Shakespeare Studies in Colonial Bengal

Shakespeare Studies in Colonial Bengal: The Early Phase

By

Hema Dahiya

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FOREWORD

This fascinating account of the dawn of Shakespeare studies in early colonial Bengal focuses on three extraordinary figures: the precocious young poet Henry Louis Vivian Derozio ('the Indian Keats'); D. L. Richardson, also a poet but primarily a critic who combined a captaincy in the army with a deep love of flowers; and H. M. Percival, who taught History, Political Economy and Political Philosophy as well as Literature and who prepared numerous critical editions of Shakespeare's plays (and whose writings incidentally supply insights into early responses to the seminal work of A. C. Bradley). Hema Dahiya's study of these teachers and their influence touches on a number of the complex and conflicted ways in which Shakespeare was 'made to mean' in the very specific context of Hindu College (later Presidency College) in the decades following its foundation in 1817 by Rammohan Roy and David Hare: how he came to stand for secularism and humanism; the other authors with whom he shared the curriculum; and the extent to which the early teaching on Shakespeare in India was shaped by and intertwined with the influence of Romanticism. Dr Dahiya also touches on the early history of preparing critical editions of Shakespeare's texts and of performing and reciting them, and offers some fresh and surprising conclusions about the cultural and ideological work performed by the teaching of Shakespeare in India. Above all she provocatively contests the idea of Shakespeare as an instrument of imperialism and proposes a newly recuperative understanding of Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of Shakespeare in India has been widespread, and has been duly acknowledged in several books, each related to an aspect of Shakespeare in India, such as stage performance, translation, and interpretation in different Indian languages. These studies include *Shakespeare in Indian Languages* (Ed. D.A.Shankar); *Shakespeare's Impact in Hindi Literature* (Jagdish Prasad Mishra); *Shakespeare in Tamil Versions* (Palany Arangasamy); *Shakespeare Came to India* (Ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah); *India's Shakespeare* (Eds. Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz).[1] These various studies demonstrate how Shakespeare came to India in the eighteenth century and made a lasting impact on the Indian theatre and literature studies in most of its major languages. What seems to have remained inadequately acknowledged, however, is the contribution of those eminent early teachers of English in Calcutta who actually laid the foundation of Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal. Not that these teachers find no mention in the historical accounts of English education in India; they do receive brief attention in some, if not all, these general histories, though, of course, without any special and searching investigation into their work. A scrutiny of these available passing or casual accounts of Shakespeare studies would show how a subject of considerable significance has remained unexplored. But before we mention these accounts, it seems necessary to briefly introduce Hindu College, where these eminent teachers pioneered Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal.

A privately funded institution of higher education named Hindu College was set up in 1817 in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal and one of the three largest cities of India at the time. It was originally set up by raising funds through donations made mostly by the founders themselves. Those who held several meetings and finally resolved to set up Hindu College included twenty Indians, prominent of whom being Gopi Mohan Tagore, Raja Ram Chund, and Radha Kanta Deb. Who precisely contributed how much is not mentioned, but the names appeared in the *Asiatic Journal* of Feb. 1817 (Vol. III. p.34). Financially aided by the colonial government from 1824, Hindu College became Presidency College in 1855. Although Calcutta University, along with the universities at Madras and Bombay, was created in 1857, Presidency College

continued to be the main centre for university-level education in Bengal. Initiated by Henry Derozio (1826-31), and carried forward to its great heights by D.L. Richardson (1837-1861) and H.M. Percival (1880-1912), Shakespeare studies became a hallmark of Hindu College. This college produced eminent intellectuals who became leaders in the movement called the Bengal Renaissance, which finally led to a greater awakening in the whole of India.

In the books mentioned above, there are brief comments on Shakespeare which make no reference to what the Hindu College teachers had contributed to the teaching of Shakespeare in India. D.A. Shankar's edited volume, *Shakespeare in Indian Languages*, for instance, concludes as follows:

> No Shakespeare came with Sir Thomas Roe or Robert Clive. In fact, to really arrive in India, Shakespeare had to wait till his countrymen were through with their business of war and commerce and could get the services of the man like Macaulay who decided that the Orientals needed to be brought up on a strict diet of English education.[2]

The critic, D.A. Shankar, goes on with his pontificatory utterances to add: "Almost simultaneously with the classroom Shakespeare, emerged Shakespeare the writer for the stage."[3] Worded more in the manner of a public speech than in the style of academic investigation, the report makes no reference to any verifiable fact of the case. Those conversant with the history of British India know that while the first theatre in Calcutta was built in 1753,[4] classroom Shakespeare began soon after Hindu College was founded in 1817.[5] Macaulay appeared much later on the scene in 1835, after Shakespeare had already secured pride of place in the minds of readers and theatre-goers in Calcutta.

