

“IN THE SPICED INDIAN AIR BY
NIGHT”: PERFORMING
SHAKESPEARE’S *MACBETH* IN
POSTMILLENNIAL KERALA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the twenty-first-century intercultural performance of Shakespeare in Kerala, India. The thesis highlights Shakespeare's function in invigorating local performing arts traditions that navigate tensions between paradigms of former feudalism, post-Independence democracy and capitalist globalisation. Throughout, individual artistic perspectives in interview illustrate local productions of *Macbeth* for indigenous Keralan performing art forms, ranging from the two-thousand-year old kutiyattam to contemporary postmodern Malayalam-language drama. My introduction contextualises these hybrid productions in their global, national, and local historiography, exploring intersections of the sacred, supernatural, and secular; postmodernism and rasa theory; intercultural Shakespeares and Keralan performing arts; and Shakespearean works with Indian literary and theatrical traditions from the colonial to the postmillennial era. Chapter One highlights cultural translation, focusing on kutiyattam artist Margi Madhu's 2011 *Macbeth*; Chapter Two discusses cultural collaboration, studying kathakali artist Ettumanoor P. Kannan's *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, 2013; Chapter Three considers cultural fusion, profiling Abhinaya Theatre's experimental local-language production of *Macbeth*, 2011. In closing, the thesis underscores the importance of giving a voice to Keralan theatre artists on Shakespeare, recognising the hitherto critically unexamined potential for the meeting point of two great dramatic cultural traditions as a forum, underpinned by residual colonial and Communist legacies, for intercultural discourse.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the people of Kerala, and to all those who hold its art in their hearts.

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GLOSSARY OF SOME COMMON TERMS¹

Bhava – mood

Chakyar – a hereditary performer of kutiyattam

Cholliyattam [cholliattam] – the simplified rehearsal form of kathakali

Dhvani – resonance, reverberation

Kalarippayattu [kalaripayattu] – Kerala’s traditional martial arts form

Kathakali – Kerala’s traditional dance-drama

Kutiyattam [kudiyattam/koodiyattam/koodiyattom] – Kerala’s ancient Sanskrit theatre form

Kuttampalam [koothambalam/kuttambalam] – Kerala’s ancient theatre hall

Malayalam – the vernacular language of Kerala, India

Navarasa – the rasas from the nine main moods

Natyasastra [*Natya Sastra/Natyashastra*] – Bharata’s ancient Sanskrit performance treatise

Rasa – the aesthetic experience of emotion shared between performer and spectator

Veda – one of four ancient Hindu scriptures

¹ For the reader’s convenience I follow the convention of italicising other, less common Indian-language terms throughout the thesis. With the same rationale, in citing sources throughout the thesis, I retain intact their alternative authorial transliterations with variants in the spelling, punctuation, and italicisation of these terms, such as ‘*Kathakali*,’ ‘*Natya sastra*,’ etc., without inserting [sic] repeatedly.

INTRODUCTION

*Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order:
And, in the spicèd Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th' embarkèd traders on the flood*

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer
Night's Dream* (2.1.121-127)

*Yatho hastastato drish tiryato drish tistato manah
Yatho manastato bhavo yatho bhavastato rasah.
(Just as there is the production of good taste
through the juice produced when different spices,
herbs and other articles are pressed together so
also Rasa (sentiment) is produced when various
Bhavas [moods] get together.)*

Bharata, *Natyasastra*, verse 31 (B.O.S. 73)

Shakespeare's works first reached India by sea, through journeys intimately intertwined with the search for spice, both literal and metaphorical. In the above passage from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare sets up an imagined Indian spice coast as a land of mystery, fertility, and magic.² Here India's shores become a portal that opens up infinite possibility, a meeting point for trade winds and sea sands, Orient and Occident, human and immortal, in a rich mutual exchange. Yet the mutuality and harmony of this encounter are debatable; like the stolen Indian changeling, India's Shakespeare has a chequered history, dominated by enforced rather than reciprocal exchange. In tracing the postcolonial inheritance of India's intercultural Shakespeares to explore the field's postmillennial evolution, this thesis adopts biological metaphors of identity and hybridity typically used to describe the mixing of cultures. The thesis privileges the human perspective in examining individual artistic interpretations of Shakespeare, making case studies of twenty-first-century productions that originate in India. In particular, this thesis studies three recent productions of *Macbeth* for representative performing art forms of India's Kerala State, examining the strategies used to reconcile their different

² Unless otherwise noted, all direct references to Shakespeare's playtexts refer to the 1998 Oxford edition of *The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor.

practical, theoretical, and spiritual traditions. For these Keralan adapters, the ‘spice’ at the heart of their local-language productions is the elaboration of ‘rasa,’ or the idea of the fundamental shared human experience of emotion that underpins the Indian arts (Kapila Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 103). This thesis chooses to focus on *Macbeth* as a Shakespearean work commonly adapted in Kerala. The tragedy provides Keralan adapters with multiple potentialities for reimagination on physical and metaphysical levels, and it gives artists the chance to showcase rasa in its every aspect. While distilling *Macbeth*’s emphasis on inner and outer demons into a morality tale for the new millennium, these artists ultimately assert the agency and diversity of their own performance forms. In exploring their adaptive strategies, the thesis examines their hybrid mixtures of Shakespearean drama with seminal Indian rasa performance theory and praxis. In locating the resulting productions on a world stage, I suggest these hold new implications for existing paradigms of intercultural Shakespeare.

Emotions of ambition and excitement at conquest and the spice trade originally drove India’s engagement with Shakespeare, an exchange that can be traced to his lifetime. Indian critic Sukanta Chaudhuri posits that “outside the western world, India has the longest and most intense engagement with Shakespeare of any country anywhere” (“Introduction” 3). While this is debatable, the playwright writes of the “spicèd Indian air” (*Dream* 2.1.124) shortly after the return of adventurer-writer Ralph Fitch, sailor on the *Tyger*, which set out in 1583 to survey the Indian spice route for English trade purposes. Shakespeare certainly knew of Fitch’s journey, the same hexed by *Macbeth*’s First Witch: “Her husband’s to Aleppo gone, master o’ the Tiger” (1.3.6). The playwright likely read Fitch’s account of his foreign adventures in Richard Hakluyt’s 1598-1600 compendium (Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz 13).³ Fitch

³ For Fitch’s full account, see “The long, dangerous, and memorable voyage of M. Ralph Fitch marchant [sic] of London, by the way of Tripolis in Syria, to Ormuz, to Goa in the East India, to Cambaia, to the river of Ganges, to

records the *Tyger* captain's death, his own capture by the Portuguese, and eight months spent in the contested colonial spice port of Cochin in today's Kerala, a state sandwiched at the tip of India between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. There, in 1589, Fitch awaited the favourable retreating monsoon trade winds and noted: "Heere [sic] groweth the pepper [...] especially about Cochin" (46). These same monsoon winds carried Shakespeare's works to India—as early as 1607, East India Company sailors reportedly performed *Hamlet* aboard, years before the British Empire officially annexed nearly the whole of India, save for its southern peninsular tip (Laurence Wright 5).⁴ By 1609, Fitch's intelligence had led King James I to patent the East India Company's pepper trade. The rest of the history of Shakespeare in India charts a typical teleology of human ambition and conquest: colonial introduction and imposition, followed by post-Independence interpretation, postcolonial and postmillennial (re)appropriation. Accordingly, Indian Shakespeare productions often negotiate tensions latent in their intercultural heritage of ambivalence; performing *Othello*, kathakali artist Arjun Raina states his postcolonial dual "love" and "hate" for Shakespeare ("Quest" n. pag.). Thus, in studying three representative Keralan *Macbeths* for the arts of kutiyattam, kathakali, and modern Malayalam-language drama, the thesis makes use of otherwise unavailable primary documentation to examine the extent to which these productions address or transcend this typical postcolonial binary.

The hybrid history of Shakespeare in postmillennial Kerala, still a hub of global intercultural exchange, complicates the typically applied binaric paradigm of postcolonial

Bengala, to Bacola, to Chonderi, to Pegu, to Siam, &c. begunne in the yeere 1583, and ended in the yeere 1591" [sic] in the Cambridge 2014 edition of Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Vol. 5., pages 465-505.

⁴ British rule became official on 2 August 1858 and lasted until Indian Independence on 15 August 1947, yet by then the British had effectively governed the country for an extra century through the East India Company.

theory. A study of the local Shakespeare in adaptation and performance must be contextualised against the locale's atypical history of religious plurality and political anomaly (G. A. C. Pandeya 21). Aptly, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins define postcolonialism as: "an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies" (2). Yet Keralan Shakespeares often ignore, evade, or transcend this engagement, nor do they always function as the "cultural expressions of resistance to colonisation" that Gilbert and Tompkins describe (ibid.). Even in defining postcolonialism as a "pluralistic outlook" that focuses on both the "direct effects" and the "aftermaths of colonization," theorists such as Jaydeep Sarangi still perpetuate the binary of before-and-after, colonised-and-coloniser (v). Other critics, such as Vilashini Cooppan, point to "the disjunction between the field's eponymous announcement of the passing of colonialism and imperialism" and a continuing global neocolonialism, advocating a wider definition of postcolonialism that includes "anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist energies, practices, politics, and polemics" (11, 16). As an alternative to the label 'postcolonial,' the thesis prefers to use the term 'postmillennial' in proposing a more globally applicable extension of existing theory. This extension is intended to accommodate illustrative case studies of twenty-first-century Keralan-origin theatre productions of Shakespeare. The thesis specifically looks at the attitudes and approaches to Keralan Shakespeares that underpin the three *Macbeth* case studies, and briefly explains the order in which these are treated here.

To contextualise these three *Macbeths* more fully, the thesis introduction is structured to move from the general to the specific. This structure allows me to engage with the multiple cultural and ideological geographies I locate within the overarching field of intercultural Shakespeares. The remainder of this introduction will first establish the thesis structure,

rationale, and methodology, and next discuss intercultural performance theory with a literature review of seminal works, including texts and productions such as Dennis Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (1993), Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* (1985), Ric Knowles' *Theatre and Interculturalism* (2010), and Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin's *Postcolonial Shakespeares* (1998). This opening section will also define basic terms such as 'intercultural', and situate the discussion of Keralan Shakespeare within the global context of twenty-first-century intercultural theatre events such as the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival.

The central section of this introduction will situate Keralan productions in a pan-Indian tradition of theory and performance, contextualising their origins and the studied practitioners' perspectives. This middle section will illustrate Kerala's ancient tradition of interculturalism before turning to Bharata's ancient Sanskrit *Natyasastra* treatise, a work familiar to the theatre artists interviewed here in the case studies. This performance manual emerged in oral form c200 BC-200AD, and it constitutes the philosophical and practical bedrock of the Indian classical arts (K. G. Paulose, *Introduction* 1). In discussing the codified theatrical principles and practices based on the established theory of *rasa*, or the pure experience of feeling shared between actor and audience, this thesis primarily draws on Kapila Vatsyayan's modern translation of the *Natyasastra*, considering her work as the most scholarly in its accurate and comprehensive treatment of the scripture. I will discuss *Natyasastra* theory alongside Keralan commentaries on the treatise, from that of playwright Kavalam Narayana Panikkar to critic K. G. Paulose. This theoretical discussion will be contextualised in a wider overview of Keralan performance texts and the literary and performance history of Keralan-origin Shakespeares, ranging from colonial to postmillennial. Here I will highlight relevant local directors, critics, and dramatists such as Panikkar, G. Sankara Pillai, and Pandeya. In so doing, the thesis will ground the three *Macbeth*

productions profiled here in their relevant local historical, geographical, and sociopolitical context, while relating this to the overarching intercultural framework.

The final section of the introduction will lay out the structure for the three core thesis chapters that each make an in depth case study of one *Macbeth* production. These core chapters will highlight relevant directors and works that provide additional context for these Keralan *Macbeths*, examining productions such as Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona* (2000), the Keli-Leday kathakali *King Lear* (1989, 1999), and Panikkar's Malayalam-language *Kodumkattu (The Tempest)* (2001). This last section will end with a summary of the final thesis chapter that links the body together, presents the research results, outlines the conclusions drawn, and investigates their significance to their local, national, and global contexts and the research area as a whole.

Rationale and research questions

This thesis proposes to chart the range of currently possible twenty-first-century theatrical responses to Shakespeare's works in the state of Kerala, South India. Keralan Shakespeares is yet a critically underresearched area of study. In constructing a theoretical framework to support the illustrative case studies of Keralan Shakespeares that fill this research gap, the thesis modifies and extends extant intercultural performance theories. In so doing, the thesis argues that the typically applied critical paradigm of postcolonial Shakespeares has become inadequate to address the complex topic of Keralan Shakespeares in an increasingly globalised twenty-first century, and I propose that the field is in transition to a postmillennial model.

To document an illustrative sample of local Keralan artistic attitudes and directorial approaches towards Shakespeare, the thesis undertakes case studies of representative local-language versions of *Macbeth*, investigating theatre productions that originate in Kerala and are

performed primarily there, even if they may later travel overseas. My interest in the particular productions discussed here was sparked by the festival titled “Hamara Shakespeare” [Our Shakespeare] that takes place annually in Chennai, capital of Kerala’s neighbouring Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Sponsored by the charitable Prakriti Foundation, the festival showcases Indian-language non-English Shakespeare performance adaptations. The festival’s Hindi-English title and its focus on local-language Shakespeares are indicative of an Indian interest both in promoting local art to a global audience and in appropriating the playwright on local terms.

In February 2011 Hamara Shakespeare hosted three productions, all of *Macbeth*; the festival organiser Ranvir Shah assured me that this conjunction was coincidental (n. pag.). Two of these productions, both titled *Macbeth*, originated in Kerala.⁵ In seeking to provide an illustrative sample of postmillennial Keralan-origin Shakespeare productions, this thesis makes case studies of these two Keralan *Macbeths* (performed 11-12 February 2011) in conjunction with another twenty-first-century production, *Macbeth Cholliyattam* (19 November 2013).⁶ In particular, Chapter One discusses *Macbeth*, a cultural translation by hereditary artist Margi Madhu for his Sanskrit drama form of kutiyattam, India’s oldest surviving performance art (Leah Lowthorp, *Scenarios* 193). Chapter Two looks at *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, a cultural collaboration directed and performed by Ettumanoor P. Kannan for his art form of kathakali, the local dance-drama that “dates back to about the time that Shakespeare was writing his plays” (David Bolland 2). Chapter Three looks at the local Malayalam vernacular translation of *Macbeth* directed by Jyotish M. G. as an experimental postmodern work for Abhinaya Theatre,

⁵ Vikram Iyengar’s *Crossings*, the third production performed in 2011 at Hamara Shakespeare, is not discussed here as it is not Keralan. For a full account of Iyengar’s adaptation, see Paromita Chakravarti and Swati Ganguly’s essay “Dancing to Shakespeare” in *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, pages 272-290.

⁶ In 2014, Abhinaya’s *Macbeth* also shared a Shakespearean double bill with *Macbeth Cholliyattam* at the Janabheri National Theatre Festival held on 22 April in Thrissur, Kerala, suggesting a more conscious juxtaposition.

a Keralan theatre collective.⁷ These three Keralan productions engage with the same Shakespearean work, even if they encounter different issues in their respective performance contexts, as will be discussed in the thesis body.



Figure 1: Margi Madhu as Macbeth, Hamara Shakespeare Festival, photograph © *The Hindu*.

The selection of *Macbeth* productions is a conscious choice for the thesis. In providing a control, this unified focus on *Macbeth* ideally can reveal differences in directorial approach as well as the dissimilarities or individual challenges arising in dealing with the varying artistic codes of each art form. While the thesis grounds these three Keralan *Macbeth* productions in

⁷ Typically, Keralan names are transliterated from the phonetic Malayalam language into English, resulting in flexibility in their English spelling and punctuation; alternatively, his name is spelt Jyothish M. G.

their fundamental basis in *Natyasastra* strictures, the three case studies are treated as moving within and across multiple circles and geographies of ideas, *intracultural* as well as intercultural.

The text of *Macbeth* offers fruitful potentialities to Keralan adapters on thematic, practical, and spiritual levels. The play deals with feudal hierarchies, a familiar social setup that existed in Kerala until the Communist reforms of the mid-twentieth century (Phillip B. Zarrilli and Carol Sorgenfrei 470). *Macbeth*'s supernatural theme is also topical; Keralan myth is rife with false prophecies, and black magic is still practiced in the state, reflecting a wider "Indian belief in the black arts" (R. K. Yajnik 173). *Macbeth*, second in popularity among translations in India, fits neatly into an historic Indian literary and performance tradition of moral allegory (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 17; Bruce McConachie et al. 81). Shakespeare's Scottish tale is already familiar to the Malayali audience, offering these artists performative possibilities in terms of elaborating sections of the story to show off their personal artistic interpretation (A. J. Varkki vii). For Asian adapters, Alexa Huang argues, *Macbeth* particularly "suits such cultural crossings, since it can be boiled down to a set of emotions and mental pictorial images rather than culturally or historically specific allusions in history plays" (*Macbeth* 5). In terms of genre, Shakespeare's shortest tragedy supplements Indian canons where the tragic ending is rare and the typical protagonist is virtuous.

In the play's human reiteration of dialectics that lead to the liminal, supernatural, and ineffable, *Macbeth* also represents that magical meeting point of the horizons of imagination. *Macbeth* affords these Keralan productions an opportunity where "the treatment of the other-worldly can be considered a metonymy for the intercultural meeting with another world" and the "interruption of ordinary human reality [...] forms a break or join where the systems of belief, cultural practices and performance conventions of a non-Christian culture interact"

(Yong Li Lan, “Of Spirits” 48-49). Thus, *Macbeth* presents an opportunity for adapters to experiment through creating a space for dialogue between languages, art forms, or belief systems, that intercultural midpoint that Indian philosopher Homi Bhabha terms the “interstitial” or “third space” (*Location* 3, 1). In exploring these ideas, to offset the potential limitations of focusing on only Keralan *Macbeths*, this introduction discusses these three productions in conjunction with a brief critical and performance history of Keralan Shakespeares.

Overall, the thesis aims to remedy the comparative critical silence surrounding Shakespeares that originate in Kerala. The critical neglect so far accorded to Keralan Shakespeares is regrettable, because the subfield represents a rich and rapidly evolving area of study that can contribute much to a better understanding of a field that has traditionally struggled to overcome a narrower outlook of Anglocentricity (Nandi Bhatia, “Codes of Empire” 105; Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris 9). This paucity of research is unaccountable in a state like Kerala, with a high literacy rate, a large proportion of English second-language speakers, and compulsory English-medium higher education (P. Bhaskaran Nayar 5-6; Zarrilli, *Dance Drama* 202). The critical silence is furthered by the typically esoteric and inaccessible nature of traditional Keralan art forms to a non-native audience or a non-Malayalam-language speaker (Loomba, “Postcolonial Performance” 129). This vacuum presents those practitioners who adapt Shakespeare with both an opportunity and a challenge; any changes introduced in the way of practice or content in the traditional Keralan arts represent a marked departure from tradition rather than a subtle intercultural absorption.

In considering *Macbeth* as performed in three Keralan theatre forms—kuttiyattam, kathakali, and postmodern Malayalam drama—I choose to examine representative productions

from around and after the turn of the current century. I consider that these productions offer a snapshot of the rapidly evolving Keralan attitude towards Shakespeare in the world's largest secular democracy. Over the following chapters, I will respond to the following research questions: Why has Shakespeare been a popular subject for Keralan adaptations of Western spoken drama, especially into traditional art forms which are largely ritualistic, mime-based, and stylistically restricted? How far does their setting—social, political, and cultural—in a Commonwealth and post-imperial India affect these interpretations? Do these productions reflect contemporary secular democratic concerns and dynamics; do they reconcile or remain restricted by differences in traditional stylistic and cultural codes? Have they managed, failed, or even intended to be intercultural? Answering these complicated questions necessitates a flexible, receptive research methodology, as will be detailed in the following section.

Methodology

The thesis adopts a methodology of interviews, field research, and archival studies in making the three case studies. These three *Macbeth* productions have been selected on the basis of their relevance as well as their comparative ease of accessibility for research purposes. The Hamara Shakespeare Festival productions had already been documented in print and (partially) in video for their archives, and the management could provide me with contact information and introductions to the artists. In studying the relatively underresearched area of Keralan Shakespeares, where performance archives are rare, materials are often out of print, and the records of transmission are largely oral, the case study method has proven to be a valuable format that allows for recording first-person experiential narratives. The primary source of information comes from first-person interviews I conducted with the main performers and

adapters of these three *Macbeth* productions with the objective of providing an illustrative sample of Keralan Shakespeares. I also interviewed the Hamara Shakespeare Festival producer Ranvir Shah, to document the observations of a related major stakeholder in South Indian Shakespeare. My aim here of presenting a narrow research field from as wide an angle as possible is underpinned by the assumption that multiple interviews will involve multiple perspectives. This is especially useful here in dealing with traditional art forms where an artist's individualistic interpretation and improvisation is an accepted part of an evening's performance.

In privileging the subjective viewpoints of Keralan artists and adapters to best address a subject that is creative and personal, my adopted methodology investigates the challenges and latent tensions faced by local practitioners in adapting Shakespeare to fit their own cultural contexts. In exploring why Shakespeare has been the subject of Keralan theatre productions, and examining these practitioners' strategies, it is necessary to narrow the focus from the intercultural to examine Keralan culture. Thus, the thesis also looks at the extent to which their social, political, and cultural setting affects these productions of *Macbeth*.

Here the interview method enables a reflection on collective traditions such as the theatre codes laid down in India's seminal *Natyasastra* treatise followed by generations, while also allowing for individual recording of first-hand experiences. Huang values this primary, experiential approach: "Scholars are now seeking answers to how Asian Shakespeare formulates firsthand experience rooted in Asia [...] practitioners' perspectives are equally valuable" ("Asian Shakespeare 2.0." 2-3). It is important to allow these individual voices to be heard; Gayatri Spivak warns cogently that in enabling the Indian subaltern to speak, one must exercise care to avoid imposing assumptions of a collective universal identity and reproducing unequal colonial power structures (*Live Theory* 121-124). The interview format ideally allows

for an appropriate response to the critical silence, while including different voices in an attempt to avoid pigeonholing Keralan Shakespeares. Such potential limitations are important to bear in mind, with the first-person interview increasing in popularity as a methodology in the wider intercultural field of Asian Shakespeare (see Poonam Trivedi and Ryuta Minami 6). The chosen case study method therefore provides both the necessary focus to examine these perspectives in depth, as well as the flexibility to locate these in their individual contemporary contexts on a case by case basis (Robert Scapens 267).

To record individual perspectives more accurately, interviews were semi-structured in format, with pre-prepared open-ended questions. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed for accuracy and supplemented with notes taken at the time; transcripts were sent back to the interviewees to double check and add or remove comments. The transcripts were then coded by hand, cross-referencing repeated themes in seeking to build case studies illustrative of the thesis topic of Keralan Shakespeares (ibid. 270). Extra care has also been taken in designing the mode, format, and content of questions, to minimise or avoid the “demand effect” where the interviewee purposefully acts to help the researcher (David Marginson 331). My perspective is that of an insider, having grown up in Kerala and studied the main local performing arts. Yet this obvious insider bias may also aid in encouraging trust among interviewees and a willingness to openly communicate their experiences.

To aid in reliability, besides these interviews the thesis incorporates multiple sources of evidence. I have observed performances live where possible, supplemented by viewing archival footage. I have further compared these interviews to those in other documentations of the same production, such as newspaper reviews or verbal accounts of performances. To aid its methodological objectivity, the research design also takes into account evidence that contradicts

my contention that postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares are outgrowing extant critical paradigms. I argue that in an age of globalisation it has become necessary to relate the research area to the overarching field of intercultural Shakespeare. Thus, in seeking to answer the research questions, the thesis grounds its evidence in the ongoing theoretical debate regarding the parameters of intercultural Shakespeares, which will be elaborated in the following section.

Intercultural Shakespeares: theory and terminology

Moving from the general to the specific, this section situates these three profiled Keralan *Macbeth* productions in the overarching theoretical framework of intercultural Shakespeares and the surrounding scholarly conversation. Thus, the section provides a brief literary, filmic, and performance history of selected translations and productions, and it reviews selected postcolonial and Marxist criticism, contextualising the ongoing evolution of Keralan Shakespeares from postcolonial to postmillennial. Later on, selected literature on adaptation theory, literary criticism, and traditions of local religious performance is incorporated throughout the thesis chapters, to illustrate the ways in which these Keralan *Macbeth* productions reconstitute “local and community identities” across practical, theoretical, and spiritual levels (Ric Knowles 4). In focusing on twenty-first-century Keralan Shakespeares, the thesis ignores a large amount of extant research on the history of Shakespeare across colonial and postcolonial India. This scholarship is referred to only as needed to contextualise the thesis topic, with ideological geographies privileged over physical.

These Keralan *Macbeths* exist in a flexible twenty-first-century ‘glocal’ culture, one that marries local customs to a global outlook. By definition, culture includes shared human experience: the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “culture” as “the arts and other

manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded *collectively*; the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or *society*; the attitudes and behaviour characteristic of a particular social *group*” [my emphases] (n. pag.). Yet in the new millennium where the “social group” can encompass our globe, culture has become increasingly complex, shifting and shaped by individuals. Writing on intercultural Shakespeare performance, Erin Sullivan posits that there is no “easy summary of what Shakespeare ‘means’ in the twenty-first century,” when productions fold “into his plays their own cultural concerns, artistic forms and political engagements” (9). To describe this mutability, the thesis prefers Lan’s more flexible definition of culture as a set of shared values, “a nebulous, heterogeneous, constantly fluctuating collocation of practices and attitudes that is loosely gathered under an ethnic, regional or national name” (“Of Spirits” 48). Similarly, this thesis adopts Knowles’ fluid definition of intercultural theatre: “a site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstitution of individual and community identities” (4). Likewise, Keralan Shakespeares continuously renegotiate their own culture, in turn validating Bhabha’s contention that “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (*Location* 37). Thus, intercultural performance could be viewed as a project that mingles two discrete and established artistic traditions from different cultures.

Accordingly, intercultural performance is a joint endeavour that combines intercultural elements in various positions or proportions to produce a new work. Similarly, Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins define intercultural performance as the “meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions” (7). However, this rather narrow view occludes other models such as intercultural overlap, subsuming, or fusion—Patrice Pavis points out that intercultural performance can include “hybridization such that the original forms can no longer

be distinguished” (*Reader* 8). More useful here is Bhabha’s fluid concept of cultural “hybridity” with its interstitial “third space” discussed in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Borrowing architectural metaphor inspired by site-specific artist Renée Green, Bhabha here likens the third space to a stairwell between two parallel buildings, a tabula rasa of infinite possibility and a medium to facilitate intercultural communication (5). Correspondingly, these Keralan *Macbeth* productions function as a portal that allows an experience between multiple dimensions or multiple participants to exist in the space between cultures, allowing cultural communion. When Knowles uses the term “hybridity” he discusses a theatrical flow *across* cultures, with cities “newly global” and diverse audiences coexisting for a time in the same space (2). Yet this thesis conceives of hybridity as a metaphor closer to Bhabha’s, one that allows for interstices and multiple dimensions (*Location* 5). As Keralan Shakespeares present multiple modes of interculturalism, this thesis seeks to include several case studies with differing models of intercultural performance, to extend its theoretical remit into the twenty-first century.

In using intercultural performance theory to underpin my research, it must be underlined that the term ‘intercultural’ is contested, and best practice models are still debated. Critical theories range along a spectrum of intercultural exchange, from fixed and unidirectional, to two-way and mutual, to multidirectional, hybrid, and fluid. Postcolonial critics argue that interculturalism is a reproduction of unequal colonial power structures; Una Chaudhuri decries Anglocentric intercultural theatre’s wholesale appropriation of Indian elements as “cultural rape” (193). Pavis’ influential “hourglass model” depicts intercultural performance as a one-way cultural exchange where East and West exist in cultural opposition as the glass’ two halves (*Crossroads* 4-6). In the vacuum of an unequal postcolonial conversation, Western theatre appropriates Eastern elements, much as the running sands of time flow irretrievably through the

hourglass despite its apparent symmetry. Interculturalism is often presented as a polarised concept, with two cultures in opposition, or the ‘foreign’ and the ‘indigenous.’

Critics of this binaric oversimplification point out that the original Shakespearean drama seems foreign to us today, even in its original geographical location, because of the historical and cultural distance involved (Anthony Tatlow 5). The idea of ‘other’ versus ‘our’ Shakespeares is challenged in Kennedy’s influential *Foreign Shakespeare* (1993), the first modern collection to recognise non-Anglocentric Shakespeare as a separate field worthy of study in its own right. Writing later with Lan, Kennedy redefined the term ‘intercultural’ in arguing that the concept now involves West-East hybridisation in a fundamentally equal exchange: “the ‘conqueror’ is equally enslaved by the ‘indigene’” (10). Despite this ideal of parity, Vasudha Dalmia avers that “intercultural” is a Western term, so its use should be restricted to Western work, such as that by Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Brook, and Eugenio Barba (295). Typically, Indian critics perceive scholarship on intercultural Shakespeare as a conversation that is still often dominated by Anglocentric artists and critics at the expense of indigenous voices.

Critical opinion is divided as to the ideal model to accommodate the cultural relationships in intercultural theatre. While Pavis foregrounds binaric East-West and coloniser-versus-colonised perspectives, his hourglass model has become increasingly obsolete to describe intercultural theatre involving other modes of interchange. Yet Knowles takes issue with terms such as “transcultural,” later preferred by Pavis (4). Knowles cites Pavis’ own unidirectional hourglass metaphor in arguing that communicating Indian culture to a Western audience can never be transdirectional (25). Instead, Knowles privileges intercultural difference, and warns of the danger of the more dominant West “cannibalising” indigenous theatrical forms without respect for their source cultures (12). He cites English theatre director

Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* (1985)—a performance adaptation of India's great Hindu epic that included Keralan and other Indian art forms—as an example of misuse of intercultural elements (22). Brook's production polarised critical opinion; Rustom Bharucha is among those polemical critics who term it disrespectful in its decontextualisation of its source culture, a “distorting” process resulting in “a tale told by an idiot” (*World* 4, 76-77). Such a process generalises and essentialises rather than “provoking audiences to examine the tensions between cultures” (Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert 47). Conversely, Brook privileges a universalist viewpoint; Knowles attributes this to a largely Western (and reductive) view of intercultural theatre productions as holding the potential to create a “utopia” through the search for and celebration of our “common humanity” (2). Increasing globalisation has only complicated this intercultural conversation.

The parameters of intercultural Shakespeare studies no longer align to a simplistic East-West binaric axis, but exist in an age of glocal inter- and intraculturalism between multiple local and global centres. Accordingly, former postcolonial paradigms are increasingly inadequate to represent the multidirectional complexity of intercultural Shakespeares following twenty-first-century globalisation, media digitisation, and international migration. For postmillennial intercultural Shakespeares, Lan suggests: “Instead of a relation between ‘x’ and ‘y’ cultures [...], global movements of people and media actually define those cultures” (“Elsewhere” 212). Thus, to describe productions such as the Keralan *Macbeths*, former models of one-way or two-way cultural movements are no longer adequate. For example, in *Macbeth Chollyyattam*, Shakespeare's English text parallels the Malayalam verse of kathakali in non-opposition, necessitating rather a horizontal model that allows for symbiosis and flux.

Concurrently, scholars of intercultural Shakespeares have begun to recognise the field's transition to a postmillennial state of decentrism. Bhabha takes exception to the division of the world along local-global axes, arguing: "Contemporary globalization exists in a palimpsestical, side-by-side movement of inequities and disjunctions, rather than a binary or polarized dynamic that has been normalized in the global discourse through the variants of local and global" ("Epilogue" 269). Conversely, by privileging a "local-global axis," Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia's collection *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage* (2008) attempts to "explode the prevailing [postcolonial] binary logic" of "hegemonic and the subaltern, the West and the rest" (6). Kapadia posits that several Shakespeare productions that stress "the intraculturalism of Indian identity" successfully move beyond the "colonial/postcolonial binary" (92). While this qualification is applicable to the Keralan *Macbeth* productions, less useful is Dionne and Kapadia's description of Shakespeare appropriations as inherently postcolonial and binaric, or "a site of contest where identity and ideology converge but perhaps never cohere" and where "the ideology of the text can be [either] reinforced or resisted" (7, 9). More apt for these Keralan productions is Kennedy and Lan's expansion of interculturalism into a concept accommodating "plurality" (14). The combination of two or more different cultures can take various forms, and a few of these are considered here as they emerge in the different versions of *Macbeth*.

Productions such as the Abhinaya *Macbeth*, mingling influences from Sigmund Freud to Gordon Craig, have outgrown even theoretical models that allow for cultural multiplicity, such as Christopher Balme's proposed third type of indigenous intercultural theatre, which features essentially new forms in a fusion where both retain their cultural integrity (20). Pavis' notion of unified hybridity is more accurate in representing the full extent of the cultural fusion (*Reader*

8). Paraphrasing Oswald de Andrade, Poonam Trivedi aptly describes India's typical subsumption, transformation, and reconstitution of Shakespeare as a perverse form of homage in its "cannibalisation" (*Cannibalist Manifesto* 43; *Quarterly* 158).⁸ Yet in their "deterritorializing" and "reterritorializing," in which Shakespeare is transformed by the indigenous art form, these Keralan *Macbeths* further resemble the rhizomatic formations proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (194). Arguably, these *Macbeths* fit Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm of rhizomatic minor literature that "pluralizes tradition from within, making new connections and suggesting new beginnings" (Jonathan Gil Harris 59). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari see their rhizome theory as holding the potential for subjectivity in its enabling of interrelated symbiotic plurality.

In their interrelatedness, these subjective Keralan *Macbeths* evoke the organic growth of Deleuze and Guattari's proposed rhizomatic network. These authors write of organic "assemblages" with a "multiplicity" of simultaneous flows: semiotic, material, social (25). Such flows circulate in a network of diffused roots. This network differs from that of the "banyan tree" in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi's metaphor for appropriative translation in India (10). Bassnett and Trivedi describe this as "a natural process of organic, ramifying, vegetative growth and renewal, comparable perhaps with the process by which an ancient banyan tree sends down branches which then in turn take root all around it and comprise an intertwined family of trees" (10). Instead, Keralan Shakespeares resemble the rhizomatic network of the banana tree, where a central taproot is replaced with an assemblage of related yet decentralised individual growths.

⁸ Here, de Andrade writes of cultural cannibalism as: "[a]bsorption of the sacred enemy. To turn him into a totem."

Furthermore, these Keralan *Macbeths* evoke Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory in their lateral growth. These productions move in "oblique directions, making connections with unexpected times and places" (Harris 59). Correspondingly, these three productions harmonise with rhizomatic theoretical paradigms with their "diffused connections, movement" and "multiplicity" of "turbulent formations that stray across the boundary" (ibid. 58-59). Simultaneously, they use Shakespeare's "plays to produce dynamic, hybrid assemblages of their own, performing modes of interpretations that are different from what we have seen thus far in formalism, structuralism, and deconstruction" (ibid. 59, 61). Accordingly, these three *Macbeth* productions feature symbiotic systems with multiple, horizontal, metamorphic interconnections, while retaining their own individuality in their growths of creativity. Having established their dynamic and hybrid intercultural theoretical framework, the introduction now turns to tracing the mixed genealogies of these Keralan *Macbeths*. The next section locates these productions in Shakespeare's encounter with Keralan culture, rooted in its ancient Indian theatrical heritage.

Locating Keralan Shakespeares: historic interculturalism

In analysing intercultural Shakespeare performance in Kerala, it is important to contextualise Keralan culture both before and after the assimilation of Shakespeare within the cultural consciousness (Maurizio Calbi, "*Dancing*" 34). Today, "Shakespeare is everywhere in a nation such as India, in the very language of political debate and public utterance, of Bombay cinema, of signs of the road, in names of prize-winning varieties of mangoes, in reflections upon the past, or in pronouncements about current affairs [by a Keralan MP]" (Loomba, "Possibilities" 121). However, Kerala's Shakespeares are interlinked with its idiosyncratic traditions and performing arts forms, rooted in its identity as a state in the culturally and

linguistically distinct Dravidian region of South India. The majority of Kerala was “never directly ruled by any colonial power [...] [aside from] Kerala’s Malabar region, [...] becoming part of the Madras Presidency until Indian independence” (Leah Lowthorp, “Voices” 174-175 fn. 8). With a population today of over thirty million united primarily by their common first language of Malayalam, progressive modern-day Kerala outshines India’s other states in its indices of health, education, and gender equality.⁹ English is spoken as a second (and occasionally, first) language throughout the state, and Shakespeare is still a fixture on the official syllabi of Kerala’s English-medium private schools and universities, presenting a perfect forum for continued intercultural experimentation.

In focusing on Keralan Shakespeares, this thesis acknowledges that often they are still subsumed under the intercultural umbrella of Indian Shakespeares due to their geographical and historical origins. Keralan theatre historian G. Sankara Pillai charts the journey of Shakespeare’s plays from the coast to the Indian interior, writing that the pan-Indian imitation of British theatre first spread from their port cities of Calcutta and Bombay (29). Next, itinerant Maharashtrian Parsi theatre companies circulated the new western imitations to the South, via the route of Madras, Mysore, and Tamil Nadu to Kerala (ibid.). Along the way, Shakespeare eventually underwent his own metaphorical “sea-change” and became transmuted into something “rich and strange” (*The Tempest* 1.2.403-404). Later in this introduction I trace the history of Kerala’s relationship with Shakespeare from pre-Independence India to present-day Kerala.

Yet in focusing throughout the thesis on the intercultural renegotiations involved in Keralan Shakespeares, I take exception to generalising these under a national category. India lacks cultural homogeneity as a nation; even its geographic borders are still disputed. As

⁹ Pandeya traces the advent of *marumakkattayam* (the matrilineal system) in Kerala to the 12th century (21). For a more detailed discussion, see Ayyappa Paniker’s introduction in *Kathakali and Kutiyattam* (v).

Kennedy and Lan write in their introduction to *Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance*, India “is a bit of a fiction as a nation” (5). Regarding the idea of a single national Shakespeare tradition, defining the term ‘intercultural’ becomes further complicated. Rustom Bharucha holds that “regional, sectarian, and communitarian considerations of diverse Indian performances would fissure the very identity of a unitary India in the first place,” to the extent that Pavis’ hourglass model could never accommodate the necessary blockages and interruptions (“Foreign Asia” 24). Even India’s national slogan “unity in diversity” acknowledges its multiplicity of geographies, customs, and languages.

Reflecting this variety, postmillennial Shakespeares in India often operate along boundaries of ideologies rather than geographies. These Shakespeares juxtapose an older and vernacular small-town India—“feudal, orthodox, mired in caste and community conflicts—against the global and secular India of mobile phones, university-going women, and inter-community marriages” (Paromita Chakravarti 668). India has no unified approach to Shakespeare, as Kennedy and Lan establish (6). To address this plurality, they propose three possible ways of viewing the playwright’s relationship in countries such as India: “nationalist appropriation, colonial instigation, and intercultural revision” (ibid. 7). These latter two views best fit India’s evolutionary identity, as a once-colonised territory, then a fiercely independent new nation, and now a burgeoning geographical and political entity balancing its diaspora and the coexistence of postmodern and ancient worldviews.

Yet Keralan Shakespeares are rooted in an atypical cultural hybridity that is inadequately addressed by adopting postcolonial perspectives. In *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, Loomba contends that ‘hybridity’ is a problematic term to apply to intercultural Shakespeares in India, as the country contains “many hybridities” (“Possibilities” 133). She asserts that critical use of

the term “concentrate[s] on colonial culture” while ignoring the nuances of the “ideological sieve” that filters ideas in both directions (“Othello Fellows” 148-149). However, Poonam Trivedi discusses Keralan Shakespeares as “an example of the kind of hyphenated hybridity that Homi Bhabha has elaborated, which is an opening out and a remaking of the boundaries and limits of culture” (“Folk Shakespeare” 189). In *Remaking Shakespeare*, she explains that “Kerala as a whole escaped the ravages of cultural [British] colonialism, so that its regional dance, music and literature have a longer continuity than in many other, especially north Indian, regions” (“Other Shakespeares” 68). Instead, Kerala easily assimilates outside influences into its own culture.

Shakespeare’s arrival with the East India Company occurred decades after the landings of the colonial Dutch, Danish, French, and Portuguese, originally attracted by Cochin’s spice trade and its tolerant hospitality. Precolonial Cochin was “the world trade center of the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea” (Bindu Malieckal 161). Historian Pandeya lists the visits of “Phoenicians, Egyptians, Syrians, Jews, Romans, [...] Greek ambassadors, Megasthenes, China [sic], Dutch, French, English” and the influence of “Buddhist, Jain, Brahmin, Christian” on Kerala’s “social structure, art and architecture and dance and music” (10-11). Multiple waves of traders, refugees, missionaries and colonisers have sought tolerant Keralan shores, resulting in richly creative literary and performance hybridities.

The typical Keralan accommodation of cultural difference leaves an interstitial third space naturally open for the insertion of foreign nuances into local literature and performance. An early representative theatre hybrid is the fourteenth-century theatre form of *chavittu natakam*. This Keralan folk dance-drama mixes Indian footwork with European costumes and “an assertively non-Hindu cast of heroes such as Charlemagne and St. George,” borrowing from

the mystery and miracle plays of the proselytising Portuguese (Bharucha, *Foreign Shakespeare* 19; G. Sankara Pillai 28). The advent of Christian philosophy and European history predates the arrival of the Portuguese or of Shakespeare. Circa AD 52, St. Thomas the Apostle introduced Christianity to the Malabar coast, and Kerala still hosts Asia's largest annual Christian gathering at Maramon (K. Bharata Iyer 3). Cochin holds both India's oldest church and its oldest synagogue. Seeking Keralan spice, Vasco da Gama was buried there in St. Francis Church in 1524, before Shakespeare wrote of a divine "knell / That summons thee to heaven, or to hell" (2.1.63-64). The Keralan tolerance for multiple religions is representative of a local tradition of interculturalism that lends itself to Bhabha's idea of the "cultural hybridity that entertains difference" (5). In Salman Rushdie's novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), this hybrid tradition enables to the author set up his Shylockian protagonist Abraham Zogoiby, dealer in "pepper, the coveted Black Gold of Malabar," as both a descendent of da Gama and a member of the Keralan Jewish community (Rushdie 6; Malieckal 162). Arguably, Kerala's interculturalism easily accommodates Shakespeare.

Despite Kerala's early tradition of interculturalism, its theatrical hybridity dates chiefly from the colonial era. Critics concur that regarding "ancient Greek and Indian performance [...]" there is no evidence of influence in either direction" (Farley P. Richmond, Darius Swann, and Phillip Zarrilli 81; R. K. DasGupta 17). Instead, India's ancient *Natyasastra* treatise "continues to have relevance today for articulating a theory of art which can be clearly distinguished from Aristotelian or subsequent theories of aesthetic and art in the post-Renaissance West" (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 26).¹⁰ Having discussed Keralan culture's foreign influences and

¹⁰ It must be noted here that this thesis delves into the *Natyasastra* rules, philosophy, and related commentaries only so far as required. Commentaries such as Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabhāratī* (c950AD) discuss rasa in further depth.

intercultural hybridities, in the next section I turn to the influences of ancient Indian performance theory on Keralan Shakespeares, exploring in particular the theory of Bharata's *Natyasastra*.

Keralan drama: Sanskrit origins in practice

Keralan productions such as the kutiyattam and kathakali *Macbeths* demonstrate a necessary innovation, negotiating their art forms' traditional Sanskrit-based strictures in a postmillennial, secular society where these rules are increasingly outdated. Practically, theoretically, and spiritually, the Keralan performing arts tradition derives from the Sanskrit *Natyasastra* treatise, "the single cohesive fountainhead for all the arts, although principally for theatre" (ibid.). Over thirty-six chapters, the comprehensive *Natyasastra* "traces the origins of drama and explains how to construct an appropriate theatre building. It explains how to worship the gods prior to performance, discusses types of plays, playwriting, costuming and makeup, character types and behavior, movement, gesture, and internal methods for acting the moods and states of being of characters" (Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli 82). Bharata's authoritative *Natyasastra* "was adhered to [...] (until the nineteenth century or the modern period) consistently throughout the subcontinent" (Vatsyayan 26).¹¹ While 'natya' translates to the performance of dance or drama, 'sastra' is scripture. As a "Veda [scripture] of drama" the *Natyasastra* is also "considered a holy book of Hinduism" (Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli 82). Accordingly, the Hindu treatise

¹¹ The four 'Vedas' or sacred oral scriptures are source of wisdom in Hindu culture, considered received from the gods and transmitted through generations of priests in unbroken lineage. These scriptures contain philosophical and religious instructions on how to lead a good life; today they are UNESCO protected as masterpieces of human heritage. The *Natyasastra* is also known as the 'fifth Veda,' as Sadanam Balakrishnan writes in *Kathakali*, page 12.

contains a detailed account of the basic rules and varied procedures as well as the religious observations to be followed in performance.

Structurally, Bharata's model has the potential to receive Shakespeare. His Sanskrit drama "has a rigid frame, sophisticated structure with a beginning, development and denouement, the five junctures with their innumerable limbs for the plot and the actor imitating the historical character. All these go to develop the principal sentiment, either heroic or erotic" (Paulose, *Improvisations* 23). Accordingly, the classical Sanskrit drama aimed "to evoke the essence of feelings or states of being (*rasas*)" (John Gillies et al. 276). In this theoretical universe, Shakespearean comedy finds easier accommodation than does tragedy. In Sanskrit drama: "The principle of development was not action or *agon*, but contrast and elaboration. Conclusions were neither tragic nor comic, but reunifying and harmonising" (ibid.). In particular, Sanskrit drama is equated to Shakespeare in its reverential 'classical' label.

Sanskrit and Shakespearean drama share a perceived status as canonical, time-honoured, 'elite,' and 'high' art. Margi Madhu, performer-director of *Macbeth* for kutiyattam, claims he adapted Shakespeare because the playwright is "a classical writer" like the Sanskrit-based "kutiyattam is a classical form" (interview n. pag.).¹² Kutiyattam remains the only living practical model of India's Sanskrit performance tradition and follows its prescribed rigid strictures (Vatsyayan 32). Accordingly, kutiyattam artist G. Venu maintains that "For a proper understanding of India's ancient style of enacting or presenting a drama, a careful study of Kutiyattam is as essential as the study of Bharata's *Natyasastra*" (*Into the World* 179). Stylistic features of Sanskrit drama survive mainly in kutiyattam and in its derivative art form kathakali, described at length in the thesis chapters. Both Sanskrit-origin art forms showcase rich costumes

¹² Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Margi Madhu throughout the thesis I refer to our personal interview.

against simple sets; feature a live vocal and instrumental accompaniment including drums, conch and cymbals; and typically incorporate moral instruction through appropriate stock characters with codified face paint. India's *Natyasastra* treatise is thus a guidebook to artistic performance as a means of moral enlightenment and aesthetic enjoyment, culminating in the soul's ecstatic union with the consciousness of divinity (Sadanam Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 71). Thus, the *Natyasastra* is intended to be philosophical as well as practical in its instruction.

In adapting *Macbeth* for *Natyasastra*-derived dramatic art forms, the kutiyattam and kathakali productions profiled here renegotiate a dual inheritance of dramatised allegory. Like England's morality plays, Kerala's Sanskrit-origin drama illustrates man's fall and salvation, narrating tales of gods and demons from religious epics.¹³ These tales are presented in episodes elaborated over hours or nights. This artistic elaboration provides space to expand on the aesthetic theory of *rasa* intrinsic to the *Natyasastra*. 'Rasa' equates to the enjoyment and experience derived from art, variously translated as flavour, relish, core taste, or aesthetic sentiment; the theory will be detailed in the next section.

Bharata's *Natyasastra* treatise: *rasa* theory

The *Natyasastra* distinguishes between *rasa* and *bhava*, "calling the everyday emotions 'bhava' and their aesthetic equivalents 'rasa'" (David George 54).¹⁴ However, both terms equate to the display of emotion in performance. In *Indian Ink*, the central lover Das explains aptly that *rasa* is "the emotion which the artist must arouse in you" (Tom Stoppard 29). Similarly, Margi Madhu foregrounds this theory of emotion in his performance, telling Nileena M. S. [sic] that

¹³ I do not explore the marvellous later Sanskrit dramas of "India's Shakespeare," the North Indian poet-playwright Kalidasa (c4th-5th century AD), considering these as tangential to Keralan performance traditions.

¹⁴ In the Malayalam language, these terms become 'rasam' and 'bhavam.'

in kutiyattam, the display of “*bhavam* is more important, not the story. What matters is how the artist approaches the text” (n. pag.).¹⁵ Rasa is thus an experience of emotion that is “produced by a medium rather than a cause and which can be savoured or enjoyed for its own sake because it has no immediate need or even opportunity to express itself in some behaviour or action” (George 54). While Vatsyayan maintains that the “notion of *rasa* and *bhava* continues to be of relevance in the most contemporary styles of music and dance” the Sanskrit concepts are slippery, with a multiplicity of individual interpretations by artists and audiences (*Bharata* 25). George defines *rasa* as “liquid,” “sap,” or “essence”—just as we talk of the ‘essence of roses’” remarking that “*rasa* remains the combination of the essence of a natural phenomenon and also the experience of that essence, an experience soon associated with notions of exhilaration, joy, even ecstasy” (53-54). Here, George speculates that the “joy” and “shift in consciousness” experienced regarding *rasa* may have to do with its approximation to the intoxicating Indian hemp drink, or soma (53). Similarly, Erin Mee defines *rasa* as “juice” or “flavor,” [...] it refers to the emotional essence of a production, to that which can be tasted in performance” (*India* 8). Therefore, the concept of *rasa* equates to the spice of life, imbibed and enjoyed through an intoxicating, shared aesthetic experience of art.

While Shakespeare’s authorial intentions remain largely inscrutable, Indian critics continue to read these through Indian drama theory. S. Viswanathan identifies Shakespeare’s use of *dhvani*, or the experience of resonance between audible and audience, to create *rasa* (245). Viswanathan posits that “the sort of suggestiveness, *dhvani* one can call it, through which Shakespeare effects the communication [in *Macbeth*] may be felt to have the overall consequence of an evocation of the *rasa* or sentiment of an ‘unknown fear’” (245). In this

¹⁵ Keralan names often involve multiple initials in prefix or suffix. Accordingly, to avoid confusion throughout the remainder of the thesis, I cite Nileena M. S. primarily as Nileena.

evocation, the *Natyasastra* treats drama and dramatic sentiment as a representation of life rather than its reality. George differentiates the *Natyasastra* from “its Western equivalent, Aristotle’s *Poetics*,” remarking that “whether or not Aristotle intended his ‘pity and fear’ to describe discretely *aesthetic* effects, his followers [...] failed for centuries to make any clear distinction between aesthetic responses and those derived from real life” (54). Rasa, like dhvani, is a mutual experience; it “exists neither in the performer nor in the spectator but in the interaction between the two” (Mee, *India* 8). Bruce Sullivan adds the author to this spectator-performer dynamic, citing the *Natyasastra*: “To relish the rasa intended by the playwright and performers is to have an aesthetic experience brought about by an effectively presented drama” (“Kerala’s *Mahabharata*” 6). While the *Natyasastra* classifies rasa into eight categories of emotion, local Keralan arts tradition follows the *Abhinayadarpana* in incorporating an optional ninth rasa, or ‘shanta’ (peace). The spectrum is referred to as ‘navarasa,’ or nine rasas (see Figures 2 and 3).

The concept of nine rasas is reminiscent of the Renaissance classification of humours or Paul Ekman’s emotional gamut; Vatsyayan compares these emotions to the Ayurvedic body humours (19). Kannan claims that in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* “we can see the [range in] rasa; one after another, it is there” (n. pag.).¹⁶ “Who can be wise, amazed, temp’rate and furious, / Loyal and neutral in a moment?” (2.3.108-109). Ragini Ramachandra posits that Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is a particularly “powerful and eloquent exemplification of all the important rasas (emotions), except *sringara* (love), namely *hasya* (humour), *vira* (heroism), *karuna* (pathos), *raudra* (terror), *bhayanaka* (fear), *bhibhatsa* (disgust), *adbhuta* (wonder) and *shanta* (tranquility)” (682).¹⁷

¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Ettumanoor P. Kannan throughout the thesis, I refer to our interview.

¹⁷ The Malayalam terms for these rasas are identical but for the added gender-neutral suffix ‘m.’

[The images have been removed from the online version due to copyright reason.]

Figure 2: The nine basic emotions, enacted by kutiyattam maestro Mani Madhava Chakyar, image © C. Pramod.

[The images have been removed from the online version due to copyright reason.]

Figure 3: The nine basic emotions, enacted by kathakali artist Gopi, image © Ramesh Menon.

Ramachandra further identifies scenes where these emotions are exemplified: raudra rasa for the bloody imagery, adbhuta for the witches' prophecy, karuna for Lady Macduff's pathos, etc. The *Natyasastra* theory of the basic emotions pervades Indian art, suggesting that Shakespeare's representation of humanity in all its richness of emotion has a natural, direct entry to the psyche of Indian artists and audiences.

Keralan performance texts: mythical origins

Shakespearean and Sanskrit-origin drama bear further parallels in their historical, epic and religious source material, presenting the adapters of the three Keralan *Macbeths* with a familiar mythical basis. In discussing the intercultural nature of Indian Shakespeares, Mark Thornton Burnett observes astutely: "Shakespeare sits easily alongside Indian representations [of legends] and forms" (*World Cinema* 34). Similarly, Keralan drama is preoccupied with stories of mythical and royal individuals, whether heroic or demonic. In Kerala, as throughout India, classical art and the sacred are still deeply entwined. The two major Hindu religious epics, the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, resemble England's morality plays in their inculcation of moral instruction through divine avatars and stock characters representing the forces of good and evil (R. A. Malagi 542).¹⁸ The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* narratives form the basis for the corpus of classical Indian dramatic literature and performance, and they date to the mid-first millennium and 200BC-200AD, respectively (Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli 81). The two epics are central to the two intermediate dramatic forms that link kathakali to kutiyattam, or

¹⁸ In Malayalam, these epics are known as the *Mahabharatam* and the *Ramayanam*. Legend attributes these epic Sanskrit verse poems to Veda Vyasa and Valmiki respectively, writing with the help of the gods. The epics were later condensed and translated into the vernacular all over India by various authors and poets, including Thunchattu Ezhutacchan, the 'Father of Modern Malayalam.' Ezhutacchan's *Adhyatma Ramayanam* is still read aloud daily in Hindu households for spiritual sustenance during the month of dearth.

Ramanattam and Krishnanattam. These performance forms narrate the legends of the epics' heroic protagonists Rama and Krishna, divine avatars of the god Vishnu. The typical kathakali opening dance features performers costumed as Krishna, manifesting the divine spirit onstage.

Whether in the Sanskrit language or multiple vernacular translations, these two Indian epics have a national cultural ubiquity. Margi Madhu claims that “epics like *Ramayanam* or *Mahabharatam*” have a “similar status of Shakespeare [sic]” in the works' classical nature and widespread influence. Keralan author Arundhati Roy describes the epics as household tales even for a Keralan Christian like herself: “The Great Stories [...] are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don't” (218). The *Ramayana*, a foundation for many popular kathakali stories, tells the story of Prince Rama. When Rama's beautiful wife Sita is abducted by the evil demon King Ravana, Rama journeys to Ravana's island fortress of Lanka.¹⁹ Aided by his loyal brother Lakshmana, and the monkey army led by Prince Hanuman, the avatar slays Ravana and rescues Sita. The later *Mahabharata*, upon which Brook based his seminal, controversial intercultural production of the same name, narrates the history of a royal family feud and the ensuing war. Lord Krishna supports the five virtuous Pandava brothers, his maternal cousins. The losing side includes the Pandavas' paternal cousins, the hundred evil Kaurava brothers. Krishna's spiritual revelations and moral instructions to his cousin Arjuna on the battlefield form the core religious text of Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Having established the spiritual, practical, literary, and theoretical origins of Keralan performing art forms, I now turn to an examination of the history of Shakespearean translation, adaptation, and performance in Kerala and its colonial origins.

¹⁹ The epic records that Rama's army builds a bridge to Sri Lanka. The geographical remains of the Indo-Sri Lanka land bridge are revered by Hindus as Rama's sacred causeway; protests cancelled a national dredging operation.

Keralan Shakespeares: local perspectives, colonial inheritances

Productions such as the kutiyattam and kathakali *Macbeths* better fit the second mode of Shakespearean adaptation in India proposed by Gillies et al., where Shakespeare in India “is indigenised and traditionalised [...] [in] an appropriation into specific native performance genres” (275). Keralan Shakespeares reflect this nationwide tendency to nativise Shakespeare, enhanced by the region’s comparative cultural independence during the colonial period. “There’s a legend that Shakespeare was born in South India,” mused one Indian bystander on a 2012 documentary by Felicity Kendal, “his original name was Seshippu Iyer” (“Quest” n. pag.). Equally, Salim Ghouse, who directed *Macbeth* in 1998, declared of Shakespeare: “I don’t feel he is just English. That is just an accident. He could be an Eskimo—to me it doesn’t matter” (qtd. in Cecile Sandten 113). In one humorous recollection, South Indian author R. K. Narayan illustrates Shakespeare’s local ubiquity. Narayan writes that the playwright “will always be known [here] even if it should be in some unimaginably garbled manner, just as a cook in our house once asked for the evening off as he wished to see a film called “Omlette,” [*Hamlet*] which he heard talked about everywhere” (115). Accordingly, Shakespeare’s legacy in India is not uniformly perceived as colonial.

Indisputably, however, colonialism had a pervasive influence on the performance and translation of Shakespeare in pre-Independence India. David Garrick assisted in the establishment of one of India’s first permanent colonial-era theatres, the Calcutta Theatre, which opened in 1775 (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 13-14). The incident is reported in the *London Chronicle* of 10-13 December 1774, which states that Garrick sent over from Drury Lane “the best dramatic works in our language, together with complete setts [sic] of scenery” (qtd. in Rakesh Solomon, “Culture” 338-339). Poonam Trivedi notes that Shakespeare’s works were

introduced to India during the British Raj as entertainment, with the first (recorded) performances taking place in the 1780s (*Lear* CD n. pag.). She posits that by 1775, the performance of Shakespeare's plays in English was already underway, for European traders in then Calcutta and Bombay (*ibid.*). By the nineteenth century, notes Bengali critic Abhishek Sarkar, there was a tendency to "celebrate Shakespeare as an exponent of universal morality—a kind of emphatically didactic and liberal humanist reading that was recurrent" ("Shakespeare" 118). Sarkar remarks that "*Macbeth* [...] especially generated such readings," and he ascribes this propensity to *Macbeth*'s familiarity as a core text prescribed for English-language students in the colonial education system. Correspondingly, the earliest recorded dramatisations of Shakespeare by Indians took place in the English-language schoolroom, in major cities such as Calcutta.

These early dramatisations of Shakespeare predate Keralan Shakespeares by decades, indicating the lesser British colonial presence in the region. India's early Shakespeares were scenes acted in schools and colleges, with the first known performance occurring in 1822 in Hindu College, Calcutta (Poonam Trivedi, *Lear* CD n. pag.). English-educated Indians commonly first encountered Shakespeare in the English text in the classroom, primarily through illustrated editions of Charles and Mary Lamb's child-friendly abridged *Tales from Shakespeare* (first published 1807).²⁰ Shakespeare's English works were originally imposed on India's native population by the British as part of a programme of one-way colonial education. Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous 1835 "Minute in Indian Education" derides "the whole native literature of India" as worth "a single shelf of a good European library" (722). The English

²⁰ The enduring local influence of the Lambs' heavily revised texts can be traced to their continued popularity in India. Notably, cinema director Vishal Bhardwaj traces his inspiration for his 2001 film *Maqbool* (*Macbeth*) to the moment when he idly picked up his young godson's copy of the Lambs' *Tales* and read the tragedy (v).

