

**The Renaissance and Shakespeare**  
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**Lecture – 16**  
**Global Shakespeare**

Hello friends, now we come to the modules on global Shakespeare. The first 2 modules present to you a conversation between doctor Nita Kumar and professor Claire Cochrane of the University of Worcester in the UK. Professor Cochrane talks about Asian Shakespeare in the UK companies like Tara arts which regularly produce performances of Shakespeare with a dollop of Bollywood or of other Indian elements.

She also talks about racially blind casting in the UK. And I hope that this conversation will prove to you that Shakespeare is not just somebody to be studied in the classroom. Shakespeare is a playwright who even today attracts audiences all over the world and is performed in many different languages and many different theatrical styles, thank you.

I am doctor Nita Kumar secretary of the Shakespeare society of India. And it is my pleasure today to introduce professor Claire Cochrane from the University of Worcester professor Cochrane is here for the IP college and Shakespeare society seminar on revisiting Shakespeare in Indian literature and culture professor Cochrane is the professor of theatre studies at the University of Worcester in the UK.

She in addition to teaching Shakespeare. She is also interested in contemporary playwrights and she is a theatre historian her most recent book 20 twentieth century British theatre industry art and empire, was published by the Cambridge university press in 2011. Welcome to Delhi professor Cochrane.

Thank you for inviting me.

I must congratulate you on the wonderful presentation the plenary lecture, you delivered at the seminar today. And you gave us, this picture of a very you know very complex you know and a very nuanced theatre scene in the UK. Even though the Asian community in the UK you suggested was a relatively small one. Would you like to outline for us the Asian theatre in the UK, in it is contemporary scene?

Well I mean the Asian community is steadily growing in in in some cities that my own city Birmingham. For example, you know a large proportion of the populations are now ancient. And particularly a Pakistani heritage, but the largest concentration are of migrants of a subcontinent you find in London. And that is where most of the theatre companies are based.

Theatre companies have come and gone it is not always easy to run a small scale theatre company, because we lose funding or you lose leadership and the company runs out of steam. So, there have been various companies that the Asian cooperative theatre for example, but that came flourish for a while and then and then died, but the Asian the longest lived company is Tara arts which was founded in 1977 and became fully professional in 1982.

The USA got a company that was formed by 2 women caught Amish theatre company, and also Carly theatre company. Carly is particularly interesting because it focuses on the development of women Asian writers. So, it has a development program both those companies give opportunities to British Asian actors as well as British Asian writers.

Then you have got other companies near London was one called rich co for example, and further north in England was another company called pescow. And, but there is not very many, but there is certainly a growing number British Asian actors who they appear a lot on television and, but also increasingly in the theater in mainstream theater productions.

Right, thank, you now in in the seminar that we have had for 2 days now, there has been a lot of talk about the long relationship that shake India has had with Shakespeare. To begin with Shakespeare's part of the colonial enterprise of the imperial power and the reception of Shakespeare in India and many speakers have talked about a post cool coming of age of our relationship with Shakespeare.

Now, I understand as you spoke in your presentation about this too. That the situation of Asian community in in UK their identity issues are even more complex. And therefore, their relationship with Shakespeare is even more complex. Do you see a sort of development in the way Asian community has received and presented Shakespeare over the years? Do you think there is something like coming of age in that relationship are people more comfortable in their complexity?

I mean there is Asian identity which is very complex, is there more serve comfort in itself and it is relationship with Shakespeare.

Many Asian communities do not know the future in the UK and many theaters made a great deal of effort to reach out to develop theater product which is interesting and accessible for all local community audiences. We had an example now of an all British Asian production much too badly by the royal Shakespeare company, which is really quite a major turning point because something like this has never happened before. I mean there is been there have been popular projects like Bombay dreams, for example, the musical that was in London in 2002.

