

Book Review

The World as a Stage: Shakespearean Transformations by Dr. K. Chellappan

Emerald Publishers, 2016.

One wonders whether Shakespeare is more loved in India than in his homeland, Great Britain.

Dr. Chellappan's book is a tribute to the Bard of Avon, commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of his death. The author discusses an amazing variety of topics, which reveal his wide scholarship, critical acumen and originality.

The book consists of two parts. Part I traces Shakespeare's exploration of the relationship between drama and reality. The study applies the insights of Feminism, Marxism and New Historicism and relates them to Buddhist concepts. Part II studies transformations and translations of Shakespeare in Tamil, and also shows the affinity between Shakespeare's art and Indian thought, by comparing his plays with Indian epics and classical Sanskrit drama.

For Chellappan, Shakespeare is our contemporary. He says, "Shakespeare's plays give useful clues for developing communication skills, which are essential for success in the contemporary world order. Iago in Othello is a very successful communicator. By simply repeating Othello's words, he not only violates discourse conventions, but destroys Othello.

Iago: Indeed.

Othello: Indeed, indeed? Discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?

Iago: Honest, my lord.

Othello: What dost thou think?

Iago: Think, my lord.

The interface between dream, drama and reality is discussed in the context of ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***. "All art is dream, but also more real than reality. Similarly our life seems to be an illusion, but it also suggests a deeper reality. Drama provides the most effective metaphor and symbol to Shakespeare to show this illusion/reality syndrome in life and art." ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** is a larger dream, and the stories are dreams within dreams.

The disguise convention is viewed in a new light here. "The urge of woman to be the "other" in the male dominated world takes different shapes and disguise is the most dominant expression of this craving for power or self-completion of woman in the early comedies; it becomes a cry for unsexing in the tragic universe of the later plays."

The discussion in ***The World as Theatre in King Lear and Tempest*** "examines Shakespeare's view of theatre as a metaphor and means of discovering the world, with all its unreal reality but which is also the only real reality which we can hope to have. Shakespeare has been asking the question,

“Was it a vision or a dream?””. All criticism has not answered it and the mystery of the world and Shakespeare are mysteries still.

In Part II, while comparing Shakespeare and Kamban, he says, “Shakespeare’s heroes are fully human, though imperfect, but Kamban’s Rama is perfectly human, perfect, but still human.” The Tamil mind finds an affinity in the Shakespearean breeze that revitalized and humanized Tamil thought. Regarding Sanskrit drama, “Shakespeare and Sanskrit drama have successfully

captured the boundlessness of space and time within the bounds of space and time of the theatre.”

Here is a multi-faceted, insightful, scintillating treasure trove of Shakespearean criticism that should delight any lover of Shakespeare.

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