A more representative account of Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal, though not very elaborate, is given by Sisir Kumar Das,[6] who shows how Shakespeare and Milton had impacted English education in India, and how the former of these two poets had cast a spell on the Indian readers. As Das puts it,

> In the history of the reception of Western literature in India, one notices a long-drawn battle between the admirers of these two English poets. The Christian missionaries, in particular, who strongly opposed the idea of secular education, invariably preferred Milton to Shakespeare, but it was Shakespeare, rather than Milton, who cast his spell over the Indian reader. Milton was popular amongst a section of English educated students for his radical views against monarchy and portrayal of the valiant archangel …. But his impact, if indeed any, was marginal and limited. Shakespeare, on

> the other hand, became the most popular European author in India, and also the most influential not only in the growth of an Indian theatre but also in the emergence of a tragic vision which made the nineteenth century Indian literature distinct from its earlier traditions.[7]

Although a fairly reasonable view of Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal, it only makes a comparative judgement on the popularity of Shakespeare and Milton in India. It could not have been longer, given the subject of the book, which is Indian literature, and not Shakespeare studies. It does, however, indicate an important aspect of Shakespeare studies in India, showing how the more secular Shakespeare found greater acceptability in India than the more Christian Milton, also emphasizing that even Milton's radical stance against monarchs made a limited impact on the Indians compared to Shakespeare's general popularity.

Whereas Sisir Kumar Das acknowledges Shakespeare's influence on Indian literature, Srinivas Iyengar,[8] the author of *Indian Writing in English*, speaks of a still wider influence of Shakespeare on the Indian people:

> It was not, after all, possible for people to read Shakespeare and Milton and Locke and Burke and Mill, to read about the Magna Carta and the evolution of the British Parliament, and yet acquiesce for long in British colonialism.[9]

Such general observations appear in passing in the larger historical accounts of English education in India, and are not focussed on Shakespeare studies as such. But there are other studies related to education in colonial Bengal in which the role of Hindu College and its Shakespeare studies in promoting the Bengal Renaissance finds a special mention.

These general studies of nineteenth-century Bengal do take note of Shakespeare teaching at Hindu College as a part of English education. As such, they do have some relevance to the subject in hand. But again, these studies, not specifically devoted to Shakespeare teaching in colonial Bengal, make only brief mentions of the role the College played in spreading new ideas through English education. Paying not much attention to the introduction and growth of Shakespeare studies in Calcutta, these studies necessarily leave out something of great significance to the advancement of modern education in Bengal. One such mention appears in Sumanta Banerjee's study of culture in nineteenth century Calcutta.[10] About education at Hindu College Banerjee says the following:

> The Bengali students of Hindu College – and other schools set up around the same time with the objective of educating the 'natives' in European

> science and literature – were quick to gain proficiency in subjects like the intricacies of the British political and legal system, the history of England and Greece and Rome, the European classics and the plays of Shakespeare.[11]

The fact that it is Shakespeare alone from among the numerous English writers which were taught at Hindu College who finds a special mention in the cited account shows how prominent the author was in the English literature course, in fact, in the entire curriculum of study. Beyond such a brief mention, however, the book does not go any further into the growth and significance of the subject.

A similar mention, though factually erroneous, is found in a study by Jagdish Prasad Mishra[12], where in the opening chapter,"The Vogue of Shakespeare," it is stated that

> Shakespeare may have been regarded as an 'enemy to morals' and as 'a creature of the stage' in America and, may not have been introduced into 'Early American School,' but, in India, people have always readily responded to his works. Even as early as 1788, we find that attempts were made to put Shakespeare on the stage, and since then there has been a spate of Shakespeare's productions in Bengal ….
>
> But the actual introduction of Shakespeare into schools and colleges began after the able advocacy of English education by Lord Macaulay in 1835 and the vogue was furthered by the establishment of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857.[13]

The factual errors here are: one, that attempts to stage Shakespeare were first made, not in 1788, but in 1753; two, that it was not Macaulay's advocacy that led to the introduction of Shakespeare studies in India; it had already been done at Hindu College following demand from the Indians themselves. Although Mishra makes a statement of substantial truth, and without any overt ideological or theoretical distortions, his stress on the role of Macaulay's Minute of 1835 is not substantiated by any evidence.

Although an adequate discussion of Macaulay's Minute of 1835 will appear in the next chapter which deals with the conditions leading to the introduction of Shakespeare studies in Bengal, it seems necessary to clarify here that Macaulay, an eminent advocate, based his Minute on available evidence, and made recommendations which addressed both aspirations of aware Indian subjects as well as anxieties of the ruling British authorities. The fact that a good deal of persuasion had to be done on the ruling side for the acceptance of the Minute only underlines the truth of its not being wholly to the liking of the colonial authorities. The

Minute, severely attacked by the postcolonial critics, is not without merit and substance if read in the historical context in which it appeared.

A similar erroneous mention, though equally free from postcolonial ideological slant, appears in Palany Arangasamy's contention that "With the introduction of English in Bengal and Madras from March, 1835, the study of Shakespeare was compulsorily initiated into the educational institutions."[14] As stated earlier, Shakespeare studies had already begun at Hindu College after its very foundation in 1817, and Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) had been introduced in schools even much earlier. As Krishna Chandra Lahiri informs about Shakespeare in schools in the early years of the nineteenth century before the establishment of Hindu College in 1817, "… in third and fourth classes … the students were initiated into the works of Shakespeare through the famous *Tales from Shakespeare* … [which] used to be universally read in schools and outside, and was as popular as *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.*"[15] But the fact of Shakespeare's popularity in India, out-topping all other English writers including Milton, comes out clearly in every account in these various descriptions not directly or exclusively focussed on Shakespeare studies in colonial Bengal.