Education Act of 1835 followed Macaulay's Minute, "requiring English to be the official language of study and instruction in India" (Tamara Valentine 119; Sangeeta Mohanty 18). With the India Act of 1853 and the subsequent 1855 inclusion of English language and literature on the Indian Civil Service examination, soon a familiarity with Shakespeare enhanced job opportunities, rendering it more essential (Bhatia, "Codes of Empire" 99).

Macbeth was prescribed on the colonial Indian curriculum, alongside *Hamlet* and *Othello*, John Milton and Francis Bacon (Valentine 119; Mohanty 28). In mandating English education in colonial India, Macaulay's stated intention was to train the natives "who are Indian in blood and colour" to become "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (729). However, when a native Othello, Baishnav Charan Addy, first played opposite a white Desdemona at Calcutta's Sans Souci Theatre in 1848, public consternation over her stage embrace with "a real unpainted nigger" caused the British production to shut for a week (letter to the *Calcutta Star*, qtd. in Gillies et al. 273). Apparently, a knowledge of Shakespeare did not erase one's 'Indian blood and colour' sufficiently for the coloniser.

Concurrently, Indian-language theatrical versions of Shakespeare appropriated the colonial icon in a subversive retaliation. As Ellen Gainor writes: "To suggest that cultural identities are fixed is to suggest that the cultural inheritances that make up those identities are equally fixed: that we cannot change the material we have inherited" (210). Mischievously, Munshi Ratan Chand's 1882 Hindi translation of *The Comedy of Errors* reorders Dromio's hierarchy of countries in his catalogue of Nell's globular form (3.2.116-144) (Gillies et al. 275). Chand's rearrangement substitutes England for India, which now stands "in her face, for just as Hindustan is the best of all countries, so was her face the best part of her person" (ibid.). Slyly demoted, England in turn replaces the kitchen-wench's 'Netherlands:' "this was such a tiny

country that exceedingly hard as I looked, I could find it nowhere. It must be hidden among those parts of the body I didn't look at" (ibid.). Chand's naughty translation betrays an irreverent familiarity with Shakespeare's text, in shrinking England's crown territory while reterritorialising its cartography.

Post-Independence, the English colonial perspective continued to debase the worth of Indian literature and performance, privileging Anglocentric Shakespeare. In a 1964 article on "Shakespeare Overseas" for the *Times Literary Supplement*, D. J. Enright writes of colonial Africa and Asia: "Their art was inviolate, shackled to the past. But they came to want it to yield its long preserved virginity, to be free. They knew they could not go on forever producing haiku or Kabuki or variations of the *Ramayana*... Naturally they would turn first to the... literature of the West [...] pre-eminently the plays of Shakespeare" (352). If we apply Emily Linnemann's definition of interculturalism as "deeply embedded in and indebted to modernist ideals of consensual artistic realms," then colonial India's relationship with Shakespearean theatre can be seen as positively non-consensual ("Innovation" 14). Despite (or because of) the imposition of Shakespeare upon India, the local populace embraced and rewrote the playwright's works enthusiastically.

Macbeth's popularity as a topic of theatrical and literary adaptation in colonial India is indicative of an early native familiarity with and interest in the Shakespearean tragedy. *Macbeth* was the first Shakespeare play to be adapted into Bengali, with Haralal Ray's *Rudrapal Natak* [*Fierce Protector*] (1874), writes Suresh Awasthi ("Shakespeare in Hindi" 52). Other early adaptations in major languages include the Marathi-language *Manajirava* [*Macbeth*] (1896) by Professor S. M. Paranjpye; N. V. Thakkur's Gujarati-language *Malavaketu* [*Macbeth*] or *Maya-Prabhava* [*Disillusion*] (n.d.); and Girish Ghosh's Bengali *Macbeth* (1893) (Yajnik 172). These

early adaptations often “not only changed names and places but rearranged plots, rewrote characters and were liberally embellished with Indian songs and dances” (Gillies et al. 274). These creative emendations nearly approximate Kennedy and Lan’s model of “intercultural revision” that “estranges the Shakespeare play in a Brechtian manner in order to create a new text, a third text” (10). Such alterations were possibly necessitated to counter the natural opposition of local taste and render *Macbeth* more palatable to local audiences. In *Shakespeare through Eastern Eyes*, Ranjee Shahani avers that “Lady Macbeth is utterly unacceptable to an Indian audience. Whether or not such a character can be found in real life, it should at least be barred from the stage...Then again, the witches are ineffective and repugnant to Indian taste...Further, the killing of the guest is altogether abhorrent to the Indian conscience. Such an abuse of hospitality is unheard of” (67). Other, musical versions of *Macbeth* demonstrated an intracultural inheritance from the musical Parsi theatre, which later influenced South Indian Shakespeares (Gillies et al. 274). Ghosh’s ambitious 1893 Bengali version of *Macbeth* was a near verbatim translation in blank verse that retained Shakespeare’s plot, while adding songs.

Such authorial interpolations represent an indigenous tradition of creative freedom with Shakespeare, insofar as they appear aimed at the tastes of the local Indian audience rather than the colonial ruler. When Ghosh performed the lead in his adaptation, overtly Scottish in set and costume, “the editor of *The Englishman* observed: “A Bengali Thane of Cawdor is a living suggestion of incongruity”” (Yajnik 175). While Ghosh’s play closed after ten days, other such early Indian-language stage versions were more popular and travelled the subcontinent with touring players, through Kerala and as far south as to then Ceylon (ibid. 100).

In twentieth-century India, English-language Shakespeare productions were also popular. These plays were performed by travelling English troupes such as Dave Carson’s

“Original San Francisco Minstrels,” Allan Wilkie’s company, or Geoffrey Kendal’s “Shakespeareana” (Poonam Trivedi, *India’s Shakespeare* 254). C. D. Narasimhaiah attributes these troupes’ success to “Shakespeare’s immense popularity,” writing that “It was a familiar sight in the days of the Raj for a poor Englishman [...] to turn into a strolling player [...] invite himself to our schools, and recite Shakespeare’s famous passages from the plays, collect enough money to pay for a middle class hotel, slip in a drink and journey to the next town for a repeat performance” (*Hiranyagarbha* 665). Despite this popularity, there is no evidence that any of these shows inflected contemporary or later Keralan productions and translations. There is little evidence of early Malayalam Shakespeare theatricals at all. Yajnik’s 1934 survey of South Indian Shakespeares mentions only the Madras theatre, describing it as one that includes Tamil, Telugu and Kanarese productions (those in the languages of today’s South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, respectively) (15).

The three Keralan *Macbeths* examined here display only partial affinity to these early national colonial adaptations, aligning to these in theme rather than in structure or plot. For example, Kannan’s and Madhu’s *Macbeths* do not demonstrate the marked structural changes undergone by colonial Indian theatre forms, into which “Shakespeare breathed much needed new life [...after] many traditional Indian forms had become moribund by the end of the eighteenth century” (Gillies et al. 276). Mohanty attributes this theatrical evolution to the influence of the Shakespearean structure: “Like the Bengali stage [,] modern Marathi theatre has drawn the five-act Shakespearean technique [,] and the ancient practice of seven or ten acts has fallen into disuse” (46). Furthermore, Mohanty states, the “ancient Indian mode of a prologue has vanished” from native forms (ibid.). However, this evolution appears uneven, as South Indian forms evidence a different pattern. A late nineteenth-century indigenised Kannada

adaptation of *Macbeth*, titled *Prataparudradeva* after its virtuous hero Malcolm, retains both a traditional opening invocatory verse and an opening benediction (Valentine 119). Similarly, as opposed to the aforementioned cultural hybridity of structure, the kutiyattam *Macbeth* subsumes Shakespeare's five acts under its own organic monostructure. In resisting structural change, Madhu's Sanskrit theatre-based version follows the convention adopted by one early Keralan version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Shakespearean work was adapted in 1906 "as a Sanskrit play in Malayalam, with generic music and dance" that also "incorporated generic [Sanskrit] conventions such as the nandi (prayer-prologue) and sutradhar (chorus)" (Gillies et al. 274-275). Madhu's *Macbeth* functions instead as a cultural translation, shaping an excerpt of the Shakespearean text into his own version of the traditional Sanskrit prologue.²¹

The Keralan *Macbeths* bear similarities to the colonial adaptations in their emphasis on Shakespeare's tragedy as moral allegory. If 'Sanskrit drama' typically refers to "a specific style of performance that originally used the Sanskrit language," as aforementioned, additionally the drama "was always concerned with teaching moral lessons" (McConachie et al. 81). Colonial-era *Macbeth* adaptations such as *Rudrapal Natak* indicate a widespread affinity with the Indian perception of "Macbeth's fate in terms of the time-honoured Hindu principles of karma and predestination" (Sarkar, "Shakespeare" 125; *Tantra* 949). Among these adaptations, Yajnik records that Thakkur's Gujarati *Macbeth* "quotes a didactic motto on "greed for riches" which entirely misses the point of Shakespeare" (174). Other native authorial innovations in colonial Indian *Macbeths* include the subversive alteration of the Shakespearean plot. In Thakkur's

²¹ It must be noted here that to omit the kutiyattam prologue would be a drastic alteration. Unlike a Shakespearean prologue, the kutiyattam prologue functions both as a divine invocation and as the only spoken text; the remainder of a kutiyattam performance is narrated in dance and gesture.

Gujarati version, among other authorial emendations Banquo survives instead to kill Macbeth (ibid. 175). Accordingly, Thakkur's reversal enabled the appropriate triumph of virtue.

Such alterations suggest the early native attempt to attract audiences by hybridising Sanskrit drama with Shakespeare, as Madhu does with his *Macbeth*. However, Yajnik bemoans the fact that in trying to "improve" Macbeth, Thakkur does the opposite (ibid. 174). Yajnik hints that the adapter adds unnecessary layers of emotion, as in Thakkur's preface "it is stated that the English poet has only one 'rasa' in a play and the Gujarati audience requires many 'rasas'" (ibid.). Additionally, Yajnik complains that Thakkur omits major scenes such as those of the bleeding soldier (1.2), illusory dagger (2.1), and Banquo's ghost (3.4), besides cutting several of Macbeth's final soliloquies (ibid.). Conversely, the dagger scene in particular is retained in all three Keralan *Macbeths*, indicative of a non-linear intracultural inheritance from colonial Indian Shakespeares, if they are indeed derivative.

The binary of 'elite English Shakespeare' and 'popular, local-language Shakespeare' resonates uneasily in a twenty-first-century Indian context, where Shakespeare is still performed in elite Sanskrit theatre forms such as kutiyattam. This ambiguity problematises Trivedi's claim that colonial Indian Shakespeare performances functioned largely as "an empowering mimicry [...] a mastering of the master colonising text" (*Lear* CD n. pag.). When Kennedy and Lan highlight the binary of the national popular versus educational approaches to Shakespeare in India, this dichotomy is more likely indicative of the loose cultural homogeneity that defines the nation (8-10). In arguing that today the intercultural conversation surrounding Keralan Shakespeares transcends postcolonialism in highlighting a more global plurality, it is necessary to first examine the context of Shakespeare in colonial-era Kerala, as I do in the next section.

Malayalam-language Shakespeares in colonial-era Kerala

The collection of territories that became the state of Kerala was never occupied fully by the British, yet the region's early Shakespeare reflects India's colonial familiarity with the author. The prefatory remarks by Keralan translators, explored later in this section, demonstrate their adoption of the wider Indian attitude that necessarily equated English Shakespeare with an educational gold standard. English-educated academics and playwrights prepared the earliest Malayalam-language translations of Shakespeare, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. *Macbeth* appears only in the early twentieth century, yet this late entry must be contextualised against Mohanty's documentation of only eighteen extant translations of Shakespeare in Malayalam in this colonial period (59). The earliest recorded Malayalam-language Shakespeare is *Almarattam* [*Substitution*] (1866), Kalloor Oommen Philipose's adaptation of *A Comedy of Errors* (Sanju Thomas 106). *The Merchant of Venice* was adapted twice, as *Porsyaa Svayamvaram* [*Portia's Wedding-Choice*] (1888), and *Venisile Vyapari* [*The Merchant of Venice*] (1902), and in 1893 Kandathil Varghese Mappilai authored a "colloquial free rendering" of *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Kalahinidamanakam* (Valentine 121). Sanju Thomas notes the early dominance of literary translation, positing that while few "Shakespearean plays were performed in Malayalam theatre" the playwright did "inspire many Malayalam playwrights who tried to imitate his grandeur in the portrayal of heroic characters" (107). An examination in the following section of the few early plays is necessarily inconclusive, owing to their rarity, yet it suggests that her contention is accurate.

The colonial-era Malayali predisposition for Shakespeare in literary translation rather than performance adaptation is reflected by the form of the two recorded early Malayalam editions of *Macbeth*, both pre-Independence publications. Mary Haritha M. C. records that the

first translation of *Macbeth* into Malayalam was published anonymously in 1903 in the magazine *Bhashaposhini* (13).²² A second translation is K. Chidambara Vadhyar’s 1929 version of *Macbeth* printed in the daily *Nasrani Deepika*; this translation was later reprinted in 1933 as a novel, *Prataparudreeyam athava Streesahasam* [*The Story of Prataparudram, or the Woman’s Escapade*] (17). Despite the prevalence of literary Malayalam Shakespeares, Mohanty states that the most popular of these early eighteen Malayalam Shakespeares was a 1909 adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which “has been converted into a musical” (59). Poonam Trivedi records another performance adaptation, writing that in 1897, A. Govinda Pillai translated, directed and acted in one of the first “faithful translations” of Shakespeare in Malayalam, *Brittanile Rajavu Lear* [*King Lear of Britain*] (*Lear* CD n. pag.). Pillai’s production was staged in the Keralan city of Trivandrum with “a meticulous realism which included imported costumes and accessories, before a select audience and with a select cast—noted novelist and playwright C V [sic] Raman Pillai played Lear” (ibid.). An examination of such translations suggests a tendency for translators to ‘nativise’ Shakespeare through the strategic relocation of names and places to more familiar Malayalam-language equivalents.

P. Velu’s 1891 translation *Parakleshu Rajavu* [*King Pericles*], unrecorded elsewhere, illuminates the Malayalam Shakespearean translator’s typical strategy of nativising European names (all passages are in my own translation): Thaisa becomes “Dayesha,” or the ‘kind lady;’ Marina is “Samudrika,” or ‘maiden of the sea;’ and Tyre alters to “Tharapuram,” or ‘city of the stars’ (2). For the benefit of Velu’s Malayali readers, the translator retains the more formal Shakespearean dialogue along with added description in a more casual register. “You are, you are—O royal Pericles!” (1.22.30) becomes, “*Allayo Paraklesharajave! Ningal thanneyanu—*

²² As aforementioned, Keralan names often involve multiple initials in prefix or suffix. In the interests of clarity I refer to this writer henceforth as ‘Haritha.’

ningal thanneyanu—[Oh, King Pericles! You are indeed...you are indeed...] *ennithrayum paranyappozhekku mohalasyappettu veenupoyi* [speaking thus, she fainted dead away]” (Velu 53). The content of Velu’s preface further indicates the contemporary paucity of translations of Shakespeare in the Malayalam language.

Velu’s *Pericles* indirectly demonstrates that Shakespeare was not the only English author in Malayalam translation. The edition of Velu’s text has been rebound in a compendium with *Resalesika*, T. Kanaran’s 1989 translation of Samuel Johnson’s 1759 *Rasselas*. However, while the transposition of Shakespearean names into their Indian-language equivalents was a strategy common to colonial-era translators and adapters, Velu’s remarks suggest that he was a pioneer in selecting such a method to accommodate the Malayalam language. The author states that “while Malayalis presumably know of Shakespeare by reputation, until now they have not been able to understand or enjoy his works unless they know English” (ibid. 2). Velu’s claim is corroborated by the lack of evidence of an early tradition of Malayalam-language Shakespeares, aside from the 1866 *Almarattam*, which presumably was out of (or never in) print. Velu concludes in expressing that he had originally wished to translate the original Shakespeare into the more suitable classical language of Sanskrit. However, the translator writes, this is beyond his linguistic skill; instead he has translated one of the Lambs’ *Tales*, written in an “ordinary prose manner” into the Malayalam vernacular (ibid.). Velu’s admission opens up various underexplored possibilities regarding the relationship of Malayalam-language Shakespeares to those other nativised versions across colonial-era India.

The Malayalam translator’s choice of *Pericles* is possibly an independently motivated selection. Velu’s translation is by his own admission directly modelled on the Lambs’ English prose version, while there is no other contemporary recorded print version of *Pericles* in Indian-

language translation. Yajnik catalogues two early undated Marathi versions, the anonymous *Sudhanva* and B. R. Patil's *Pratapamukta* (both "named for the hero"), but he remarks that neither version was staged professionally (Yajnik 144, 149). However, the timing of Velu's selection of *Pericles* hints at its location in an atmosphere of intracultural borrowing that surrounded Shakespeare in the colonial era. In the decades preceding Independence, printed academic Shakespeare in Indian-language translation circulated alongside touring nativised Shakespeare in performance.

Notably, the same year as the publication of Velu's translation, an Urdu adaptation of *Pericles* played in Bombay. Styled *Khudadada* [*God-Given*], this "Urdu free adaptation" by "Munshi Karimuddin" was "produced by a Bombay Parsi company in 1891 [...] but it was not printed" (ibid. 144). "Munshi" is an honorific, so the play is likely the same as *Badshah Khudadad* [*King Khudadad*], written and produced by Karimuddin Murad Bareilvi in 1890 (Javed Malick 96). Given the rarity of *Pericles* in Indian-language translation or adaptation—Yajnik catalogues only three such works—the timing of Velu's near-concurrent publication is significant. This concurrence suggests that Karimuddin's *Khudadad* likely toured in performance and inspired other adaptations. Two such adaptations remain on record: Jahangir Pestonjee Khambatta's play *Khudadad* (1898) and its eponymous 1935 Bollywood film remake (Rajiva Verma, "Hindi Cinema" 272). Furthermore, Malick traces Karimuddin's *Khudadad* back to another Gujarati production. He suggests that the Urdu production is a translation of an earlier, undated adaptation of *Pericles* by Dosabhai Framji Randhelia, or *Daad-e-Dariya urf Khusro na Khavind Khuda* [*Salute of the Seas, or The Almighty is Khusro's Protector*] (104 fn. 8). Therefore while Velu attributes his inspiration in translating Shakespeare, via Charles and Mary Lamb, to a desire to render the text intelligible to his own Malayali readers, this desire

must also be located in the translator's latent wish for the Malayalam language to be represented equally among colonial-era Marathi, Gujarati and Urdu versions of Shakespeare's romance.

Before turning to an examination of post-Independence Malayalam Shakespeares, one further translation is noteworthy in illuminating the complex issue of the cultural inheritance of Shakespeare in Kerala. Unlike Velu's *Pericles*, Varkki's 1923 prose translation of *Hamlet* retains Shakespeare's proper names intact. Varkki translates "Irving and Marshall's" edition of *Hamlet* "word for word" into Malayalam prose, while retaining poetry for verse such as Hamlet's love rhyme or Ophelia's songs (iv). Yet Varkki's edition resembles Velu's in its dual appropriation of Shakespeare as both a means and end, extending world literature to the Malayali reader while enriching the body of Malayalam literature. Varkki's first, English preface indicates a colonial relationship; it is dated intentionally to "Shakespeare's birthday" in tribute, and he quotes "Lloyd George" from the day's *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, rhapsodising on Shakespeare as a "national heritage" with a "unique genius" that "transcends the bounds of time and space" (vi). Similarly, Varkki's second, Malayalam preface (my own translation) states his perception that most Malayalis who have not been English-educated still know many of Shakespeare's dramas (vii). The translator attributes this familiarity to the Lambs' *Tales*, and to the English dramas enacted by English-educated college students on special occasions (ibid.). Here, Varkki reiterates his intention to translate the "exalted poet" Shakespeare in the vernacular rather than the classical equivalent of Sanskrit poetry, to bring his work both to students and to the "common man" (ibid.). Varkki's emphasis on the common [average] man hints at the future Keralan preoccupation with translating Shakespeare in the service of a wider Malayali society, to which I now turn.

