exceeding that of the other states, was obviously lesser, and the number of Western educated Bengalis was even less. Bose's efforts are directed at this miniscule but prominently visible minority who claimed to be the spokespersons for the entire society while at the same time felt "patronisingly towards the illiterate masses, as the colonial sahibs felt towards…[them]" and subscribed to the "identification between the educated Indian and the colonial state [that] consolidated the boundary walls around school knowledge" (Heredia 368; Kumar 15). Bose's *Karnabir*, thus participates in the circulation of a coterie literature aligned with an elitist nationalism that excludes the minorities and the masses both from readership and representation. The indigenised conflict of Shakespearean tragedy thus bears overwhelming traces of conflicted indigenisation.

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