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(Interviewed by Arunava Banerjee)

Could you please tell us the years of your passing B.A. and M.A.?

1962 and 1964.

And the institutions?

B.A. from Bangabashi College and M.A. from the University of Calcutta.

When did your first encounter with Shakespeare take place?

I privately read Shakespeare during school, I.A. and college, inspired by my father who was a college teacher, and a great scholar – Kumud Bihari Chatterjee of Balurghat College. My first encounter was between 16 and 18 years of age. There was a Warwick Shakespeare at home, I saw my father read and recite from it, and I felt that I should too, so I started reading then, with the help of the Warwick Shakespeare. It was well-annotated.

Which Shakespeare texts were on the syllabi?

Shakespeare was first a part of the syllabus during B.A. We had *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. All the plays were taught to us in class, and the most remarkable was Nirendranath Ray. In college we were taught *As You Like It* by him, while Manibhushan Bhattacharya taught us *Hamlet*. At university there was a separate paper with many plays but not many teachers. Jyoti Bhattacharya was mostly in jail at that time. 1962 saw the Indo-China War, and he never taught Shakespeare when he came back. Amalendu Bose taught us one play in two days. Shakespeare teaching was very irregular back then. In college Manibhushan Bhattacharya taught us *Hamlet*, both the text and the criticism. He had a disturbing habit of asking questions and not answering them. The questions would usually come from critical works on Shakespeare.

Could you give us some more details about the mode of teaching Shakespeare?

Nirendranath Ray concentrated on the text. He explained every word and every line and he told us to read criticism later. The students liked him the best. He wouldn't allow any student in the classroom



without a text. He also taught *Julius Caesar*, the method was the same. My most memorable experiences about learning Shakespeare was during my B.A. years. M.A. didn't have such memorable teaching. Professor Bose was humorous and fluent, and he tried to make the classes interesting, but he had very little time. No teachers enacted the scenes in class.

Were the teachers very particular about pronunciation and accent?

Nirendranath Ray was very particular about pronunciation and accent, as was Amalendu-babu. The others were not so fastidious.

Were expletives and sexual references omitted?

Expletives were sometimes omitted, sometimes used. No hard and fast rule was maintained.

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

The socio-historical context was by and large left to us, as well as Shakespearean textual scholarship relating to folio, quarto and emendations.

Were Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists given the same amount of importance in the classroom?

There was another paper for non-Shakespearean plays, and every other play was dismissed in one class. P.C. Ghosh had roughly one hour for every other dramatist.

Were students encouraged to think independently and challenge the teacher?

Students were not encouraged to challenge the teacher, but encouraged to think independently. Manibhushan Bhattacharya raised questions and wanted us to find the answers.

Which edition of Shakespeare was prescribed to you?

Editions used were mostly Arden in CU. In college it varied. Nirendranath Ray used Verity. In B.A. we were not told about Arden. It wasn't available then, I think. We started to find Arden during the M.A. years. We used to buy or borrow books. It wasn't readily affordable. I couldn't afford a single one. But it was easily available.



And the critical material on Shakespeare usually read in those days?

Shakespeare criticism was divided into two areas, up to the 18th century and from the 19th century to the present. We used to study the *Shakespeare Survey*, Raleigh, Halliday and Kenneth Muir at the British Council Library, which was affordable. We were shown *Richard III* and *Hamlet* at the BCL. Jyoti Bhattacharya used to show films in CU later, but ours was a disturbed time. We used the National Library and Calcutta University Library. G.W. Knight and L.C. Knights were the rage. Essays by T.S. Eliot – the essay on *Hamlet* came out in the University bulletin.

Could you tell us something about the examination and question pattern?

6 questions over two halves: on critics, their comments, and textual questions.

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

Amalendu Bose referred to stage and film productions sometimes. Rarely were stage conventions discussed in classes. However Granville-Barker's Prefaces was an important text.

Was there any performance of Shakespeare at the institution you studied in?

There were productions of scenes at Kalyani University as well as free Bengali adaptations. This is still going on.

Is there any noticeable change in Shakespeare pedagogy and student reaction over the decades?

Earlier Shakespearean pedagogy was about liberal humanism, now it is about literary theory. New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and the rest, but I haven't forgotten Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, and Dover Wilson and try to incorporate all of them in my teaching.

Which Shakespeare texts have you taught?

I have taught *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*. I have tried to modernize my teaching. New editions such as New Cambridge, New Arden, newer reference books – these are some of the ways in which I have tried to modernize Shakespeare pedagogy while I was on the B.O.S. of K.U. and C.U.

Do you think that Shakespeare is an overrated author?



I don't think Shakespeare is an overrated author.

How would you react to the present trend of deglamorizing and decanonizing Shakespeare?

I don't like deglamorizing and decanonizing. I think Shakespeare should be a part of literary studies. However Shakespeare idolatry should be discouraged. Shakespeare should be seen as a working playwright.

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

I don't like the concept of reading Shakespeare in paraphrase. No point in reading him if he is not read in his own language. We don't read him for the stories, the stories are not original, and the paraphrases lose the distinctness of his style.