And there was a production a short lived production of twelfth night, with a largely Asian cast in 2004, but on the whole British Asian theatre makers in their own companies. Part of Tara arts have pretended not to present Shakespeare art. I think the relationship remains very complex. I think there are still tensions around the history of the fact that that Shakespeare was an imposed people within the subcontinent in the nineteenth century.

And I think for several of the key groups, their political aspirations they are concerned to create a theater that speaks to the contemporary issues within their own communities and within multicultural Britain is of a greater importance, but there is no doubt about it that there are a number of key, Asian actors that that enjoy performing Shakespeare.

But until it balcom was asked to direct much to about nothing 4 years say, the usual pattern has included British Asian actors you would still have a member of the whites establishment. That was directing and I think the main thing that will have to change in the future, is you develop more British Asian directors. So, there is more power and autonomy.

That these people my next question, how is the casting policy are Asian actors accepted in the mainstream British theater is that casting is a blind casting or is a ways aware of casting.

Well integrated casting or colorblind casting, which starts in the late 1980s, I think and then starts to develop in the national companies and in the region of producing theaters. And I think most mainstream theaters are comfortable with that. I do not think colorblind

casting is quite as radical as extreme as it was. I mean you audiences of critics were upset when black British appreciation actors, were the casting kind of social realism of early twentieth century, northern playwrights and it just seemed a bit illogical to do that.

Yes.

But never, but certainly within classical drama particularly within Shakespeare, but with also other renaissance dramatists. So, with dramatists from the fairly modern European repertoire. More and more educational which is are being housed in these plays and of course, making a major contribution.

And is if an Asian theater company puts a performance is the audience composition largely of agents or through white and other communities also take interest in nation theatre.

Marketing and performance development strategies have been quite hard and quite rigorous. In a lot of Asian communities which tend to be quite good closed. It is often to be difficult to get people to come to the theatre. So, white establishment theater makers have had to be very sensitive they have to be very knowledgeable their outreach policies has have got to be responsibility.

You know just thinking that just because you are putting all nation interest play you are Asian community will just automatically roll up. And say often that that does not happen. I mean for example, in Birmingham, there was a high profile adaptation of the Ramayana. A great did of money we spent on it and question about it was made into attracting audience to go to it, but actually most of the Asian population of Birmingham were particularly interested.

But when the show went to the national theatre in London, where you got a nation population along with a complete melting pot of cultures and ethnicities within London, then the theater going habit is much more entrenched. And it did extremely well there. And I think it is true to say that that Asian audiences are attending more and more the work of small theater companies, but you also get. Look at people and me.

Yes.

You know you will get you will get members of the of the white theatres going community that that has attended as well just to support the work.

And from the what is the source of funding for these smaller Asian theatre.

Well (Refer Time: 12:33) ask also funding.

Ok.

But as you know we have an economic crisis and there are austerity measures. And public services in all sorts of ways are being cut back quite strictly. And this is happening within the arts council. So, I think virtually every theatre company even the most highly funded companies have taken a major cut in their annual revenue. So, there is a very real fear, I think with the smaller companies. Not just British Asian or black theater companies, but with all small theatre companies that the security of subsidy is gradually ebbing away.

So, everyone is being encouraged to be terribly entrepreneurial. It is sponsorship and patronage from all sorts of external sources. And it is quite stressful I think there will be a different model of supporting theater theatre companies. And how that will evolve over the next 10 years would say I didn't really know.

Would you like to give us a quick response on your experience of 2 days of the seminar that you have attended and then (Refer Time: 13:54)

I think it is been fascinating. It is quite humbling; I mean really to be invited it was amazing. Like I said everybody I am going to Delhi to give a paper on Shakespeare that was extraordinary. And I think what is coming across is the passion of the Indian Shakespeare community it is extraordinary.

I mean it makes me feel quite ashamed really but.

That the bretts did get quite cynical about this whole thing.

Yes.

And that the passion the innovation, the experimentation and translation the adaptation. And I think somebody said today that they are going beyond the post-colonial within the

Indian context, into something which is fully an independent and creative in its own right and Shakespeare is there.