Translating Shakespeare in post-Independence Kerala

It is necessary to contextualise the three Keralan *Macbeths* in the post-Independence adaptations of Shakespeare located at the cultural intersection of Hinduism and Marxism that occurred in Kerala following national independence in 1947. Post-Independence, Keralan Shakespeares quickly became appropriated in the service of political and social movements such as the Marxist theatre, as well as a return to a ‘theatre of roots’ located in an ancient Indian culture, as will be elaborated in Chapter Three. With Independence, caste-based distinctions had been made technically illegal, and the ‘untouchable’ castes were allowed temple entry, yet still socially excluded. The Marxist movement aimed to redress this imbalance through a drive on universal literacy and land reforms that redistributed feudal property so that even the poorest owned a plot. In 1957 Kerala became the first Indian state to elect a Marxist government democratically.²³

In this climate of cultural, social, and political flux, Shakespeare’s works were widely “co-opted in the search for identity” (Poonam Trivedi, “History” n. pag.). Accordingly, Shakespeare was “transposed into indigenous theatre forms [...] to forge a new performative idiom while giving an added respectability and stability to the traditional forms” (ibid.). The Keralan search for a post-Independence identity led to a dual emphasis on secularism and politics that saw Shakespeare used to revive Hindu art forms in a more equal, caste-free, Communist society.

This revival involved the co-opting of Shakespeare to secularise the “fast dying art” of *kathaprasangam*, an effort spearheaded by ardent Communist exponent V. Sambasivan (1929-1997) (Thomas 108). The traditional Keralan art of *kathaprasangam* (‘story-declamation’) is a

²³ Along with West Bengal, Kerala remains one of the rare states to elect Marxist leaders to power intermittently.

solo devotional song-narration of Hindu legends that evolved from the devotional Hindu *keerthana* (hymns) and *harikatha* (stories of Vishnu). Sambasivan's populist introduction of Shakespeare marks a transitional phase in Keralan Shakespeares, where Marxism facilitated a progressive rather than reactive mode of intercultural assimilation.

Concurrently, Shakespeare's classical elitism was jettisoned for the masses. With Sambasivan's introduction of Shakespeare as "world literature" [...] the consciousness of the colonial pedigree of Shakespeare seemed to have receded into the past" (Poonam Trivedi, "Rhapsodic Shakespeare" 4). Over several decades, Sambasivan presented Malayalam "Shakespeare for the masses" before thousands of people at temples, church festivals, colleges, clubs and parties, introducing secular world classics for the Communist literacy movement (ibid.; Thomas 108). Poonam Trivedi posits that Sambasivan "secularized the form bringing in Shakespeare" to add to his corpus of fifty-five new hour-long dramatised story-texts ("Rhapsodic Shakespeare" 2). Sambasivan's adaptations retold Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* alongside epic, folk, and contemporary literature, and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (ibid.). Film director Jayaraj Nair ("Jayaraj") cites *kathaprasangam* as the inspiration behind his Malayalam-language adaptation *Kaliyattam* (1997), stating that "I encountered *Othello* in my childhood through this art form" (qtd. in Burnett, *World Cinema* 71). Thus, Shakespeare entered the Hindu establishment primarily through Marxist democracy rather than colonial rule.

Moreover, Sambasivan consciously indigenised Shakespeare, paralleling his characters with those familiar to the local Malayali audience. Poonam Trivedi describes Sambasivan's works as "faithful versions of the original in Malayalam translation, retaining most of the plot, names of characters and locations" interspersed with his own colloquial commentary and poetry ("Rhapsodic Shakespeare" 5). For example, to lend *Othello* local appeal, the poet-reciter

embellished the verse with conventional poetic Malayalam metaphor, comparing the Moor to a “moonless night” made bright with “the full moon” of fair Desdemona (ibid. 6). Additionally, Bianca is compared to the lovelorn courtesan Vasavadatta, titular heroine of the well-known work by Keralan poet Kumaran Asan (ibid.). Such intertextual allusions not only familiarised the local populace with Shakespeare but also promoted local poetry and Keralan culture.

A comprehensive list of Malayalam translations of *Macbeth* reveals a preponderance of post-Independence literary translations as opposed to the rare performance adaptation. Together with the fact that the number of Malayalam translations of Shakespeare increases sharply after the 1950s, these statistics indicate that in promoting Malayalam Shakespeares, the Keralan Communist literary drive proved more successful than the potential former colonial imposition. Eleven Malayalam translations of *Macbeth* have been located by Haritha, who traces these from the colonial to the postmillennial era. Briefly, these works include *Macbeth* as translated by the following: 1) Anonymous, published in the magazine *Bhashaposhini* (1903); 2) K. Chidambara Vadhyar, in the daily *Nasrani Deepika* (1929, later reprinted as a novel, *Prataparudreeyam athava Streesahasam* [*The Story of Prataparudram, or, the Woman's Escapade*] in 1933); 3) K. Ramakrishna Pillai (1962); 4) Madassery Madhava Warriar (1969); 5) V. N. Parameswaran Pillai (1971, reprinted 1978, 1985, 2010); 6) Sandeepani (1982); 7) K. Achuthan Pillai (1983); 8) P. A. Warriar (1984); 9) R. Gopalakrishnan (1999, along with other Shakespeares for the *Paico Classics* comic series); 10) P. K. Venukkuttan Nair (2000, reprinted 2008 and 2012); and 11) P. K. R. Nair (2000) (Haritha 13-28). Of these, Haritha writes, only V. Pillai's translation was intended for staging (21). Among these editions, P. K. Venukkuttan Nair's *Macbeth* also forms part of the collection *Shakespeare Natakangal* [*Dramas of Shakespeare*] edited by K. Ayyappa Paniker, noted Malayalam playwright and translator.

The repeated reprints and high sales of Malayalam Shakespeares in Kerala are indicative of a corresponding popular local reception. Paniker's collection "sold 5,000 copies within 3 months" of its Kerala release in 2000 (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 19).²⁴ This number is more significant in an age of visual media, a competing form of entertainment on which Thomas blames the decline of audiences for *kathaprasangam* (108). In the decades between Indian independence and the new millennium, with the opening of the Indian economy and media to global players including American cable television, Kerala and India globalised rapidly, importing Shakespeare from multiple directions. Thus, to contextualise postmillennial Keralan productions of Shakespeare means looking not only retrospectively at the state's postcolonial heritage but also at its postmodern intercultural influences that affect Keralan Shakespeares.

Postmodern Keralan Shakespeares

Postmodern Keralan Shakespeares benefit from the infinite possibilities in the interstitial third space that exists between their intercultural inheritances of Shakespearean and Sanskrit theatre, and Hindu and Marxist philosophy. Bhabha's concept of hybridity best describes the chaotic East-West cultural overlapping that occurred in the 1990s with India's transition to postmodernity (*Location* 5). Along with the rest of India, Kerala witnessed a cultural revolution with the opening of the national economy to Western and Chinese markets, most importantly digital media and MTV. Aptly, Bhabha writes that the "'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself [...]. The boundary is Janus-faced" ("Nation" 4). He describes an ultimate "turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through

²⁴ The collection comprises thirteen translations, including: *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*.

which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (ibid.). Such unexplored interstices contribute as fundamentally as the intersections to the intercultural dynamic inherent in Indian Shakespeares. Bharucha acknowledges these interstices as vital: “To borrow the fundamental premise of interstitiality in postmodern theory, it is not simply the ‘here’ or the ‘there’ that matter, but what lies *in between*” (ibid. 274). Having survived the economic and cultural shifts brought about by this new exposure, postmodern Kerala represents a perfect forum for continued intercultural experimentation.²⁵

This ‘in-between’ cultural period presented a creative potential that was exploited by productions such as *Kodumkattu (The Tempest)*, a 2000 Malayalam adaptation directed by K. N. Panikkar. Discussed further in Chapter Three, Panikkar’s influential production deliberately protested global consumption by privileging a typical Keralan theatre aesthetic, using costumes made from local banana leaf and other natural materials. Sandten writes that Panikkar had adapted both *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* “because of the spirits and the Indian interpretative possibilities” (116). Notably, *Macbeth* presents Keralan adapters with the same range of liminal, otherworldly interpretative possibilities. In 2013, Jyotish M. G. spoke of a new *Macbeth*, stating that Keralan playwright “Chandradasan has done [*Macbeth*] in this year [sic]” (n. pag.).²⁶ Chandradasan’s website *Lokadharmi* lists the playtext as his own translation (n. pag.).

In continuing to adapt Shakespeare for an increasingly fragmented postmodern society, the three Keralan *Macbeths* studied here have reached a cross-section of audiences likely to read the shows through multiple interpretations: schoolchildren, Keralan arts aficionados and

²⁵ Pandeya traces the advent of *marumakkattayam* (the matrilineal system) in Kerala to the 12th century (21). For a more detailed discussion, see Ayyappa Paniker’s introduction in *Kathakali and Kutiyattam* (v).

²⁶ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Jyotish M. G. and Reghoothaman throughout the thesis, I continue to refer to our interview.

Shakespeare-lovers. These audiences are likely to be familiar with Shakespeare. Imported foreign playwrights such as Molière, Brecht, Chekhov, Ibsen, and Shaw have “figured prominently in the development of India’s theatrical consciousness”, with the latter two playwrights often more popular than Shakespeare (Samuel Leiter 828; Fischer-Lichte, *Beyond Postcolonialism* 7; Awasthi, “Shakespeare in Hindi” 8). Yet Shakespeare remains India’s most popularly translated non-native playwright. Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli note that C. C. Mehta’s *Bibliography of Stageable Plays in Indian Languages* (1963) contains nearly two thousand Indian-language versions of Shakespeare’s works (438). While this high figure seems improbable given the limited number of versions documented in a literate state such as Kerala, it is possible, considering the potentially wide readership.

Shakespeare in local-language adaptation for the Malayalam cinema also offers Keralan adapters the potential to highlight their culture before a wider audience. Kerala’s rare cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare demonstrate a preoccupation with local religions, politics, and arts. Jayaraj’s 1997 national award-winning *Othello* adaptation *Kaliyattam (The Play of God)* foregrounds Hindu ritual in featuring the protagonist as a temple *theyyam* dancer.²⁷ The director also adapted *Antony and Cleopatra* as *Kannaki* (2001), set against the background of Keralan cockfighting and ritual snake-worship.²⁸ Similarly, V. K. Prakash’s 2012 adaptation *Karmayogi [The Sacrificer]* features traditional Keralan arts. The film is set among the feudal martial tribes of North Kerala, where Prince Rudran/Hamlet is a kalarippayattu warrior and Hindu *kelipathram* ritual practitioner. Unusually, Amal Neerad’s 2014 film *Iyobinte Pusthakam*

²⁷ Jayaraj’s film preceded and arguably inspired Bhardwaj’s Mumbai-underworld Hindi version, *Omkara* (2004). Bhardwaj has also directed the Hindi *Maqbool (Macbeth)* (2001) and *Haider (Hamlet)* (2014) for Bollywood.

²⁸ For a more detailed account of Jayaraj’s films, see Ania Loomba’s piece “Local manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows” in *India’s Shakespeare* (2005) and Mark Thornton Burnett’s chapter “Vishal Bhardwaj and Jayaraaj [sic] Rajasekharan Nair” in his *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (2013).

converts Christian parable into Marxist allegory; the film's disc jacket states that it includes elements of *King Lear*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *The Book of Job* (n. pag.). In this colonial tale of fratricide and patricide, Comrade Aloshy (a conflation of Cordelia and Edmund) is disowned and expelled from the family tea plantation after Job discovers his son's Marxist sympathies, shouting: "Aloshy...nee *Communist* anno?!" [Aloshy...are you a *Communist*?!]. Here, the patriarch is still shocked at his child's disloyalty to the British crown.

The most recent Keralan Shakespeare film is *Veeram*, a Malayalam-language adaptation of *Macbeth* that Jayaraj is directing at the time of writing.²⁹ Jayaraj claimed that he selected the play for his upcoming film because Shakespeare's *Macbeth* "is very close to our culture."³⁰ The director elaborated that by "culture" he meant the "martial culture of North Kerala," with its kalarippayattu tradition. Accordingly, the film's title evokes the rasa of *veeram* (valour), aligning with Jayaraj's range of films that openly prioritise the pan-Indian performance tradition of emotional expression. Jayaraj added that the "northern [Malayalam] dialogues" are suitably "expressive" to carry Shakespeare's ideas, and that the "inner conflict" of his titular character is comparable to that of *Macbeth*. The film's official website states that "*Veeram* captures the universal truth about human greed, lust, cruelty, and betrayal" ("About Us" n. pag.). This view is evocative of Vanessa Gerhards' declaration that Indian filmic *Macbeths* are "non-English Shakespeares [that] also communicate the main themes discussed in *Macbeth*, namely ambition, violence, betrayal and loyalty" (189). Gerhards posits that "the story of the rise and fall of a man [...] still remains "Shakespearean" in many senses" (ibid.). The three Keralan *Macbeth* theatre productions here profiled make similar use of this allegorical trajectory to illustrate their protagonists' journeys.

²⁹ It is noteworthy that these Malayalam films are all based on Shakespearean tragedies.

³⁰ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Jayaraj throughout the thesis, I refer to our telephone conversation.

In examining the intercultural context of these Keralan *Macbeths* in a culture that juxtaposes ancient tradition with postmodernity, it is relevant to note Fischer-Lichte's consideration that kathakali adaptations of Shakespeares fit a paradigm of intercultural "interweaving" (*Beyond Postcolonialism* 15). Fischer-Lichte views the western/non-western binary implied by the term "intercultural" as problematic. She states that interwoven "cultures in performance [...] bear the potential to *go beyond postcolonialism* by allowing their participants experiences [...] and thus new ways of thinking *beyond* the pervasive binary concepts of Self versus Other, East versus West, North versus South, own versus foreign" (5, 13). These false binaries could also be conceptualised in terms of 'local versus national,' or 'traditional versus modern.' Transcending these distinctions ideally leaves space for a mutually supportive discourse that acknowledges cultural commonalities as well as differences (Knowles 50). As director Ghouse expressed to Sandten in giving his rationale "as an Oriental," he privileged a non-Cartesian duality and dressed his ambivalent Macbeth accordingly in two colours, "Reality is not black *or* white, it is black *and* white" (112). In an age of similar interweavings, dialogic modes of thinking are necessary to navigate the increasingly interconnected global culture surrounding Keralan Shakespeares. Accordingly, this chapter now turns to an examination of the postmillennial globalisation that exemplifies these productions' intercultural context.

Global Keralan Shakespeares

Keralan Shakespeares are now part of an intercultural, global conversation that transcends the postcolonial binary in its rhizomatic multiplicity of directions. In an era where 'global Shakespeares' is an increasingly common terminology used to describe productions less

separated by physical distance, Huang writes that “available theories of postcolonialism or current discourses about globalization cannot adequately deal with the issues [raised] of multiculturalism, multilingualism, diaspora, and identity” (287). Loomba describes intercultural Shakespeares as the product of the global traffic and traffic in global Shakespeares occasioned by the non-Western craving for “authentic” Shakespeare and the Western craving for “foreign” Shakespeare (“Possibilities” 123-124). Indian Shakespeare productions have received increased international exposure and attention with their presence in the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival.³¹ Yet there have been few major international productions featuring Keralan Shakespeares that have not been criticised for a colonialist or Orientalist appropriation of native elements. Furthermore, the extant scholarship covers primarily foreign-origin productions. Keralan Shakespeare film and performance adaptations are briefly outlined on Peter Donaldson’s site *Global Shakespeares* (n. pag.). While it is debatable that, as Huang remarks, Asian Shakespeare is a critically “marginalized cultural phenomenon” it is notable that even self-titled Asian Shakespeare-centric websites such as the *Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A/S/I/A)* do not include India among the profiled countries, an omission for pragmatic reasons that nonetheless limits this conversation (“Asian Shakespeare 2.0.” 1). Such a gap in the literature is regrettable in virtue of the opportunities that Keralan-origin productions afford for adding to a scholarly understanding and documentation of intercultural Shakespeares.

The first evidence that international Shakespeare directors took notice of Keralan art forms emerged in the Shakespeare cycle of Ariane Mnouchkine (1981-1984), followed by Peter Brook’s 1985 *Mahabharata* (Watson et al. 13). Mnouchkine’s production of *Richard II* in 1981 “marked the beginning of an era of intensified European-Asian cultural cross-currents around

³¹ For reviews of these productions see Paul Edmondson, Paul Prescott, and Erin Sullivan’s collection *A Year of Shakespeare* (2013).

Shakespeare's works" (Huang, "Asian Shakespeares" 54). These intercultural productions featured elements of traditional Keralan forms such as kathakali and kalarippayattu, and they followed the documentation of these art forms in Kerala from the 1950s onwards by theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba, his student Jerzy Grotowski, and critic Richard Schechner (Watson et al. 13; George 50). George connects this intercultural interaction to the first overseas productions of kathakali in the 1960s (46). In the 1980s this interaction attracted foreign practitioners such as Maya Thanberg, who visited India to learn on more equal terms, adapting Shakespeare for Eastern forms rather than vice versa. Despite their online and touring presence, Keralan Shakespeare adaptations remain understudied outside India, suggesting a comparative intercultural invisibility contingent on cultural rather than physical location.

Among postmodern and postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares, the production that has received the greatest critical attention (and criticism) is Annette Leday and David McRuvie's kathakali *King Lear* (discussed further in Chapter Two). Produced with the Keli Company, the production toured to Italy in 1989 and to Edinburgh in 1990. However, *Lear* was profiled by only a handful of Shakespeare scholars until after it played at Shakespeare's Globe in London in 1999.³² Leday's *Lear* received greater critical attention than her production of *The Tempest* (2000), produced with the Bremer Shakespeare Company and featuring kathakali dancers (Poonam Trivedi, "Other Shakespeares" 70). Similarly, while Kannan first presented a kathakali version of *Macbeth* (detailed in Chapter Two) in the USA at Los Angeles (1998) and Pittsburgh (2001), his production received only a few basic press reviews, as it did on its home revival a decade later. While Poonam Trivedi declares that "kathakali Shakespeare has become

³² For a detailed discussion of the kathakali *Lear*, see Diane Daugherty's "The Pendulum of Intercultural Performance" (2005), Suresh Awasthi's "The Intercultural Experience and the Kathakali *King Lear*" (2013), and Phillip Zarrilli's *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play* (2000).

something of a minor tradition, with three full plays (*Lear*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*)” the latter two productions remain critically underrepresented in related scholarship (*Remaking Shakespeare* 67).³³ Filmic intercultural Shakespeares with Keralan elements, such as *Dancing Othello* (2002) or *In Othello* (2003), have received only marginally greater critical exposure.

Those intercultural Shakespeare productions that remain restricted to national or regional audiences have received a comparative lack of critical attention. In 2013 the Globe to Globe Festival brought Footsbarn Theatre’s *Indian Tempest* to London, reimagined in a Keralan seascape. Footsbarn’s company includes Malayali actors, and the show featured kathakali and kalarippayattu moves by Malayalam speakers including Prospero/Reghoothaman (who had acted the lead in the Abhinaya *Macbeth*). Despite its performance at the Globe, my own review for *Cahiers Internationales* remains the sole scholarship on the production. Similarly, Poonam Trivedi and Sanju Thomas are the only scholars to have discussed Shakespeare in *kathaprasangam*, despite Sambasivan’s local audience of thousands over decades.

Greater critical attention has been received by Shakespeare productions that feature Keralan elements and are more visible globally, located in international cities and Anglophone locations. Such productions include Tim Supple’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the RSC (2006), which featured actors speaking in Malayalam among other Indian languages, and also toured India. Chapter One goes into further detail on another such production, Ong Ken Sen’s Singapore-based, touring *Desdemona* (2000) that included kutiyattam-inspired costumes and featured both kutiyattam performer Margi Madhu and kathakali artiste Maya Rao as twin Othellos. These productions explored the possibilities of hybridising Shakespeare with Keralan theatre on multiple levels of language, costume, and form.

³³ *Julius Caesar/Charudattam* in particular has so far received a lone academic review. See Graeme Vanderstoel’s piece in the Spring 2011 issue of *Asian Theatre Journal*, 561-572.

Supple's *Dream* provides a model of harmonious intercultural Shakespeare performance that incorporates Keralan elements. Supple's Indian production was lauded in general by its critical audiences as respectful in its intercultural portrayal. Ananda Lal writes that "Tim needs no advice, really, but in these contentious times of globalisation, everyone is rightly sensitive to the troublesome aspects of intercultural theatre. Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* had proved it to Indians" ("Edge of Creativity" n. pag.). Lal's comment references the heavy criticism received by Brook's *Mahabharata*, particularly from Indian critics, who felt that the production exoticised their country rather than treating it as a cultural equal. Linnemann explains that "Rather than regarding Brook's work as groundbreaking, articles written in the 1990s and beyond tend to consider his work as a new form of colonialism" ("Innovation" 32). Reviewing Supple's production in *Shakespeare Survey*, Michael Dobson felt that it evaded the worst case scenario of "a show masquerading as a Shakespeare revival but really offering a composite, exoticised vision of India for audiences of *de facto* tourists" (301). Instead, he wrote, Supple's show offered an "intelligent, cogent and original" reading of Shakespeare's play (301-2). While terming Dobson's criticism "perceptive" Lal problematises his review as one that suggests the "generic Western critic's inherently problematic gaze, relishing exotica" even while self-aware ("Tim Supple's *Dream*" 70, 75). As Lal points out, there remains an uneasy postcolonial boundary to negotiate when associating Indian Shakespeares with "Otherness" (ibid. 75). Yet Lal's view argues that a foreign director cannot competently direct Indian Shakespeares, an extreme position that precludes any possibility of intercultural work.

Such intercultural performance presents rich opportunities for improvisation and mutual artistic reciprocity. Anthony Dawson mentions this reciprocity in critiquing the kathakali *Lear*, describing the production as having been "as much about what Shakespeare can do to and for

Kathakali, as it was about Shakespeare when, like Bottom, he is translated into something quite different but still recognizable” (178). It is this mutual recognisability that unfortunately seems overlooked by Kennedy and Lan when they automatically place Shakespeare and Asia in juxtaposition as if counter to one another, in referring to “Asian *or* Shakespeare classical theatres” (my emphasis) (72). This distinction may seem insignificant, but the ‘inter’ in intercultural can be lost in merely contrasting cultures, rather than also comparing and evaluating them, taking into account multiple planes of interaction and even symbiosis. Doug Lanier situates Shakespeare’s “cultural authority” in the “accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation” where “the Shakespearean text [...] becomes less a root than a node that might be situated in relation to other rhizomes” (27). Accordingly, the thesis turns next to an exploration of another node in the rhizomatic structure of Keralan Shakespeares, the kutiyattam *Macbeth*.

In this introductory chapter I have presented the beginnings of Shakespeare in Kerala as part of the region’s continuing history of intercultural global encounters, fuelled by colonialism, religion, and adventurism. Over the course of this introduction I have located Keralan Shakespeares in an ongoing intercultural conversation, tracing influences from the historical to geographical, theoretical to practical, intracultural to global. In locating my investigation of Keralan Shakespeares within a framework of intercultural performance theories, this introduction has contextualised the three Keralan *Macbeths* in a range of literature pertaining to intercultural Shakespeares across global, national, and regional levels. I have outlined my research questions and qualitative methodology, defined terminology, and considered potential modes of hybridisation to account for the influences of Sanskrit rasa theory, Marxist politics, and religious Hindu allegory on Keralan Shakespeares. In examining local Keralan literary, dramatic, and filmic adaptations and translations of Shakespeare ranging from the colonial era

to the twenty-first century, this introduction has addressed multiple renderings of the intercultural third space for intercultural dialogue. The thesis now turns to Margi Madhu's kutiyattam *Macbeth* and its cultural translation of Shakespeare into Sanskrit drama, allowing for an extended elaboration of the horrors of the guilty conscience.

CHAPTER ONE – SHAKESPEARE IN THE OLDEST THEATRE:

MACBETH IN KUTIYATTAM

First of all was published the “Mirror of Gesture”, composed by one of the founders of the science, Nandikeśvara, to wit; but as it was not readily understandable by all, there have been introduced into this second edition pictures of the “Hands” [sic], with descriptions [...] hands to indicate famous emperors, sacred rivers, trees; animals, such as the lion; birds, such as the swan; water-creatures, such as the crocodile; and a classification of “Heads” [sic].

Madabhushi Tiruvenkata, preface to Nandikeśvara’s *Abhinayadarpana* (12)

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently [...] Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, who end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature...

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (3.2.4-5, 18-23)

As set out in the thesis introduction, this first chapter furthers my aim of addressing the research gap regarding postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares through highlighting local practitioners’ perspectives. Chapter One narrows my focus to interrogate these perspectives’ cultural locations in an intercultural conversation inflected by shifting notions of hybridity, postcolonialism, and decreasingly binaric East-West and local-global relationships. Accordingly, Chapter One undertakes an illustrative case study of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as adapted and performed by Margi Madhu, hereditary kutiyattam artist. Madhu premiered his *Macbeth* in 2006 at Vijnanakalavedi, Aranmula, Kerala, proclaiming it as “the first time that a Koodiyattom version of a foreign play was being performed” (Radhakrishnan Kuttoor n. pag.). Investigating the premise behind Madhu’s singular work, this first chapter examines the implications of his cultural translation of Shakespeare’s Scottish Play into traditionally sacred Sanskrit theatre.

First, Chapter One outlines Madhu’s strategic negotiation of tensions between his *Natyasastra*-circumscribed kutiyattam theatre and Shakespearean tragedy, analysing his

renegotiation of their physical, textual, and spiritual dimensions to fit his artistic vision. In examining the extent to which Madhu disconnects his art from its sacred temple setting to accommodate *Macbeth*, I question whether Madhu exploits *Macbeth*'s religious undercurrents or embraces a more globally applicable secularism. Concurrently, I highlight Madhu's use of Shakespeare as a medium through which to attract new audiences and democratise his declining art form, enabling its survival amid the dissolution of Hindu caste hierarchies. Chapter One next turns to an analysis of Madhu's strategies in performance, with reference to his 12 February 2011 *Macbeth* at the Hamara Shakespeare Festival in Chennai, India. In tracing rhizomatic networks of influences on Madhu's unorthodox production, I locate his portrayal of Macbeth in the tradition of typical kutiyattam anti-heroes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics. I further contextualise his Macbeth against Madhu's kutiyattam-inspired performance as Othello in Ong Keng Sen's 2000 touring production of *Desdemona*. In concluding, Chapter One examines the implications of Madhu's cultural translation for the evolving postmillennial identities of Keralan and global Shakespeares and their rhizomatic cross-fertility.

In teasing out the implications of Madhu's *Macbeth* for both kutiyattam and Keralan Shakespeares, I foreground Madhu's perspective as adapter, director, and performer. Such individual artistic perspectives are increasingly valued in intercultural Shakespeare criticism, where Alexa Huang sees a postmillennial "paradigm shift from seeking authenticity to foregrounding artistic subjectivity" (*Cyberspace* 104). First-person perspectives are especially relevant in the case of an orally transmitted heritage art form such as kutiyattam, where its rare performers act as living resources for a theatre form so fragile and sparingly documented that it has earned UNESCO protection (Leah Lowthorp, "Voices" 1). As mentioned in the thesis Introduction, kutiyattam is the sole remaining art form that encapsulates the codes of the

Natyasastra as originally performed in Sanskrit drama. Clifford Reis Jones cites the fragility of the kutiyattam heritage as such that “some portions of the manuals, pertaining to scenes which were formerly a part of the repertoire but which have not been performed within living memory, are no longer understood and can no longer be fully interpreted by the artists of the tradition today” (xvi). The factors that have led an ancient Sanskrit theatre form to survive solely in this state of India are threatened by the shifting identities of Kerala’s individuals and communities.



Figure 4: Margi Madhu’s kutiyattam *Macbeth*, Hamara Shakespeare Festival, Kalakshetra, photograph © *The Hindu*.

Madhu defines his kutiyattam *Macbeth* as a “cultural translation.”³⁴ In its utter transformation and assimilation of Shakespeare into kutiyattam, Madhu’s production resembles Poonam Trivedi’s proposed “cannibalisation” of Shakespeare (*Quarterly* 158). Yet where

³⁴ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Madhu I continue to refer to our interview.

Trivedi posits that such a translation constitutes a perverse postcolonial homage to Shakespeare, instead Madhu's production reconstituted *Macbeth* in homage to kutiyattam. Madhu averred that to the outward eye, his cultural translation was indistinguishable from a traditional kutiyattam performance: "If I [do] not say [so], nobody can tell this is a Shakespeare play." Here, Madhu distilled the translated text to an opening Sanskrit verse, and he cut the Shakespearean narrative heavily, omitting all but the central characters such as Macbeth, Duncan, Macduff, and Lady Macbeth. He compressed the witches into one, presumably the easier to enact during his solo performance, and he omitted all of the witches' dialogue aside from the conflated prophecies (1.3, 4.1). Madhu ended his play at the psychological climax, with Macbeth fainting upon realising defeat as Birnam Wood approached: "He is already finished; the play is already finish[ed]." However, one questions what occurs when Madhu's kutiyattam *Macbeth* takes place in a third space markedly different from the original settings for either Shakespeare or kutiyattam, from Jacobean or temple theatres? Huang writes that in the new millennium, "as theatre artists challenge fixated notions of tradition," latent reciprocal harmonies may also surface ("Asian Shakespeare 2.0." 1). It is believed that kutiyattam can claim an antiquity of approximately two thousand years, representing a particularly fixed performance tradition (Madhavan 19; G. Venu, *Into the World* 179). Thus, Margi Madhu's cultural translation of *Macbeth* represents a major challenge to any rigid notions regarding both kutiyattam and Shakespeare.

Accordingly, Madhu's *Macbeth* represents an important vehicle for the underrepresented "two-way traffic of intercultural exchange" among postmillennial Asian Shakespeares (Huang, "Asian Shakespeare 2.0." 2). This mutual exchange and resulting hybridity can effect a greater understanding of both performance cultures. Bruce Sullivan

locates kutiyattam's appeal in "its very otherworldly nature [...] archaic languages and esoteric gestures" enhanced by its "extraordinary costumes, lavishly colorful makeup, [...] and its driving percussion accompaniment" ("Masterpiece" 83). Thus, to witness kutiyattam is to experience an abrupt dislocation from offstage reality, befitting the adoption of a supernatural narrative such as *Macbeth*. In *New Sites for Shakespeare*, John Russell Brown maintains that he experienced an enhanced understanding of Shakespeare through its very differences with kutiyattam: "While this archaic, unscripted, complicated, and elitist theatre is obviously far removed from Shakespeare's plays and the theatre for which they were written, an experience of Kutiyattam has changed the position from which I now view Shakespeare" (83). In exploring this perceived cultural removal between Shakespearean and Sanskrit theatre, I consider the potential for using Shakespeare as a tool to transgress the *Natyasastra*'s artistic strictures in attracting new audiences to kutiyattam. Accordingly, the next section examines the *Natyasastra*'s influence on Madhu through exploring his perspective on *Macbeth*, contextualised in the practical and theoretical codifications of India's surviving Sanskrit theatre.

Changing the dagger-handle: updating the Sanskrit theatre with *Macbeth*

"*Thunder and lightning*" (1.1, s.d.): Indian critic S. Viswanathan argues that in Shakespeare's time, his *Macbeth* would have opened in *dhvani* (ambient sound), with "thunder" created by drums rolled offstage (240). Viswanathan posits that "Among Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* is most amenable to an approach through the Sanskrit-literary critical category of *dhvani*," or the theoretical concept of resonance between the audience and the audible (238). This concept is expounded along with those of *rasa* (sentiment) and *bhava* (mood) in India's seminal *Natyasastra* treatise, and Viswanathan's view exemplifies the continuing influence of this

practical and theoretical manual on the Indian artistic viewpoint (Kapila Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 28). Thus, in producing a new play for kutiyattam, Madhu modified not only his hereditary art form but also a cultural tradition involving centuries of theory, practice, and philosophy fundamentally intertwined with the Hindu *Natyasastra* (Lowthorp, “Voices” 5). In examining the relationship between the *Natyasastra*, kutiyattam, and Madhu’s *Macbeth*, this section locates his production amid the tensions surrounding the evolution of India’s Hindu temple arts tradition.

In Kerala, the evolution of kutiyattam was precipitated by the post-Independence democratic election of a Marxist government and consequential anti-caste reforms (as detailed in a later section of this chapter). The ensuing loss of regular feudal patronage resulted in the ongoing necessity for kutiyattam artists to innovate to ensure their elitist Hindu theatre form’s survival. Kutiyattam’s fragility is underlined by the UNESCO protection granted in 2001, which recognises the theatre form as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” (Lowthorp, “Voices” 157). Lowthorp states that with the UNESCO backing, “kutiyattam became the cultural face of national India on an international scale,” yet such recognition appears to be on paper only (“Implications” 207). Despite its status as “cultural capital,” kutiyattam has been practiced exclusively by six high-caste chakyar families (Bharucha, “Foreign Asia” 11). In 2012, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar expressed his “apprehensions” that “all the great masters of Kudiyaattam have gone. [...] The community of *Chakyars* is almost extinct” (*Rasa* 256). Arguably, the traditional restriction of kutiyattam to the elite high-caste Brahminical audiences of the temple environs has delayed its wider international circulation as a performance form emblematic of Kerala’s Sanskrit theatre tradition.

While kutiyattam is a Hindu art form, Madhu's hereditary theatre has not always adhered to the regulations of Bharata's *Natyasastra* treatise. K. G. Paulose writes that Bharata describes the ancient Sanskrit theatre as one possessing a "sophisticated structure with a beginning, development and denouement" that ideally leaves room for improvisation and audience interaction (*Improvisations* 23). Paulose testifies that the relationship between kutiyattam and the *Natyasastra* remains flexible:

A close look at Kutiyattam would reveal that none of these requirements of Bharata is fulfilled here. Kutiyattam has a loose structure, the development of plot does not follow the accepted track, abhinaya [emotive acting] is almost of the nature of a monologue with little scope for interaction... (ibid. 24)

In describing Bharata's treatise as the base of the art, Paulose compares kutiyattam to a clock: "The face of it represents the rigid classical structure and the pendulum below moving sideways stands for the popular and the progressive elements" ("Popular" 3). Kutiyattam performer G. Venu concurs with this assessment, remarking that "Most of the aspects in the Bharata *Natyasastra* are not exactly followed [in kutiyattam]" (*Fifty Years* 124). Primarily, Venu writes that "when it comes to concepts relating to the *abhinaya* [acting] of sentiments there are [sic] considerable influence from the *Natyasastra*" (ibid.). In Bharata's view, nothing takes place without *rasa*, and "the actor's interpretation of a play with expertise in *abhinaya* illuminates the myriad aesthetic experiences of the *rasas* for the audience" (ibid. 156). Therefore, Venu maintains that his art form retains Bharata's core theoretical emphasis on evoking *rasa* in performance, despite kutiyattam's apparent deviation from prescribed *Natyasastra* practice.

Madhu's *Macbeth* fits into this kutiyattam tradition of artistic interpretation, raising questions regarding the issue of whether it is the individual or collective who determines a culture's performance conventions. While the *Natyasastra* treatise provides a comprehensive treatment of Sanskrit drama practice and theory, it remains only a text. It is in the interpretation of these rules, the movements in the hand symbols, or the expressions of the eyes to show each mood, that kutiyattam performers must receive years of oral instruction along with their practical training. Alongside this hereditary instruction, Kapila Vatsyayan remarks that in kutiyattam "the incorporation of new material and evolution of categories appears as a fairly pervasive phenomenon" (*Bharata* 124). For example, regarding particulars of gesture, Keralan performers consult not only the *Natyasastra* but also auxiliary texts such as the undated *Hastalakshana Deepika* and *Abhinayadarpana* (Sadanam Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 25). Vatsyayan sees evidence of local innovation in these "new categories of *hastas* (hand-gesture)" found in kutiyattam, remarking that their absence in the *Natyasastra* and their presence in the *Abhinayadarpana* "is significant" (*Bharata* 121, 124). Thus, Keralan artists continue to supplement Indian tradition with local innovation.

In producing a cultural translation of *Macbeth*, Madhu created a new performance manual rather than a playtext. As the *Natyasastra* contains no playtexts, kutiyattam plays are "performed according to stage manuals passed down as palm leaf manuscripts" (Lowthorp, "Voices" 160). These manuals supplement the *Natyasastra*, which prescribes the construction of the *kuttampalam* or temple theatre hall and stage; the standard number and type of emotions displayed by the performer; the appropriate *mudra* or hand gesture used for a word or concept; the various *tala* or tempo for dance steps; and the costume and makeup, including the different colour schemes, adopted for various character types. These kutiyattam performance manuals,

known as the *attaprakaram* and *kramadeepika*, contain abbreviated plays and additional rules of enactment for kutiyattam.



Figure 5: The gestural alphabet of twenty-four signs used by kutiyattam and kathakali, illustration © Fenella Kelly.

In producing a new play, Madhu deviated from the established use of Sanskrit source-texts. The majority of these manuscript plays are based on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and composed between the 2nd-10th centuries AD by the Sanskrit playwrights Harsha, Bhasa, and Saktibhadra (Lowthorp, “Voices” 160). Venu explains that kutiyattam interprets these texts through the device of plot elaboration, or *nirvahanam*, “It is not the original text as is, that is presented in Kutiyattam. One act of the original drama is selected and [...] the presentation of that single act is lengthened for days and days!” (*Production*, 100). Accordingly, a play of five acts like Bhasa’s *Balacharitham* can be compressed into an invocatory quatrain (or *shloka*) such as Madhu’s opening Sanskrit verse for *Macbeth*, detailed later in this chapter. Following the recitation of this *shloka*, the actor enacts the first part of the performance as a mimed flashback or recapitulation that leads up to the action summarised in the opening verse. The second half of performance is then enacted in mime as the rest of the episode moves forward in ‘real time.’

This space between *Natyasastra* theory, kutiyattam playtext, and individual performance provided a natural gap for Madhu to add his Sanskritised version of *Macbeth* to the kutiyattam corpus. Madhu’s production of *Macbeth* in particular “entailed innovation,” writes Bruce Sullivan, in the creation of new “performance manuals, the written texts that provide the devotional and aesthetic elaborations” (“Kerala’s *Mahabharata*” 14). In supplementing his tradition by producing a new Shakespearean Sanskrit performance text for *Macbeth*, Madhu describes his hereditary art form as elastic and receptive to experimentation. He told me: “I think this is the most ancient theatre form; at the same time, [it] is very modern; so, kutiyattam have [sic] a capacity to receive any modern things.” Madhu’s perspective emphasises *rasa* over narrative, locating his art as a tradition that lives in the performer’s interpretation rather than in print. Yet Bruce Sullivan privileges performer and material as equal

partners in an intercultural equation, asking, “[D]oes the practice cease to be Kutiyattam if traditional performance manuals are not used, and traditional narratives such as *Mahabharata* episodes cease to be the material enacted?” (“Kerala’s *Mahabharata*” 15).³⁵ Sullivan’s question ignores the dimension added by audience interaction, and Madhu’s metaphor of cultural translation suggests that the practice of translating and updating kutiyattam holds further complexity.

