

SHAKESPEARE
THROUGH EASTERN EYES

By the same Author—

TOWARDS THE STARS

(Being an appreciation of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*)

SHAKESPEARE THROUGH
EASTERN EYES

BY

RANJEE G. SHAHANI, B.A., D.Litt.

With an Introduction by
J. MIDDLETON MURRY

and an Appreciation by
EMILE LEGOUIS

LONDON

HERBERT JOSEPH 9 JOHN STREET ADELPHI

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE STANHOPE PRESS LTD.
ROCHESTER : : KENT

TO MY KINDLY CRITIC

EDWARD GARNETT

to whom I owe the original suggestion of the following studies, as well as more encouragement than I can adequately acknowledge, I dedicate this effort.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
APPRECIATION	11
INTRODUCTION	15
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	19
A RETROSPECT	23
THE SOWING OF THE SEED	43
INTERVAL.	59
THE REAPING	69
THE AFTERMATH	85
TAKING STOCK	93
THE FIRST DISAPPOINTMENT.	117
THE GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT	151
REVULSIONS	181
THE LAST WORD	187

“Tout est étroit dans l’Occident. La Grèce est petite: j’ étouffe. La Judée est sèche: je halette. Laissez-moi un peu regarder du côté de la haute Asie, vers le profond Orient.”

MICHELET.

APPRECIATION

It is well, and high time, that the West should know how the East regards it. How few of us realise it and even take the trouble to inquire about it! What notion of our great European writers has this mysterious India, the mother of wisdom and philosophy, the cradle of an immemorial civilization?

The fault, indeed, is not entirely our own if we have been ignorant of it up to now. For more than a century India has been the facile disciple of Europe. She has been echoing mechanically the teachings of England about English writers whose works have been prescribed in her schools and universities. Her own instincts she surrendered. Her personal and deeper impressions she did not express.

It is only during the last few years that she has ventured—once again—to think independently, to recapture her faith in her own national genius and to read the literature of Europe in the light of her own feelings.

For example, what does she think of Shakespeare, who naturally has been presented to her as the supreme genius of the western world? A partial response to this question had already been made in the striking studies

of "Macbeth," "Othello," and "Hamlet" by Mr. Samarajit Dutt who, daring and hostile, had passed a severe judgment on these masterpieces.

Dr. Shahani takes up the theme with a wider horizon. He gives us a "Shakespeare as seen by Orientals" where he seeks impartially to estimate Shakespeare's reputation in India. Let us thank him for coming forward as an historian rather than as partisan or pamphleteer. His study reflects perhaps just a little the agitations of our time. But it is difficult for a reaction to be entirely free from bias.

The cult of Shakespeare had for a long time been imposed upon his country. How could he escape insisting on the parrot-cry in this glorification?

To exhibit this to us, Dr. Shahani invites us to penetrate into the colleges of India. He there shows us school boys and college students mouthing empty praises, mechanical and insincere. He contrasts the dramatic art of Shakespeare, exclusively concerned with the world of the moment, entirely earthly, with the essentially religious and spiritual character of the great Hindu literature. The Indian fails to find in Shakespeare any sustenance for his deep-seated idealism. He cannot take him to heart as he takes his own poets.

Reading Dr. Shahani, one feels that there is a fundamental antagonism between the edifying literature of India and the realism of the dramatist who was content, to use his own words, "to hold the mirror up to nature."

Is this antagonism ineluctable? Possibly. In this case Shakespeare would not be the universal poet, the poet of the whole world, which he has seemed to his English and many of his European admirers.

But we must needs wait before we pronounce judgment one way or the other. Dr. Shahani neither ignores nor seeks to hide the features of his genius that are manifest to the Indians themselves. No doubt when the present period of national reconstruction has completed its work, they may pronounce a judgment that is more calm, more akin to ours, on the Elizabethan poet who now bears the blame for having been during such a long period held up for their unwilling admiration.

EMILE LEGOUIS.

Translation by the author.

INTRODUCTION

THERE is little of this book with which I agree; yet it has interested me curiously. Being totally ignorant of educated Indian opinion concerning Shakespeare, I assume that it is very much as Dr. Shahani depicts it. It does not surprise me that it should be so. I think that the fundamental ethos of a tropical people must necessarily be different from the ethos of a Northern people like ourselves; and I should be disappointed, rather than gratified, to discover that an Indian finds in Shakespeare the same spiritual satisfaction that I find. For I have a dislike of uniformity. That truth on one side of the Alps is falsehood on the other comforts me greatly.

Universal truth has no attraction for me. Not that I do not believe there is a universal truth, and that of a more human order than the truths of mathematics; but I also believe it happens, very beneficently, to be ineffable. When uttered, it becomes local by the fact of utterance.

I am not saying that this ineffable truth receives direct, but local utterance in the works of Shakespeare. But when the author of this book ranges himself with his countrymen in declaring that there is no mysticism

and no religion in Shakespeare I feel that he does not mean by those words the same thing that I mean. True poetry cannot help being religious and mystical; and the supreme form of true poetry, which is tragic drama, is to my sense religious and mystical in a supreme degree. I am interested to find that, to the Indian mind, Tragedy and Religion are contradictory. Again, I am not surprised. After all, Tragedy and orthodox Christianity are in the same state of conflict; and it is only because Christians have abandoned the habit of coherent thinking (or it may be, of really believing in their own doctrines) that the opposition is forgotten. A great Catholic like Bossuet was quite clear on the matter: for him, Tragedy was manifestly non-Christian. The one perfect tragedy was played in Galilee and Jerusalem and ended on Golgotha; and turned out to be not a tragedy at all. That it was not a tragedy is the foundation-stone of Christianity. And, afterwards, for the believing Christian no tragedy was possible among men.

For the orthodox Christian, the tragic view of life is impossible. The attitude of the religious and educated Indian appears to be essentially the same. And the attitude is justified if we can accept the fundamental premiss common to both,—that the world of existence is, in some sense or other, finally unreal. This I cannot believe; and I am sorry for my inability, because it denies me access to a precious source of comfort of which I have felt the need as much as most men. But

to compensate, I find that the tragic contemplation of human destiny, if maintained to the end, does bring a liberation of the spirit from the world of existence. I would not say that it is entirely the same as the release into Nirvana which the Buddha taught; but I will say that it is not entirely different from that blessed condition.

To one the process of this liberation is from first to last religious, at any rate in the finest meaning I can attach to that much- and ill-used word. And I think that Shakespeare, more than any other writer of the West, has the power to lead us towards this end.

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY.