



### **Prof. Debiprasad Bhattacharya**

Formerly Kalyani University

(Interviewed by Sri Abhishek Sarkar and Sri Arunava Banerjee)

#### **Year of passing B.A. and M.A. Details of institutions concerned.**

B.A. – 1967 from Asutosh College. M.A. – 1969 from the University of Calcutta.

#### **College and university syllabi (Shakespeare plays and poems).**

We had *Macbeth* and *As You Like It* at the undergraduate level. At the M.A. level, we were taught *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*.

#### **Who taught the texts in question?**

*Macbeth* was taught to us by Professor Jitendranath Chakraborty and *As You Like It* by Pranay Ranjan Sen. I remember them with absolute respect. At the M.A. level, I was taught by Krishna Chandra Lahiri, Jyoti Bhattacharya and Amalendu Bose. Amalendu-babu taught us *Antony and Cleopatra*, Jyoti-babu taught us *King Lear*. P. Lal [Professor Purushottam Lal] taught us *Measure for Measure* briefly as well. There was also P.C. Ghosh who taught us the non-detailed study section of the course on Shakespeare. We had *The Tempest* and *Merchant of Venice* in this section. I had also learned a great deal from Professor Dinesh Chandra Biswas of Jadavpur University. I would go to his home to study with him.

#### **What techniques were used (e.g., close reading, lecture demonstration, group discussion, seminars etc) for teaching Shakespeare?**

Jitendranath-babu used to give us a panoramic view of Shakespeare and explained to us many aspects of the playwright's works. He read the play, line by line, and enacted it for us. Pranay-babu was an extraordinary reader of the text. I have learned much from his reading of the text, which I applied to my own teaching. Amalendu-babu was a scholar of international repute. He would try to enact the play as well. He would also try to contextualize the play. Jyoti-babu was a very celebrated teacher. He taught the text in a completely new light, giving us a Marxist interpretation of the play. No one missed his classes. The others were good readers of the text, but he above and beyond them. P.C. Ghosh took brief classes but covered the entire expanse of Shakespeare studies. He would have made the perfect teacher for the present semester system.



### **Did the teacher discuss philology and prosody while reading Shakespeare?**

There was a prosody section, but I was very bad at it.

### **Did the teacher refer to literature in other languages while discussing Shakespeare? For example, would the teacher mention Dante, Kalidasa or Tagore while reading Shakespeare with the students?**

Amalendu-babu would compare the tragedy of love in *Antony and Cleopatra* with Tagore and Kalidasa's concept of love. It meant that the text-reading was a little neglected, but it created a literary atmosphere. Purushottam Lal compared the decadence in *Measure for Measure* with that in the *Mahabharata*.

### **Were expletives and sexual references omitted?**

Yes. This is, in fact, why we essentially used Verity editions. They were rather sanitized. Jyoti-babu was the only one who did not omit these references. We never expected a teacher could be that frank with students. The female students in class would be very embarrassed.

### **How far was the socio-historical context of plays discussed?**

Jyoti-babu gave us a socio-historical context for the plays. He was the only one who did it.

### **Were students encouraged to think independently and challenge the teacher?**

It was a class with at least 100 students. It was impossible for students to air their own views in such a class. There was no scope to ask questions. We would mostly listen to the professors talk. The teachers weren't very student-friendly.

### **Editions and critical material prescribed and used.**

The Verity edition at the undergraduate level and the Arden edition at the postgraduate level. They were very easily available. In terms of critical material, we were asked to read Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, L.C. Knights, S.C. Sengupta etc.

### **Examination and question pattern.**



Essay type questions on character, plot, structure etc. There were also questions on reference to the context.

### **Did the teacher refer to stage and film productions of Shakespeare?**

No, this was not the trend back then. I went to see a number of Shakespeare adaptations and films on my own, *Antony and Cleopatra* for example, but they were never recommended in class. In fact, I understood the fact that Iago has a strange kind of feeling for Desdemona, that there was a kind of sexual jealousy in operation, from seeing the *Othello* play and not from the classes.

### **Whether the text was related to performance conventions.**

No, there was no discussion about theatre. We could tell this play was meant for the stage, but we were not told how it worked as theatre. Professor K.C. Lahiri spoke a little bit about the Globe theatre, stage directions etc., but not much. This was a long time ago.

### **Whether there was any performance of Shakespeare at the institution.**

No. Maybe at Jadavpur University, but Calcutta University was always very conservative and textual in its approach. Professors still did theatre, for example Jyoti-babu and Shanta Mahalanobish. But the students were not really interested. Later on, this changed.

### **Did you see any other productions?**

I saw a number of Shakespeare adaptations. For example, Utpal Dutt's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Chaitali Raater Swapno*). I had seen *Sher Afghan*, I remember. I saw *Othello* as well.

### **On teaching Shakespeare.**

I have taught in the Pass course, which necessarily meant that I make it very simple for, say, Bengali Honours students to understand. When I taught at Kalyani University, I never shied away from discussing the sexual aspects in a play, even if it made the students uncomfortable. It was, after all, a fact.

### **Do you think that Shakespeare is an overrated author?**

# PEDAGOGY

## Interview

SHAKESPEARE IN BENGAL

Centre of Advanced Study, Phase III

UGC-SAP

Department of English

Jadavpur University



Shakespeare's significance can never decrease. He is one of those timeless, classic writers who is always relevant. Like Homer, Virgil, Dante, Rabindranath, etc. he cannot be overrated. He can be related to all ages. He has been reinvented over time, with Marxist approaches, New Historicist approaches and so on.

**How would you react to the phenomenon of reading Shakespeare in a simplified language or in paraphrase, now popular among students in the West?**

This is not at all a healthy trend. If you have to read Shakespeare, you have to do it in the original.