To explain how kutiyattam has incorporated innovations while retaining its core tradition, Madhu used the metaphor of an heirloom dagger, repaired and renewed over generations:

One man, he is, got a knife from his father. [...] he give [s it] to his son. He also keep[s] it. But after some years, this, blade is cut off, from the centre. So he go[es] to the workshop and change[s] it. [At] last, [after] six or seven generations, *everything* [on the knife] is changed. But they, [he still] said, this is my father’s-father’s-father’s-father’s, it is more than 2,000 years [old]. [That] is the, tradition. We can’t keep it, the same thing, from 2,000 years [ago]. It is changing. But it is the, continuity. So the [main] thing is, what [do] you *think* about this? If you *like* it, you *keep* it, but not [exactly as] the same thing.

Madhu’s flexible perspective echoes Yong Li Lan’s suggestion that the term ‘intercultural’ not only “refers in some instances to new theatrical practices, it also marks a changed attitude to old ones” (“Fiction” 531). Thus, his view of tradition accommodates intercultural innovation.

³⁵ In quoting Bruce Sullivan and others, to enhance the readability of the text I have followed Leah Lowthorp’s convention and not retained or inserted diacritical marks in transliteration.

In exploring the origins and parameters of Madhu's art form, this section has begun to examine the potential for Madhu to reinscribe Shakespeare with kutiyattam and vice versa. It has opened a discussion of the strategies Madhu adopts to deal with an intracultural dichotomy, or what Bharucha terms the difference between cultures within the nation-state (*Practice 9*). Madhu's *Macbeth* navigates between the cultural rigidity of the prescribed practices of the *Natyasastra* venerated by generations, and the necessary flexibility that kutiyattam practitioners require in adapting these to meet twenty-first-century challenges. The next section investigates potential tensions that may arise in the process of following, ignoring, or deviating from these prescriptions and their underlying assumptions.

Renegotiating Bharata's temple theatre: entering and leaving the kuttampalam

Significantly, Madhu has never performed his *Macbeth* inside a temple theatre. This omission represents a visible break with ancient kutiyattam tradition. The architecture of the traditional 'kuttampalam,' or auxiliary temple theatre, is rooted both practically and spiritually in the *Natyasastra* scripture.³⁶ G. A. C. Pandeya describes the architectural and social divisions of the kuttampalam:

Its raised dais is covered by a wooden pavilion, the ceiling of which is richly carved and painted with floral and other decorative motifs. The pavilion stands on four lacquered pillars (brilliantly coloured) and surmounted by *amalaka* capitals. They are decorated with plantain leaves, flowers and other articles. Its auditorium is provided with two tiers, the upper one for the Brahmins and the

³⁶ Madhu typically performs in a temple theatre but has constructed a replica kuttampalam at his own kutiyattam institution, Nepathya, blurring the demarcation of sacred and secular performing spaces.

royalty and the lower one for the commoners. Behind the dais, a green room enclosure is provided with a door in the partition wall through which the actors can come in or go out; the dais is open on the other three sides. (27)

Pandeya's description is evocative of Shakespearean theatres such as the Globe, yet a typical kuttampalam was constructed in the rectangular (see Figure 6).

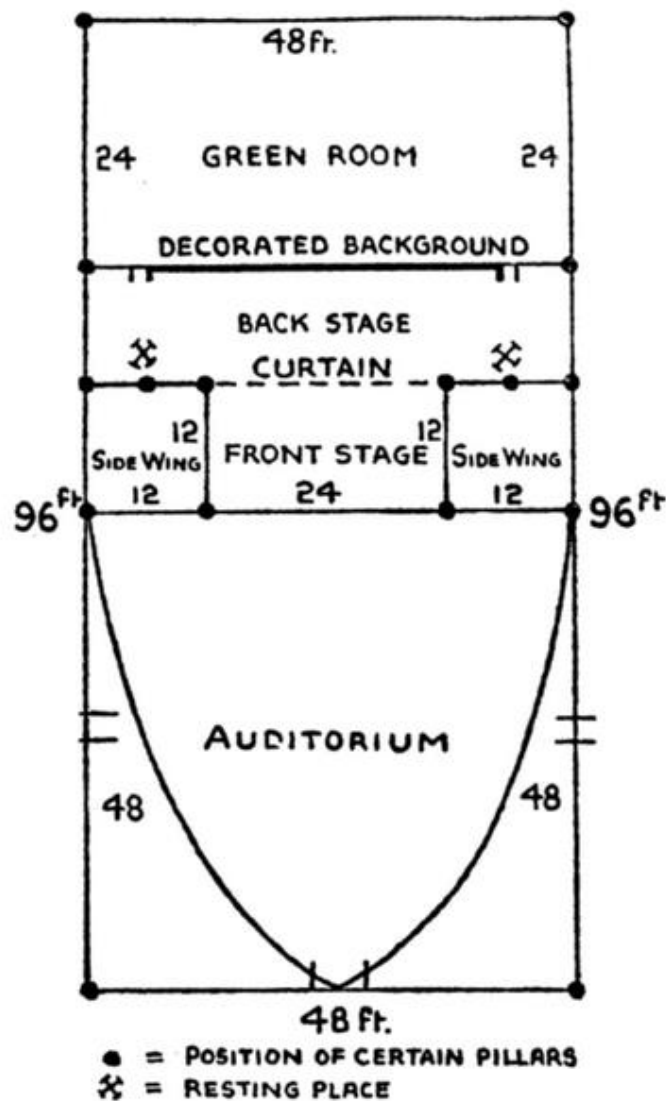


Figure 6: The theatre layout recommended by Bharata, diagram © R. K. Yajnik.

Vatsyayan records that the kuttampalams “are the closest [extant] approximation to Bharata’s theatre” (*Bharata* 124).³⁷ However, L. S. Rajagopalan clarifies that while the kuttampalam references the *Natyasastra*, the local theatres rather follow the architectural guidelines of Kerala’s Sanskrit texts, the fifteenth-century *Tantrasamuccaya* and sixteenth-century *Silparatna* (*Preliminaries* vii). Regardless of the distinction, Venu avers that “an authoritative rendering of *Kutiyattam* is possible only in the *Koothambalam*” (*Into the World* 61). In examining Madhu’s unorthodox kutiyattam performance of *Macbeth*, this chapter looks in turn at the latent spiritual, socioeconomic, and practical consequences of enacting his production at an alternative cultural venue.

Formerly, kutiyattam performances had taken place exclusively inside the walls of the temple auditorium before an elite audience of high-caste Brahmin *sahrydayas*, or aficionados. The *sahrydaya* was the ideal spectator, literally one “of attuned heart” (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 155). With India’s Independence in 1947, the subsequent election of a Communist government in Kerala saw the disintegration of the feudal Hindu caste hierarchies that had formerly supported kutiyattam. Suddenly, “the system which had sustained Kutiyattam as an elite, temple-based occupation for nearly one thousand years crumbled beneath the artists’ feet” (Lowthorp, “Voices” 5). Lowthorp locates this crisis in the economic shifts following a social collapse particular to Marxist, post-Independence Kerala, where legacies of “India’s most rigid caste system” co-exist with the region’s “relative religious equality” (“Voices” 2). Concurrently, the art suffered a cultural loss, as the average audience member supplanted the informed *sahrydaya*. This shift marks an historic confrontation of Keralan ‘high culture’ with

³⁷ For a detailed account of Bharata’s recommended design, layout, and construction for three different sizes of the theatre auditorium, see R. K. Yajnik, pages 39-43.

‘low culture’ and of Hindu elitism with a growing egalitarianism, centred on the religious institution of temple theatre.

While India’s legal abolition of caste discrimination dates to the national constitution of 1950, in Kerala this social revolution predates the era of postcolonialism. Temples in the then “princely state of Travancore (present-day southern Kerala) were opened to all castes in 1936” by local royal proclamation (Diane Daugherty, “Fifty Years” 239). In protest at the resulting influx, some high-caste families of chakyars “refused to perform for the wider audience” (ibid.). If intercultural performance is predicated on a “performative” understanding of culture in which the latter is “basically sustained *by and as performance*” then this juncture epitomises the societal authentication of kutiyattam as representative of Keralan culture (Lan, “Fiction” 532). Lowthorp sees this as the emergence of a “newly re-imagined Malayali identity foregrounding the performing arts [...] with a specific agenda of political mobilization” (“Implications” 215). In the twenty-first century, the “most important audience” for kutiyattam remains “the ordinary people irrespective of caste or creed” (Venu, *Fifty Years* 118). When asked whether different audiences affected a kutiyattam performance differently, Madhu replied in the affirmative: “That is depend[ent on] the audience. All performance[s] are [otherwise the] same.” Madhu’s response indicates the importance of the artist-audience dynamic, regardless of the performance location.

Madhu downplayed the significance of performing *Macbeth* outside the temple, relating simply that nobody had yet invited him to do the production inside: “It is not possible in...It is *possible*, but nobody is, I am not ask[ed yet by] anybody, is—‘Please do this play in your place.’ If nobody ask[s this] to me [sic], then I [will] not perform [it there], that is all.” Madhu’s own response to the question of whether he was avoiding a temple performance intentionally,

perhaps due to a reverence for tradition or to an audience that was not yet receptive, was: “No, I think nobody is not [sic] aware about this, maybe.” Despite Madhu’s unconcern as to whether his *Macbeth* is performed inside or outside of a temple, the staging of kutiyattam outside the sacred kuttampalam [literally, ‘acting-temple’] theatre holds repercussions for the art form’s evolution. In addition to inviting wider audience participation, an outside performance takes on a different connotation when divested of “the elaborate ritual procedures conducted by Brahmin priests that are required at temple theatres” (Bruce Sullivan, “How Does One” 80). Madhu averred that “kutiyattam *was*, ritual, at the same time, [it] is a culture also. But now we can’t say this is a ritual thing, now [it] is like a theatre. So now it [is at] most a culture.” In discussing culture, Madhu presented a humanistic perception of its universal root: “I’m not thinking that Indian culture is separate from others. I like to say [ours] is a human culture, just to love all.” In relation to Lan’s proposal that intercultural performance is a mode in which culture is “basically sustained *by and as performance*,” Madhu’s view represents the evolution of kutiyattam from religious ritual to humanist theatre, through the use of Shakespeare (“Fiction” 532). By extension, Madhu’s perspective implies that his translation of *Macbeth* into kutiyattam was motivated primarily by factors other than the play’s religious undertones.

Madhu’s decision to perform *Macbeth* outside the temple in a cultural translation of Shakespeare is befitting in the context of a historic wider Keralan movement to democratise kutiyattam, introducing it to new audiences to ensure its economic and cultural survival. Madhu explained that around 1965, the rules had relaxed regarding anyone “who wishes to study and perform it; out from the temple, [kutiyattam] is [sic] come to the democratic area.” The change was sudden; as late as 1964, Kunjunni Raja had written of kutiyattam: “In Kerala it is kept strictly a temple-art even to this day” (viii). It was only when Kerala’s new economic climate

“threatened the very survival” of their art that the chakyars “relaxed their orthodoxy and consented to give performances outside temples” (Venu, “Production” 6). Mundoli Narayanan dates this secularisation to the decade after Independence, recalling the “heroic efforts” of senior kutiyattam artist Painkulam Rama Chakyar “to take the form out of the temples and to introduce it to wider audiences” (142).³⁸ The maestro’s historic first secular performance was likely sponsored by new public funding such as “grants from the state and central governments, foundations, and new patrons” (Bruce Sullivan, “How Does One” 80). Narayanan describes kutiyattam’s post-Independence secularisation as an ongoing process, with the establishment of a related department “at Kerala Kalamandalam (the state institute of arts)” and “of training centres for kutiyattam at Margi and Natanakairali” and “the training of actors and actresses from [non-elite] castes” (142). Thus, Madhu’s performance of *Macbeth* outside the temple is situated at the interchange between art, commerce, religion, and culture. Accordingly, the next section investigates these factors in relation to the significance of removing kutiyattam from the traditional kuttampalam temple auditorium.

The kuttampalam and kutiyattam: spatiality and spirituality

Madhu claims that his *Macbeth* is indistinguishable from a typical kutiyattam production. However, in its removal from the kuttampalam, Madhu’s performance underwent an immediate change in typical kutiyattam staging practice. This section focuses on the practical and spiritual implications of this change for Madhu’s *Macbeth* in moving beyond the kuttampalam. For

³⁸ K. Kunjunni Raja concurs that Painkulam Rama Chakyar was the performer, yet he dates this episode to his 1960 performance of *Subhadradhananjaya* at Calicut (Rajagopalan, vii).

example, the kuttampalam auditorium was typically constructed along mathematical lines to enhance its acoustic and visual properties. The kuttampalam temple theatre represents “the last word in acoustic perfection” and ideally it “is so built that the performance can be viewed and heard clearly from any corner within” (Venu, “Into the World” 177; Paulose, *Introduction* 35). Madhu vouches for the efficiency of the traditional acoustic design. The artist told me that to “perform in a kuttampalam, is...you don’t need the mike. But [if] you perform in [sic] a proscenium stage, you need it.” As the kuttampalam is exclusively dedicated to the sacred dramas, after the decline of these performances, many theatres fell into disuse. Paulose recounts that “Most of the Kuttampalams faced ruin over the years, the only surviving one in good condition being the one at Vadakkunnatha temple in Thrissur” (*Introduction* 36).³⁹ The Vadakkunnatha Temple kuttampalam is “seventy-eight feet long by fifty-five feet wide” with a capacity of five hundred and “excellent” acoustics (Leiter 687; Paulose, *Introduction* 36). This theatre is still in use for kutiyattam performances (see Figure 7).

During a typical kutiyattam performance, the actor stands onstage in the middle of the auditorium, facing a large lit brass oil lamp before the audience, while the drummers sit at the rear. Kunjunni Raja describes this setup: “On one side [is] the green-room, just in front of it is the stage, and the rest of the place [is] for the audience [...] At the back of the stage are kept, inside a wooden frame, two big drums called *Mizhavā* [sic], big pots about three feet high made of copper, with the mouth covered tightly with leather” (9). Madhu’s 12 February 2011 performance of *Macbeth* at South India’s premier classical arts academy, Kalakshetra (literally,

³⁹ ‘Vadakkunnatha’ is the possessive of ‘Vadakunnathan.’ G. Venu specifies that kuttampalams remain in “fifteen temples while four others carry their ruins” (77). K. G. Paulose names surviving ancient kuttampalams in “the temples of Guruvayoor, Tirumandhankunnu, Koodalmanikkam, Tirunakkara, Peruvanam, Punnattur, Tiruvegappura, Moozhikkulam, Kidangoor, Haripad, Tiruvarpu, Arpukkara and Tiruvalattur” (36). Here Paulose omits to mention the ruined kuttampalams at temples such as Chengannur, while he notes the new kuttampalams at the art schools of Kalakshetra and Kerala Kalamandalam, both designed by Appukuttan Nair (36).

‘holy place of arts’) retained the traditional position of the lamp and drummers. However, the entire performance was located in the art school’s open-air rehearsal space, under a tree. The performer’s decision to perform outdoors, despite the convenient presence of a reconstructed kuttampalam on the Kalakshetra campus, hints at his deliberate break with tradition.

The architectural plan of the kuttampalam links the temple theatre implicitly to the concept of the Hindu divinity and associated devotional rituals. Paulose elucidates the intent underlying the dimensions of the waist-high, raised kuttampalam stage: “The position of the performer’s (Chakyar’s) feet was to be at the same level at which the idol’s feet were placed in the Srikovil [inner sanctum] thus equating him to the diety [sic]” (*Introduction* 35). This parallel between the performer and deity, the temple and auxiliary temple, was emphasised in the kuttampalam theatre’s inner layout, which mimicked the main temple’s ritual halls and altars. Vatsyayan describes this arrangement: “the stage in particular is an analogue of the ritual space of the *yajna* [sacrifice]. The *sala* [hall], the *vedis*, the altars, were the components of the *yajna*. On the stage, the central and peripheral areas, serve the same purpose” (*Bharata* 60). By performing his *Macbeth* in a kuttampalam attached to a temple, Madhu’s production would have held an overt religious dimension as opposed to its latent association.

Thus, the kuttampalam represents a spiritual locus for performer and audience. The Hindu trinity is believed to be present in the three dancing flames of the kutiyattam performance lamp (Rajagopalan, *Preliminaries* 24; Paulose, *Introduction* 35).⁴⁰ Before visiting the sanctum, temple devotees often worshipped first at the kuttampalam, believed to house a portion of the energy of the adjoining temple deity (Rajagopalan, *Preliminaries* 7). Kunjunni Raja narrates an anecdotal episode where the theatre literally became the inner sanctum, when the resident idol

⁴⁰ The heavenly Hindu trinity is comprised of Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer. Together, these gods perform the cosmological cycle; when propitiated, Vishnu incarnates to save Earth from evil.

of the eagle Garuda was brought in to witness the performance of the story *Nagananda*, in which the deity is a character (9). The reverence paid to the kuttampalam demonstrates the esteem held by the Hindu audience towards the sacred performing arts. This attitude indicates the impossibility of performing a secular version of *Macbeth* in a temple kuttampalam without imbuing the performance with Hindu symbolism. Through its architecture, the kuttampalam is deeply implicated in the religious Hindu symbolism underlying its dimensions, layout, and location. Therefore it represents not only a transgression but also a rupture for artists to remove their art from this sacred setting.

In its architectural metaphor the kuttampalam can be compared to the original Shakespearean theatre and its intended cosmology. Frances Yates posits that the Globe Theatre was modelled on a “theatre of the world” with a Vitruvian influence, “a magical theatre, a cosmic theatre, a religious theatre, an actors’ theatre [...] His theatre would have been for Shakespeare the pattern of the universe, the idea of the Macrocosm, the world stage on which the Microcosm acted his parts” (189). Equally, Vatsyayan records that “the Kerala temples are built largely on the pan Indian almost universal model of the Vastupurusa [universal human]” (*Kshetram* 31). She unpacks this concept as the “figure of Man [or] purusa in the literal sense as also figurative mean and as a micro and macro measure” (ibid.). Similarly, in replicating temple architecture the kuttampalam becomes “a micro-model of the cosmos. The physical place replicates cosmic space” (Vatsyayan, *Bharata* 60). Notably, Bharata’s ancient architectural plan for the kuttampalam is evocative of Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*, which the latter envisaged as a “*cosmografia del minor mondo* (cosmography of the microcosm),” or an analogy for the universe (Ludwig Heydenreich 6). Thus, the kuttampalam

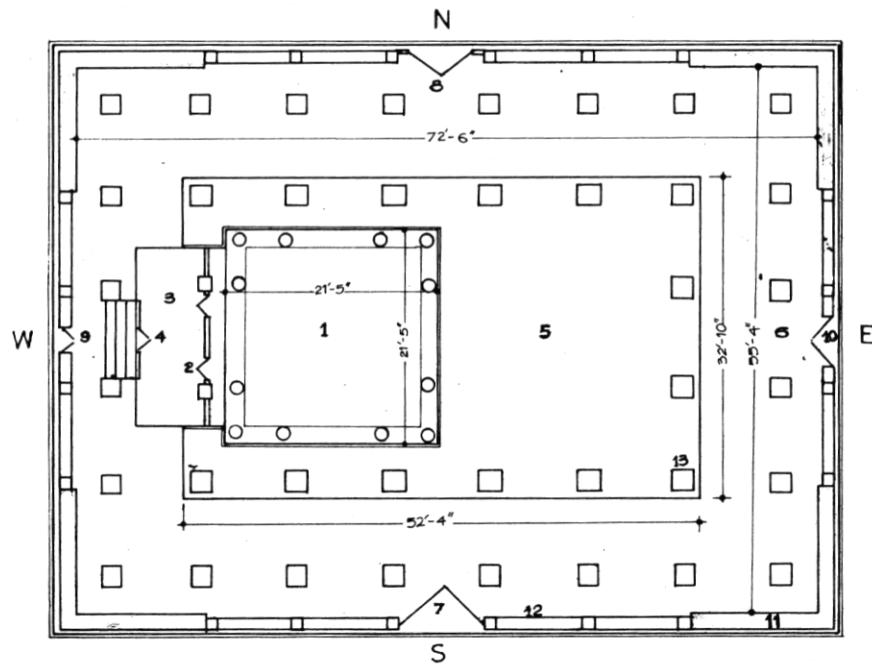
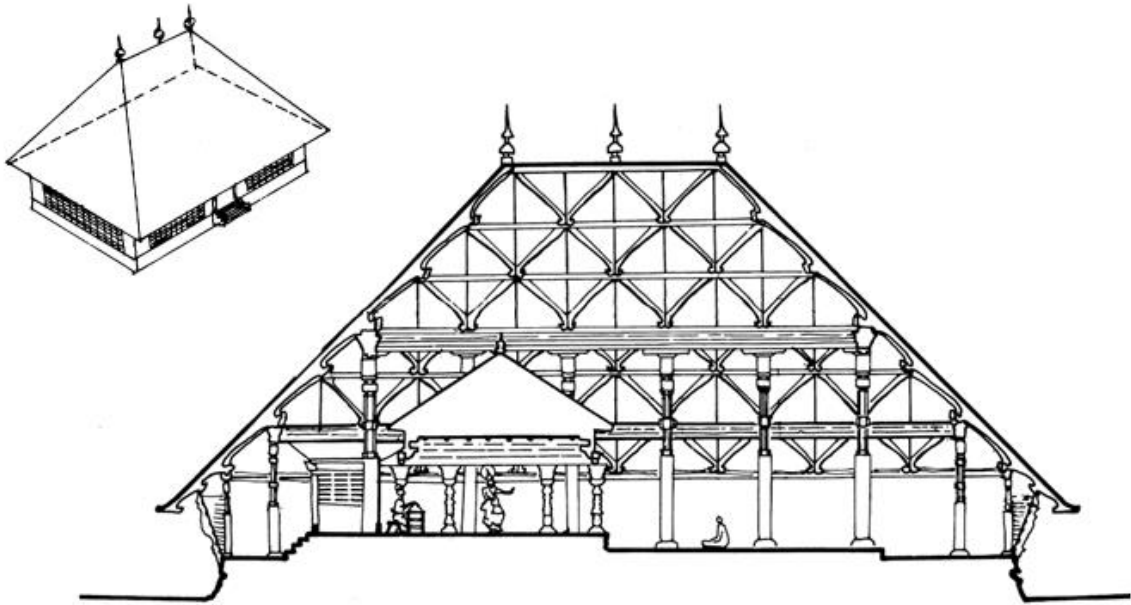


Figure 7: Plan of the kuttampalam of the Vadakkunnatha Temple, Thrissur, Kerala, images © Goverdhan Panchal.

also represents the human body and its capacity to house its own divine spirit. In a reappropriation of tradition, new kuttampalams have been constructed along the old models, at performing arts schools including Kalakshetra and Madhu's own Nepathya. While the secular location of the Nepathya kuttampalam divorces Madhu's art form from its religious temple location, the spatiality of the traditional kuttampalam architecture remains significant to Madhu's productions on a spiritual and metaphysical level.