Bhagban Prasad Majumdar, in his general study of English education in India, highlighting its role in emancipating the Indians from the traditional beliefs, inculcating the values of freedom, equality, and justice, also mentions that

> The strong urge on the part of Indian students to learn English and the exposition of literary works of England by such distinguished teachers as Derozio, D.L. Richardson [who] …. were responsible for the high standard of performance in English literature and language …. D.L. Richardson taught the Hindu College boys *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear* and two parts of *Henry IV* along with Pope's *Essay on Criticism, Rape of the Lock, Essay on Man* and *Prologue to the Satires* in endless alteration.[16]

Majumdar's account is more specific than those cited earlier, as also more particular about the early teachers of Shakespeare at Hindu College. Such studies establish without doubt the supremacy of Shakespeare in English literature teaching in colonial Bengal, especially at Hindu College. These studies also speak highly of Derozio and Richardson as teachers of Shakespeare. Further, all these accounts, however brief and perfunctory, do not underline any negative impact of English teaching, including Shakespeare's, on the native population in colonial Bengal or British India. Also, we do not see in these studies any insinuation about the promotion of the ruler's religion or culture through the teaching of Shakespeare in particular. Scholars such as Majumdar do, however, point out the rulers'

discrimination against educated Indians in appointments to high positions in judiciary and administration.[17] But these various accounts of Shakespeare teaching constitute only a very small part of the studies in which they appear, for the simple reason that these studies are not focussed on Shakespeare teaching at Hindu College, or in colonial Bengal. A collection of essays, some repeated from earlier publications, *India's Shakespeare*, edited by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz, is largely focussed on cultural appropriations of Shakespeare through adaptations and translations for stage performance. In her "Introduction" to the volume, Trivedi offers a thesis that touches upon the subject of our own study of Shakespeare. Covering the entire corpus of theatre activities in India triggered by the English theatre in colonial India, Trivedi's account is substantiated with specific information. Speaking of Shakespeare studies in India, she admires the role played by the Hindu College teachers like Derozio and Richardson, but there is a sting in the tail when she remarks that "Indians now could discover the 'real' Shakespeare for themselves."[18] Her perspective gets revealed when she observes that after the Education Act of 1835, "Shakespeare was moved from the fashionable and cultural to the imperial and ideological axis."[19] One wonders how "the official promulgation of English as the language of administration and government-funded education" made "a decisive shift"[20] in the teaching of Shakespeare. Hindu College was government funded since 1824, and Richardson joined the College around 1835. Can we really say that the official promulgation issued a pedagogy of Shakespeare teaching and all teachers of English in the vast territory from Burma to North West Frontier changed their teaching methodology overnight? It is such sweeping and theory-oriented conclusions of the postcolonial critics regarding Shakespeare teaching in colonial Bengal that the present work attempts to contest and offer in its support the available evidence about Shakespeare studies at Hindu College (later renamed Presidency College and now Presidency University).

The present work, concerned with Shakespeare studies at Hindu (later Presidency) College, covering the period between 1826, when Henry Derozio joined the college and initiated Shakespeare studies, and 1912, when H.M. Percival left the college to leave behind a tradition of secular Shakespeare studies, is intended to highlight the role the three eminent Shakespeare teachers played in promoting secular ideas of free thinking. As such, it becomes imperative to point out the unfair interpretations of Shakespeare teaching in Bengal by the Theory-oriented postcolonial Indian critics.

Coming down to the critical writings on English education in India, including Shakespeare studies, which have appeared since the 1980s, we begin to encounter highly theorized accounts of western education in India, alleging complicity between the imperial rule and the role of English teaching. The earliest book in this category of postcolonial criticism is Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, which came out in 1989. What Vishwanathan's book is about is stated in the very opening of its "Introduction":

> This book is about the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies in India under British colonial rule. It does not seek to be a comprehensive record of the history of English, nor does it even attempt to catalogue, in minute historical fashion, the various educational decisions, acts and resolutions that led to the institutionalization of English. The work draws upon the illuminating insight of Antonio Gramsci, writing on the relations of culture and power, that cultural domination works by consent and can (and often does) precede conquest by force.[21]

If we look closely into this policy statement of Viswanathan, it clearly comes out that though her book is about "the institution" of English studies, she would not look into the historical records, "various educational decisions, acts, and resolutions that led to the institutionalization of English." In other words, she would not, she declares, rely upon any available evidence about English studies in British India, but she would pass judgement on its pivotal role in running the empire. She further declares that instead of relying upon specific available evidence, she would apply to the specific Indian situation Gramsci's general theory about "the relations of culture and power." Considering Viswanathan's choice for making an application of a general theory of culture, ignoring the available textual and historical evidence about the specific case of English education in India, one is reminded of what Sherlock Holmes says in the story called "Scandal in Bohemia." Advising Dr. Watson on the use of theory, he says, "I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."[22]

Viswanathan's statement of intention notwithstanding, she does take recourse to facts, picks up select instances, and cites only those that suit her borrowed theory. She often mentions the Christian missionaries and their main crusader, Alexander Duff, seldom mentioning the Hindu College which played a pioneering role in the spread of English education in colonial Bengal. Note, for instance, the following:

> The Rev. William Keane attempted to persuade officials that 'Shakespeare, though by no means a good standard, is full of religion; it is full of

> 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.'[23]

Here, we are told what Rev. Keane "attempted to persuade," not what actually happened – whether the attempt was successful or not. Besides, if Shakespeare "is full of common sense principles which none but Christian men can recognise," what use would Shakespeare teaching be to the native Indians who would not "recognise" these principles? The fact of the matter is that Shakespeare was not taught in the schools run by Duff and the Missionaries; it was only the Hindu College that introduced and popularised Shakespeare, but not for spreading Christian principles, rather for promoting rationalism and secularism, actively tirading against religious bigotry of Hinduism as well as of Islam and Christianity.

The conclusion of Viswanathan's book is not surprising, because that is precisely what she set out to prove. Once Gramsci's theory of culture as an instrument of colonisation is set rolling, the facts are selected, cut to size, and displayed to show how the British Empire developed using knowledge for power. Note the kind of conclusion she arrives at, which, in fact, is only the ending that was there in the beginning:

> As the history of Oriental education demonstrates, a curriculum may incorporate the systems of learning of a subordinate population and still be an instrument of hegemonic activity. Indeed the point of departure of this book is its argument that both the Anglicist and the Orientalist factions were equally complicit with the project of domination, British Indian education having been conceived in India as part and parcel of the act of securing and consolidating power. The acceptance or rejection of other cultures becomes a moot point in the face of the more encompassing motives of discipline and management.[24]

The Orientalists were actively associated with the Fort William College put up by the East India Company in 1800 to train English boys after the age of 12 or 13 to work as officers for the civil and armed administration of the colonised country. It would be improper to club together the Orientalists and the Anglicists – people like Rammohan Roy, David Hare, Henry Derozio, and others associated with Hindu College – for these Anglicists managed their institutions maintaining distance from both the Christian as well as imperial establishment. As for the "discipline and management" of Indian people, "an empire of 200 million people," it was done not through the teaching of Shakespeare and other English writers, but "with a native army of 200,000 men, officered by Englishmen and … kept in check by an English army numbering only 40,000." If English

teaching were so powerful a weapon to control a vast empire, the British would not have been spending "25 percent of the tax revenues … on paying for the army to keep the Indians down," whereas "'education, public health and agriculture got a bare one percent each."'[25] It also seems pertinent to mention here that India's freedom struggle, spread over sixty years, was led by the English-speaking middle-class, who had received through English education, both in India and England, the enlightened values of liberal humanism. As for Gramsci's theory "that cultural domination works by consent and can (and often does) precede conquest by force," it does not fit on to the Indian situation where conquest by force had actually preceded the cultural domination.

Viswanathan's central assumption is that the British in India introduced the study of English literature "to perform the task of administering their colonial subjects," believing that this "disguised form of authority would be more successful in quelling potential rebellion among the natives than a direct show of force."[26] Ironically, when the foundation of the first Indian university in Calcutta was being laid, the very same day had come up the first round of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (the first war of independence for the Indians), and that, too, at a place not far away from Calcutta. And we know how ruthlessly the rebellion was quelled by the military force.

Viswanathan's general study of how the British used the teaching of English literature for securing domination of the Indians does concede the following:

> How the native actually responds is so removed from the colonizer's representational system, his understanding of the meaning of events, that it enters into the realm of another history of which the latter has no comprehension or even awareness. That history can, and perhaps must, be told separately for its immensely rich and complex quality to be fully revealed.[27]

Hence, her exclusion of the Indian response in her study of the British administrators' use of the 'masks' of 'culture' to gain political control. One can see very well the point Viswanathan has made in her thesis – the rulers, any rulers, would use all available means, hidden as well as demonstrative, to retain hold on their subjects. The point that is being ignored here is the intention of the literary text and the response of the reader, both of which deserve greater consideration in the study of literature than the intentions of the outsiders like the political rulers or religious crusaders. Thus, even though some aspects of Viswanathan's study deserve serious consideration, its keeping out of consideration the

question how the native Indians responded to the "masks of conquest" makes it rather one-sided.

The two studies devoted to the Orientalist project in colonial Bengal – *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835* by David Kopf; and *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project* by Rosinka Chaudhuri – with their greater grounding in facts, and without imposition of any ready-made theory, make out a much more convincing case for both the Orientalists as well as the Anglicists, largely showing no bias in favour or against either. While Kopf's book came out in 1969, before the vogue of postcolonial theory, Chaudhuri's was published in 2002, after the postcolonial critics had had their say. On Shakespeare studies at Hindu College or elsewhere in Bengal, Kopf has nothing much to say in his book, the subject not being part of his investigation, but he does say a good deal about Hindu College, which indirectly reveals his attitude to English teaching, including Shakespeare. Citing from the *Presidency College Centenary Volume*, that "the most striking feature of the Hindu College was its determined effort to impart secular education," Kopf comments:

> This interpretation is difficult to accept, because the twenty Bengalis who wrote the original thirty-four rules of the charter and then approved them formally on August 27, 1816, were all conservative upper-class Hindus …. It was therefore not secular knowledge in Western dress that was to be imparted at Hindu College, but useful knowledge from the West transmitted without ethnocentric bias."[28]

Even though Kopf is correct about the upper-class Hindu status of "the twenty Bengalis," his use of the tag 'conservative' is not quite appropriate, for if that were the case, they would not have crusaded for the introduction of English education for their boys. Also, Kopf's conclusion that education at Hindu College was not secular tends to run contrary to facts about the education actually imparted at this premier institution. Kopf seems to forget that those who taught Shakespeare and other English writers at the College were not these "twenty Bengalis," but Henry Derozio, D.L. Richardson, and H.M. Percival. Besides, those who drafted and approved the College charter were not monitoring the day-to-day college teaching. If there was any supervision at all from the Management side, it was being done by David Hare, the most revered figure among the College managers, enjoying the highest reputation among students and teachers, and his views, as will be discussed later, were antithetical to those of orthodox Hindus as well as conservative Christians.

Kopf's distinction between 'secular' and 'useful knowledge' seems rooted in the medieval Christian theology that set up an antagonism between the secular and the religious. The orthodox Bengalis, of course, would not tolerate any education deemed irreligious. Derozio's forced resignation from the College is an evidence to that way of thinking. As to the usefulness of English education, Kopf has a point because all those receiving that education looked for jobs in the colonial administration. But that was not the only reason that drove the Bengali boys to Hindu College. Although there were rival institutions in Calcutta imparting the same education, Hindu College became an attraction for the boys because of its emphasis on secular ideas.

Not dominated by a theory like Viswanathan, nor partially inclined like Kopf to the contribution of Orientalists, Chaudhuri makes a fair assessment of the role of Hindu College and its Shakespeare teachers like Derozio and Richardson in creating a wave of reason and free thinking. As she argues,

> There existed, however, an important tradition of dissent in the ambience surrounding the Hindu College at the same time. While Viswanathan is scrupulous in recording that here, 'criticism of Hinduism was matched by an equal contempt of Christianity by the college youth,' the emphasis in her study, as in most postcolonial work, lies on the intentions of the colonizer, and she is quite brief on this matter. But if literary postcolonial studies were more interested in the reactions of the colonized, and if the perspective was to be corrected to obtain a balanced account of the beginnings of English education in India, the importance of the anti-Christian policies at the Hindu College comes automatically into focus. The Hindu College promoted a secular concept of school instruction with an emphasis on the moralistic, humanistic functions of literature; the new ideas obtained by such a course of study, however, by weakening superstitious prejudices, only served to foster a climate of scepticism that became an enduring tradition among Bengali liberals.[29]

Even as her observations are largely true, Chaudhuri is not quite right in calling Hindu College policies "anti-Christian," for the emphasis there was on countering orthodoxy in any form, not on opposing any particular religion – Christianity or Hinduism. In the subsequent chapters, detailed evidence will be produced to show how Hindu College actually functioned. As for a climate of scepticism in and around the College, Chaudhuri is making a statement close to truth; for Derozio and Richardson, as will be shown in the later chapters, were confirmed sceptics, and the former paid the price for brandishing his scepticism a little too boldly. However, all teachers of Hindu College may not have shared their views, there being no

policy of the College to recruit only sceptics. In fact, except for a broad consensus on an anti-orthodox stance, the College had no ideological commitment on either religion or politics. It will, in fact, be more appropriate to say that Hindu College promoted liberal humanist tradition through its teaching of "the best that was known and thought in the world."[30]

Sumanta Banerjee's *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, published the same year Viswanathan's book came out, is also based, like *The Masks of Conquest*, on a borrowed theory of culture – the Latin American Paulo Freire's theory about 'the culture of silence.' Freire's formulation, cited by Banerjee, is as follows:

> … the culture of silence is born in the relationship between the Third World and the metropolis …. The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not the authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis in every way: the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens. The silence of the object society in relation to the director society is repeated in the relationship within the object society itself. Its power elites, silent in the face of metropolis, silence their own people in turn.[31]

These meta-theories of Gramsci, Freire, etc., soon run into trouble the moment they are confronted with particular facts. As we saw in the case of Viswanathan, so do we find in the case of Banerjee, rather self-contradictory observations. Note, for instance, the following:

> In Bengal the glorification of the history and cultural achievements of the past Hindu era, set in motion by the nineteenth century Orientalists, contributed to the awakening of national self-consciousness among the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia at the turn of the twentieth century. But the cultural nationalism which became an ally of the political movement against British colonial rule took the form of a return of the past ….[32]

In other words, the British Orientalists, the agents of the "director society," "awakened" national self-consciousness among the members of the "object society," rather than subdue them into silence. And this awakening led to the liberation movement against the colonial rule. Sherlock Holmes comes to mind again: we had better master the facts before we marshal a theory. In both cases – Viswanathan's and Banerjee's – facts outrun their borrowed theories.

More jargon-ridden than any of the books just reviewed is Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992)[33], which, claiming that it "seeks location within the discourse of colonial cultural studies and

attempts to question some of the governing assumptions of that discursive field," relies for illustrations solely on Kipling, Forster, Naipaul and Rushdie, not making even a mention of what happened in nineteenth-century Bengal, leave aside Hindu College and its teaching of Shakespeare and other English writers. As such, it is not quite relevant to our study of Shakespeare teaching in early colonial Bengal, though its mention seems unavoidable because of its very brazen overlooking of an important aspect of the history of English education in British India.

Disagreeing with the discourse of postcolonial theory, Suleri attempts "to break down the incipient schizophrenia of a critical discourse that seeks to represent domination and subordination as though the two were mutually exclusive terms …. This critical field would be better served if it sought to break down the fixity of the dividing line between domination and subordination, and if it further questioned the psychic disempowerment signified by colonial encounter."[34] Thus, Suleri proposes to take the postcolonial interrogation of English India into the realm of psychology, rather than keep it confined to cultural materialism. As an illustration of "disempowerment signified by colonial encounter," Suleri cites the case of Edmund Burke:

> The public failure of Burke's political concerns, therefore, only weakly reflects the poignancy of that discursive collapse through which he was forced to represent Hastings as Iago to India's Othello, or the embodiment of guilt on colonialism's "great theatre [of] abuse" (C W, Vol. 9, p. 348) …. Encoded in the towering rage with which Burke converts Hastings into the prime mover of colonial reprehensibility is an attendant rage at the powerlessness of that spectator who cannot tolerate to witness until its end an enactment of the shared intimacy of guilt.[35]

Suleri may be making a subtle psychological observation about Burke and other such "spectators" who were unable to withstand the logical end "of the shared intimacy of guilt," but her discussion of various writers from both sides of the politico-cultural divide does not touch upon the subject of Shakespeare studies in British India as such. Her book does, however, show the psychological depth to which postcolonial theory dived in its probing of the colonial encounter.

Another study, highly theory-oriented, is Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), which again makes no mention of Hindu College, nor of its teachers, such as Derozio and Richardson, but does speak of Shakespeare's politico-religious use in the Indian colonial situation. Note, for instance, the following:

> The process by which Christianity is made available to the heathens, or indeed Shakespeare made available to the uncultured, is designed to assert the authority of these books, and through these books, the authority of European (English) culture and to make the latter feel like clowns in the budoir [sic]. Thus the intention is to assert an unbridgeable gap or difference between colonisers and colonised peoples. But the effort to convert the natives also assumes that the latter can be transformed by the religious or cultural truths enshrined in the colonial texts. Here the assumption is that the gap between the cultures and people[s] can be bridged. Thus there is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the attempt to educate, 'civilise,' or co-opt the colonial 'other.' We can certainly see how such a contradiction is seized upon and used by the colonised peoples. Lala Hardyal, a founder of the anti-colonial Ghadder Association [in fact, Party, not Association], used Shylock's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*, which begins 'I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?' (III.i.51-57) to argue that Shakespeare stood for human equality and that we should remember Shylock if we are 'ever tempted to scorn or wrong a brother/man of another race or creed' (Hardyal, 1934: 238). …. Thus Hardyal mimics the English uses of Shakespeare in order to contest the legitimacy of English rule in India.[36]

Here, there is another form of postcolonialism, which takes into account as much the subject's response to Shakespeare as it does the ruler's intention. To that extent Loomba's view sounds more balanced than the one-sided view of critics like Visawanathan. As Loomba illustrates, the intention of the authority and the effect on the subject may not always be in consonance with each other. However, Loomba, even as she cites Hardyal's use of Shakespeare to his advantage, does not cite anything to show "the English uses of Shakespeare." Loomba's assertion is not backed by any evidence of fact. More general than Viswanathan's, Loomba's study offers a critical definition of terms like colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, postcolonialism, colonial discourse, and seeks relationships of postcolonialism with race and gender. The study does offer an illustration of its theoretical argument by using literary texts. For instance, defining colonialism, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is used to illustrate how "the process of forming a community in the new land necessarily meant *unforming* or re-forming the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practises including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement, and rebellions."[37] What Loomba says here about the exploitations of colonialism is a commonplace of history, but postcolonial reading of Shakespeare's play is simply one available approach to interpreting the play.

Similarly, discussing the marginalised social groups and communities Loomba uses Shakespeare's *Othello*, but not the author's original text.

Instead Jane Suzman's production of the play in Johannesburg, with black hero, is chosen for the illustration of "the racial politics of the play," because "to place Shakespeare's *Othello* in South Africa is to open up a powerful new reading of the play."[38] The postcolonial appropriations of Shakespeare have been used to highlight the discriminations based on race, class, gender, etc. But how far such appropriations or re-presentations are fair to the original text raises serious questions about the authority of the author as well as about the liberty of the reader.

Like most postcolonial critics, Loomba, too, insists that "the definition of civilization and barbarism rests on the production of an irreconcilable difference between 'black' and 'white,' self and other."[39] This "definition" is not borne out by the history of colonialism from ancient to the modern times. The Roman colonisers called the British and the Germans as barbarians. Earlier, the Greek colonisers called the non-Greeks as barbarians. Besides, these political constructions are extraneous to Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Tempest*.

Although not directly touching upon Shakespeare teaching in colonial Bengal, especially at Hindu College, Loomba raises relevant questions about the discrepancy between what the colonial authorities intended and how the colonised subjects responded. Those looking through the coloured glasses of postcolonial theory do not care to take stock of this discrepancy. Although a timely corrective to the blind march of Theory, pointing out the pitfall in its determined direction, Loomba's book leaves unchallenged the basic concepts of Theory, such as its notions of nation and race, coloniser and colonised. This work attempts to rely more on the actual historical conditions than assumed theoretical constructions in relation to both Shakespeare's work and the Hindu College teachers who interpreted that work to the Indian students.

Yet another general study indirectly related to the subject of this work is Nandi Bhatia's *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (2004).[40] Relying on Jonathan Dollimore,[41] also seeking support from Gauri Viswanathan,[42] Bhatia makes what by now is a stereotypical observation in postcolonial criticism:

> The initiation of Shakespeare into the Indian academy coincided with the introduction of the discipline of English literature in India, which became an important part of the educational curriculum after the establishment of universities in Bengal, Bombay, and Madras in 1857.[43]

If Bhatia means "the discipline of English literature," as it is known in the universities, the separate department of study in English offering B.A. Honours and M.A. degrees courses, then her observation is incorrect

because that started in Bengal, not with the establishment of the university of Calcutta in 1857, but with the introduction of these special courses in 1880s – the first degree in both B.A. Honours and M.A. English were awarded in 1883.[44] As for "the initiation of Shakespeare," that had taken place in 1753 in theatre,[45] and in 1817 in the classroom.[46] Bhatia's assertion that "Shakespeare became a means to establish British cultural authority and 'Anglicize the Indian subcontinent,"'[47] too, is not based on any evidence. When one encounters such large statements, one does not know how to take them. Which India, one would like to ask, is Bhatia talking about? India is neither a bunch of "baboos," nor a microscopic academic elite. Besides, if knowing English and Shakespeare is getting enslaved to the British culture, then the number of people having that influence in India is many times more today than it was in the nineteenth century.

It is precisely the untenable largeness of the postcolonial meta-concepts such as the West and the East, the British and the Indians, the alien and the native, etc., that the present work proposes to highlight, for these theoretical constructs spare no room for individuals who may not be defined in terms of the interests of their race and nation. Postcolonial critics, following the French theorists, Barthes, Foucault, and Darrida, discarded the humanist terms of essentialism and universalism, calling them metaconcepts, but ended up using terms which are no less large, such as East and West, coloniser and colonised, leaving no room for individuals. The French theorists' contention that individuals and societies are all constructed by conditions or structures of politics, language, etc., is highly debatable, for humans are not material products of any industrial unit that they would all think and act alike.

The vital difference between literature and social sciences has been that whereas in literature human subjects are viewed as natural and moral individuals, in social sciences, they are classified as categories in terms of races, religions, nations, classes, genders, etc. The dominance of social sciences in contemporary criticism, including the postcolonial, has obliterated the special domain of literature that looked beyond these divisive categories and emphasized the common qualities of human nature found in all times and all places. No doubt, we cannot deny the material level of our existence that Marx, and others after him, have emphasized. But we cannot also accept that the human subjects are produced, constructed, or determined by cultural materialism alone. When all these layers of social existence are removed, there still remains in us the human residue that gives us our individual identity – good, bad, or indifferent.

To underline the aspect of individual identity, this work finds reassuring support from the most revered Indian writer, Rabindranath Tagore, the only Indian to have received the Nobel Prize for Literature (1913), who not only lived during the most crucial period of India's freedom struggle but also stood firm on his own individual space, unruffled by the opposing claims of racist and nationalist interests. His views on the concepts of nation and individual self are relevant for our purposes. In one of his essays titled "The Nation," Tagore emphatically argues,

> … I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. Our moral ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans.[48]

One can clearly hear in Tagore's words the echo of Tom Paine's ideas. Note for instance the following from a song by Paine titled "The Liberty Tree":

> Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer,
> In defense of our Liberty Tree.[49]

Also, note the following:

> The true idea of a great nation is that which promotes and extends the principles of universal society.[50]

Paine's influence on educated Indians was very powerful. Those with English education in Calcutta from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore read Paine as eagerly as they read Shakespeare. And these ideas ignited the young minds in Bengal leading to first the movement called Young Bengal, and then got linked up with the larger movement of the Bengal Renaissance, finally leading to the national movement for freedom. It may not be out of place to mention here that Tom Paine is a rare example in modern history of a native of an imperial nation who inspired the colonies to get liberation from the empire of his own nation. Paine's role in the American Revolution is indeed unique in recorded human history.

For Tagore, individuals are to be judged by their own individuality, not by the race or religion to which they belong. Those who constitute the subject of this work, the founders and early English teachers of Hindu College, were individuals of similar hue. Rammohan Roy and David Hare,

Henry Derozio, D.L. Richardson, and H.M. Percival belonged to that category. Both the founders of the Hindu College as well as its early teachers of Shakespeare believed in the universality of human nature.

As Saroj Mohan Mittra, the editor of Rammohan Roy's work, writes, "Rammohun held that the entire human society is a big family. Its innumerable communities and groups are spread over different countries and states. Help and cooperation from the enlightened persons is necessary for mutual benefit and comforts of the general people."[51] That Roy always remained above the narrow feelings of race and religion, and that he continuously resisted the interference of such feelings in education, is also amply borne out by the following remark of his:

> Those about the courts of the native princes are not inferior in point of education and accomplishments to the respectable and well-bred classes in any other country. Indeed they rather carry their politeness and attention to courtesy to an inconvenient extent. Some seminaries of education (as at Benaras & C.) are still supported by the princes and other respectable and opulent native inhabitants, but often in a very irregular manner. With respect to the Hindu College in Calcutta … many learned Christians object to the system therein followed of teaching literature and science without religion being united with them; because they consider this as having a tendency to destroy the religious principles of the students … without substituting anything religious in their stead.[52]

Here is a humanist reaction from Roy, a founder of Hindu College along with David Hare, showing both sides of the issue concerning the nature of education to be imparted in colonial Bengal.

Not a bit different from Roy's view of education was that held by his friend David Hare – in their lasting friendship stands disproved Kipling's the 'Never the twain shall meet.' An account of Hare that appeared, after his death in 1837, in *Friend of India*, run by the Baptist Missionaries of Serampore, shows how close these two individuals were in their crusade for education in Bengal:

> Mr. Hare affords the remarkable – and in India the solitary – instance of an individual, without any refinement of education, without intellectual endowments, without place, or power, or wealth, acquiring and retaining for a long series of years one of the most important and influential positions in native society, simply by a constant endeavour to promote the improvement of rising generation. That he was the means of doing much good among the natives, and that the cause of native education in the metropolis is greatly indebted to his constant and unremitting attention, will be readily admitted by all. At the same time, it must be confessed with deep regret, that his inveterate hostility to the Gospel, produced an

> unhappy effect on the minds of the native youths who were so largely under his influence, by indisposing their minds to all enquiry after religious truth and inducing a general scepticism, the melancholy consequences of which will long continue to be apparent in the opinion and conduct of the generation of the enlightened native.[53]

If such concrete evidence were brought to the notice of the postcolonial theorists, they would surely feel embarrassed. Generalisations based on abstract constructions rather than concrete facts may sound brilliant in the realm of theory, but they do not hold good when tried on facts. The available facts like the one cited above do not support the abstract arguments put forth by Viswanathan and other postcolonial critics. It may be acknowledged here that the evidence in support of Hindu College and the three eminent teachers partly comprises of memoirs by the former students of the College. But even those who have written histories of education in colonial Bengal, namely S.C.Ghosh, D.P.Sinha, J.Ghosh, Arthur Howell, Sayyid Mohmud, have also confirmed these accounts of Hindu College.

Deeply rooted in the liberal tradition fostered at Hindu College, and earlier at Drummond's Academy, Henry Derozio's views about mankind were as liberal as those of Hare, Roy, and Tagore. These liberal individuals were in no way amenable to whatever designs the Scottish Church or the imperial administration might have had. Note, for instance, Derozio's observation about Drummond's School:

> The most pleasing feature in this institution is its freedom from illiberality. We have a particular reason for noticing this circumstance. At some of the schools in Calcutta objections are made to native youth, not so much a part [sic] of the masters as of the Christian parents who have children at those schools. At the Durrumtollah Academy, however, there is none of this illiberal feeling; and it is quite delightful to witness the exertions of Hindoo and Christian youth striving together in the same classes for academical honours. This amalgamation will do much towards softening those asperities which always arise in hostile sects; and when the Hindoo and the Christian have learned from mutual intercourse how much there is to be admired in the human character, without reference to differences of opinion in religious matters, shall we not be brought nearer than we now are to that happy condition
>
> When man to man the world o'er,
> Shall brothers be and a' that[54]

The poetic lines in the quotation are from Burns, showing the Romantic influence on Shakespeare teachers of Hindu College. Once again, Derozio, like Roy and Hare, speaks of humanist values, far above the realm of race

and religion. In the liberal realm of these individuals, mankind is made of individual humans, who are essentially the same, irrespective of their origin or faith. Like Derozio, Richardson, too, was a strong believer in universal human values, which are repeatedly reflected in his writings. Note, for instance, his following comments on Shakespeare:

> Shakespeare especially has addressed himself to the universal heart. The jealousy of Othello and the ambition of Macbeth are as perfectly apprehended by the intelligent Hindu alumni of an English College in Calcutta, as by the students of a scholastic establishment in the poet's native land. But Pope was too much of a London poet of Eighteenth century …. His satires, especially, are limited and obscure. It would almost be impossible, for example, to make a native of Hindustan comprehend the greater portion of his *Epistle on The Characters of Women*. But Shakespeare's females are sketched with miraculous powers, and with such fidelity to general nature, that they are recognized in all countries and in all ages by every reader who can understand the language in which his plays are written.[55]

In the tradition of Shakespeare studies at Hindu College, Richardson, as evident from the above citation, emphasized the universal aspect of Shakespeare and other writers, and came down heavily on English poets like Dryden and Pope who largely remained local and specific. H.M. Percival continued that tradition, who succeeded Richardson as Shakespeare teacher at Hindu College. Note, for instance, Percival's observation on *The Merchant of Venice:*

> As, in the first story, we learnt to distinguish what a man *is* from what he *has*, so the silent lesson of the caskets, in their effect on the different suitors, teaches us to distinguish what a man *is* from what he *seems to be*, and to see how the mistaking of appearances for reality brings deserved failure, and the discerning of real worth, underlying unpromising appearances, brings the happiness of deserved success. The two stories together, point a single moral: the most deceptive of the appearances of worth is wealth, and the most precious form of real worth is character.[56]

As can be seen, even as he sticks to the universalism of Shakespeare, earlier emphasized by Derozio and Richardson, Percival makes an added emphasis of moralism. At the same time, what these Hindu College teachers of Shakespeare, and before them the founders of the College, Hare and Roy, shared in common is their view of human beings as essentially the same, irrespective of their race, religion, or nation.

The secular tradition of the Hindu College, reflected in the ideas of its leading founders like Roy and Hare, as well as in the Shakespeare teaching