In equating the human form with the universe, the spatiality of the kuttampalam allows the direct connection of kutiyattam with the cosmos, transcending the limitations of the Hindu temple stage. Madhu's art school, Nepathya, has its own kuttampalam, which was built according to his vision: "Nepathya is [...] an experiment to work in a democratic atmosphere of art oriented co-operation without any hierarchical mannerisms where everyone is free to voice their opinion. As a part of this idea, we built a Koothambalam outside the temple premises only for performances" (qtd. in Lalitha Venkat n. pag.). Such an interpretation effectively realigns "the Lord's anointed temple" (*Macbeth* 2.3.66-67) with the body of the average human being. This relocation reconstitutes Madhu's art on the basis of humanism rather than elitist Hinduism.

Madhu's production fosters an intercultural relationship between the codes of Shakespearean and kutiyattam theatre. However, Madhu's *Macbeth* does not exist at the juncture described by Ian Watson, where interculturalism functions as a "creolization" in "a transitive, dialectical process in which at least two cultures fuse and/or suffer partial disculturation" (5). For kutiyattam, *Macbeth* represents an innovation rather than a disculturation. This distinction is marginal; in creating new work that is performed outside the temples, secularising kutiyattam presents it with "both danger and opportunity," according to Bruce Sullivan ("Kerala's *Mahabharata*" 13). Here, Sullivan warns of the danger that with the

“performances of dramas new to the repertoire, in new settings outside the temple theatres, and for new audiences,” the art performed may cease to be kutiyattam entirely (ibid. 15). Indeed, kutiyattam guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar writes that since kutiyattam has been “taken out of temples, [...] [productions] have been drastically abbreviated to limit them to a few hours. [...] I have definite fears that their highly individual styles will be lost” (iii). The hereditary masters or chakyars still “consider it a sacrilege” to alter tradition, and “the pressures of orthodoxy” continue to influence kutiyattam, to the extent that it is “impossible to get the permission of the Gurus of Ammannur tradition here in advance for a play that is not in the list” of preapproved productions (Goverdhan Panchal 57; Venu, *Fifty Years* 143). Conversely, in taking his *Macbeth* outdoors to a third space beyond the governance of the traditions of both temple and original practice theatres, Madhu values the opportunity for innovation.

Madhu’s solo performance of 12 February 2011, set in the front yard of the Kalakshetra performing arts academy, deviated in several vital ways from the prescribed kutiyattam strictures. While his *Macbeth* in cultural translation invited free entry, it was open both to the elements and to the general populace. Madhu’s show took place outdoors, underneath the boughs of a banyan tree and the night sky, a setting reminiscent of *Macbeth*’s: “Stars, hide your fires / Let not light see my black and deep desires” (1.4.50-51). Yet it was an ideal setting for a performance that respectfully transgressed one of India’s most ancient traditions even while revivifying it for modern-day audiences. As the academy’s website states, “Kalakshetra was established, in the words of Rukmini Devi, “with the sole purpose of resuscitating in modern India recognition of the priceless artistic traditions of our country”” (*Kalakshetra* n. pag.).⁴¹ The

⁴¹ The Kalakshetra website’s home page defaults to an image of the yard in which Madhu’s performance took place, and which hosts the academy’s rehearsals and morning assembly. The default image hints at the space’s religious associations, with an idol of Ganesha, typically placed on the classical Hindu stage, shown at the base of the tree.

irony is that in India's new secular democracy, formerly colonial Shakespeare here became the midwife for kutiyattam's resuscitation. While Madhu's *Macbeth* took place in an elite locus of Indian artistic tradition, Madhu's performance ensured that kutiyattam was no longer restricted to an audience comprised of the higher castes of Hindu society.

Madhu's removal of his performance from a temple setting gave the artist an excuse to experiment creatively with the boundaries of his art form. The artist remarked that with its former restrictions as a "temple art form, there were only a limited number of stories that could be performed" in kutiyattam (Nita Sathyendran n. pag.). Accordingly, Madhu told Nileena M. S.: "When we tried bringing new texts like 'Macbeth' [sic] [before the audience], they were well received and that gave us the confidence that we could present any story through this art form" (n. pag.). Madhu has composed four acting manuals for kutiyattam: *Macbeth*, and *Doothaghatothkacham*, *Kanchukeeyam*, and *Karnabharam*, based on the tales of their titular *Mahabharata* characters (Paulose, *Improvisations* 36; Sathyendran n. pag.). Madhu attributes this potential for experimentation to kutiyattam's "classical nature and the structural strength evolved through the years [that] have given it the flexibility to accommodate creative experiments" (Nileena n. pag.). The next section examines one such intercultural experiment that perhaps inspired Madhu's *Macbeth*, or his kutiyattam-inspired role as Othello in Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona*.

Cultural translation and the intercultural equation

Possibly, Madhu derived inspiration for *Macbeth* from his prior firsthand experience with the intercultural flexibility of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists. In Ong Keng Sen's experimental production of *Desdemona* (2000), Madhu performed the role of Othello "in the Kutiyattam

style” (Paulose, *Improvisations* 35). Lan writes that Sen’s postmodern production intended to present Asia as dislocated “fragments” through “disparities in performance styles” (*Desdemona* 253). Accordingly, *Desdemona* represented a radical “form of Asian interculturality” that brought together “traditional and contemporary practitioners from India, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Singapore” (ibid. 252). Both of *Desdemona*’s Indian practitioners performed traditional Keralan arts, and both played Othello. Lan writes that Madhu’s “younger Othello married to Desdemona was played in *kudiyattam*,” while actress Maya Rao played “an ambiguously gendered older Othello [...] in adapted *Kathakali*” (“Fiction” 534). Paulose suggests that Madhu’s participation in *Desdemona* and his mutual theatrical dialogue with the artists “from seven countries [...] gave him confidence to try on Macbeth [sic]” soon afterwards (ibid. 36). Madhu’s participation in *Desdemona* illustrates the potential for rhizomatic networks of exchange between Keralan and Asian Shakespeares that transcend the colonial East-West dynamic. An examination of *Desdemona* reveals the performative differences between Madhu’s kutiyattam portrayals of Macbeth in solo, and Othello in juxtaposition with other Asian forms.

As Othello, Madhu exhibited stylised movements and vocalisations that echoed kutiyattam techniques, yet his role also involved postmodernist improvisation. Accordingly, Bharucha felt that “it was moving for me to see Madhu come out of the rigor of his tradition and pitch himself into the free-for-all of contemporary theatrical improvisation” in response to Sen’s direction to the actors to “reinvent” themselves (“Foreign Asia” 11). In Sen’s production, Madhu further reinvented his appearance, wearing a streamlined costume of trousers, tunic, neck rill, and hat that held only the merest hint of the traditional elaborate kutiyattam *vesham* (TheatreWorks n. pag.). Despite Madhu’s simplified costume, Lan writes that the primary audience “response was one of alienation” to his kutiyattam, which “could hardly have felt more

exotic in Europe than in the urban Asia of Singapore” (*Desdemona* 266). Lan suggests that this alienation was enhanced by Sen’s deliberate setting of the traditional performance forms in a performance framework of “inauthenticity,” through “juxtaposing them against other contemporary Asias” that were “urban” or “avant-garde” and “against hyper-modern video installation” (ibid. 261, 266). Regardless of Sen’s direction, Madhu’s avoidance of the complex kutiyattam costume when working “with theatre practitioners from across the world” is his habitual practice, as his “only stipulation is that in doing experimental work using the technique of Koodiyattam he will not perform in the traditional costume” (Nileena n. pag.). The kutiyattam artist’s performance in *Desdemona* hints at both his openness to experimentation and his reluctance to hybridise the traditions of his art form in a rapidly globalising society at home and abroad, unless he holds complete creative control over the outcome.

Apparently, Madhu prefers either to make a complete “cultural translation” of a work such as *Macbeth* for his art form, or to lend only elements of his performance art to a very different intercultural theatrical performance that cannot be labelled ‘authentic kutiyattam.’ In so doing Madhu avoids the potential absorption of his own performance culture into another, a merger which Lan posits can occur as the intercultural performative “interaction grows more complex, eventually eroding the fundamental dichotomy of “foreign” and “familiar” that it mobilizes” (“Fiction” 532). Madhu’s attitude suggests that in his cultural translation of *Macbeth*, the intercultural equation is at his own discretion. Despite his freedom to experiment with new stories such as Shakespeare, Madhu is uncompromising regarding the linguistic base of his art form. He avers that if he performs kutiyattam, “it should only be in Sanskrit. [...] For this presentation [of *Macbeth*] a complete *attaprakara* (script for enactment) was prepared with Sanskrit verse” (Anjana Rajan, “Designs” n. pag.). In producing *Macbeth* for kutiyattam,

Nileena writes, Madhu “strictly adheres to the traditional tenets of the art form” (n. pag.). Madhu’s directorial strategy for *Macbeth* instead worked to negotiate such a cultural merger on his own terms, privileging the intact nature of the traditional presentation of his art form as far as possible.

Through his cultural translation, Madhu adapted Shakespeare to fit the needs of kutiyattam, transposing *Macbeth* along linguistic, geographic, cultural, and artistic lines. While retaining *Macbeth*’s Scottish names, Madhu trimmed the narrative, reduced the characters, and altered any other markers of geographical location or cultural custom to those suited to a Malayali story (as detailed in a later section). Unlike Madhu’s performance in *Desdemona*, Madhu’s solo *Macbeth* retained its kutiyattam elements intact. One barefoot dancer played multiple characters, with stylised gestures and dance patterns, in a traditional costume, with the opening curtain, Sanskrit invocation, and instrumental accompaniment. Madhu’s cultural translation of *Macbeth* resembles Sangeeta Mohanty’s definition of a “transculturation,” or “a transformation of the whole cultural setting and background but [with the] plot remaining the same as the original” (65). Similarly, Madhu’s *Macbeth* foregrounded his own art form, reflecting an unchanged approach to the typical kutiyattam staging and presentation.

Thus, Madhu’s kutiyattam *Macbeth* represented a largely one-way intercultural absorption of Shakespeare. Accordingly, Madhu’s *Macbeth* diverges from Pavis’ idea of interculturalism: “a hybridization such that the original forms can no longer be distinguished” (*Reader* 8). Lan takes issue with Pavis’ definition, proposing that in postmillennial productions of intercultural Shakespeare, rather than an erasure of two forms, “what seems to be desired is the signature of Shakespeare in another authentic performance style, or the signature of that performance tradition upon Shakespeare in another culture” (*Desdemona* 261). Madhu’s

Macbeth better resembles the former of these possibilities, yet the extent to which kutiyattam remains 'authentic' when it is taken out of the temple is debatable. To illustrate the intercultural tensions involved in Madhu's cultural translation, this chapter now turns to an investigation of the artist's portrayal of Macbeth as anti-hero, a portrayal that is rare in the kutiyattam tradition.

Madhu's intermediate Macbeth

Madhu conceptualised Macbeth as an anti-hero in a sympathetic, humanistic portrayal that borders on the heroic. As Madhu declared, "I think Macbeth is a human. So, he can [feel like] killing; at the same he can [feel like] crying also. [...] I am not sure Shakespeare is thinking like that, but in my mind, the, Macbeth is a very nice man." This view of Macbeth evokes Duncan's opening characterisation of the titular protagonist as "noble Macbeth" (1.2.67) rather than Macduff's closing depiction of the protagonist as "hell-hound" and "more bloodier man than name can give thee out" (5.10.3, 5.10.7). Ragini Ramachandra attributes this perception of nobility to an Indian cultural reading (687). She suggests that Macbeth's "potential for self-awareness [...] strengthens the fundamental Indian view that man is essentially good, having a fair amount of the divine in him (*daivamsha*) as opposed to the western concept of man as basically a sinner" (ibid.). Similarly, Harold Bloom calls for a more subtle reading of Macbeth's self-aware humanity, arguing that "Richard III, Iago and Edmund are hero-villains; to call Macbeth one of that company seems all wrong. They delight in their wickedness; Macbeth suffers intensely from knowing that he does evil" (517). Madhu's nuanced characterisation of Macbeth as a tragic protagonist has implications for the performer's adaptation of the practice of kutiyattam theatre, of the trajectory of Shakespeare's plot, and of the fundamental composition of Sanskrit drama.

In portraying Macbeth as a tragic anti-hero, Madhu negotiated a fundamental intercultural difference between the genres of Shakespearean tragedy and Sanskrit drama. The current kutiyattam staging convention derives from the *Natyasastra* tenet that “a drama’s hero is not to be killed on the stage” (Bruce Sullivan, “Kerala’s *Mahabharata*” 7).⁴² Shakespeare’s Macbeth is among the three types of valorous protagonists described in verse 6.79 of the *Natyasastra*, or those “heroes in generosity, religion, and war” (Bruce Sullivan, “Dying on the Stage” 430). This prohibition on killing the hero presents the solo kutiyattam adapter of *Macbeth* with a dilemma. *Macbeth* features many offstage deaths, yet Madhu narrated the story through *pakarnnattam*, where the entire action takes place onstage while an actor enacts multiple parts. While several kutiyattam plays “feature a major character dying on the stage” this deceased is never “the hero of the drama” unless “he is brought back to life before the drama ends” (Bruce Sullivan, “Kerala’s *Mahabharata*” 8). Thus, Madhu entertained a dilemma particular to his own culture, transcending the quandary faced by an Anglophone director who has only to decide whether to kill Macbeth offstage or to employ the stage direction some editors give to the end of 5.10: “*They enter fighting, and Macbeth is slain*” (Stanley Wells 999).⁴³

Whether the protagonist is portrayed as a hero or an anti-hero, any transposition of *Macbeth* into kutiyattam is complicated by the nature of the Keralan art form. Kutiyattam narratives are based on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics, texts in which “a Ravana or a Sakuni are really evil characters” (Sukumari Bhattacharji 7). Yet kutiyattam follows the *Natyasastra* tradition in characterising these villains in performance, and “in the entire

⁴² In particular, Sullivan cites the *Natyasastra* verses 20.19-22 that specify that “a drama’s hero is not to be killed on the stage in a drama of the *nataka* or *prakarana* type [...] [i.e., that] based on a well-known story [...] [or] a story created by the playwright”; for further details, see “Dying on the Stage,” page 425.

⁴³ Similarly, Martin Wiggins posits that in 5.11 “Macbeth may be beheaded on stage.” For further details, see page 288 of his entry on *Macbeth*.

repertoire of Sanskrit drama there is no truly evil character” (ibid.). For an evil character such as Ravana, his villainy is attenuated in the transition from page to stage; the character exists at the intersection of tensions between established Sanskrit literary and performance traditions. Accordingly, in kutiyattam Ravana still wears codified facial makeup that signifies his status as semi-evil, or half-human rather than fully demonic (see Figure 8). Significantly, it is this semi-demonic makeup that Madhu chose to wear for his anti-heroic Macbeth, as detailed in a later section of this chapter.

Madhu’s codified depiction of Macbeth as a semi-demonic character presented the performer with a conundrum regarding a performance tradition where the hero is typically a virtuous human who survives the narrated episode. Consequently, critic Sangeeta Mohanty posits that among Shakespeare’s tragic heroes it is only “Hamlet who can step into the shoes of the Indian hero and is worthy of applause on stage” (78). Here Mohanty differentiates Hamlet from Shakespeare’s other tragic protagonists, suggesting that Hamlet “takes up arms to destroy only evil, whereas Macbeth kills his loyal friend and Othello, his faithful wife. This, the Indian audience cannot identify with [...], accustomed to the protagonist or hero who purely embodies noble qualities and has no trace of evil in him” (ibid.). Mohanty’s view suggests that Madhu’s nuanced protagonist may defer to the expectations of local audiences as much as to his own creative ideas.

Madhu’s reconceptualisation of Macbeth as an ultimately noble hero could be read as a reflection of a continuing critical tradition of Indian Shakespeares inherited from the colonial era. Nandi Bhatia perceives a prevailing “monolithic discourse” surrounding current perceptions of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, which she traces to A. C. Bradley’s colonial influence on the Indian “academic curriculum” (“Codes of Empire” 105). D. J. Enright concurs

that until Independence, the teaching of Shakespeare in India was “heavily Bradleyan” (352). Bhatia blames Bradley for such criticism that “continues to dominate both the academy and the mainstream theatre in India” (“Codes of Empire” 105). As an example, she cites the unequivocally noble Othello portrayed by kathakali artist Sadanam Balakrishnan in his 1996 adaptation (ibid.). Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy* mentions “noble” Othello in the same lines as he describes Macbeth thus: “And there was, in fact, much good in him. We have no warrant, I think, for describing him, with many writers, as of a ‘noble’ nature, like Hamlet or Othello; [...] but certainly he was far from devoid of humanity and pity” (351). Bradley’s opinion of Macbeth may have influenced Indian critics such as G. Muliyl, who recalls studying *Macbeth* at school (6). Where Bradley writes that Macbeth “had a keen sense of honour,” similarly, Muliyl terms the king “an honourable and kindly man who had done something that had drained life of all its meaning” (351; 6). Despite this instance, Madhu’s perception of Macbeth as a “very nice man” likely derives from the influence of the artist’s Hindu culture rather than that of lingering postcolonialism.

In expanding Macbeth’s desire for the crown into a parable of universal human temptation, Madhu’s reading echoes the Hindu philosophical preoccupation with achieving spiritual enlightenment through the negation of selfish desire. Similarly, Ragini Ramachandra posits that Shakespeare’s concern with “Renaissance man’s ego” mirrors “Indian thought whose sole end in life is transcendence of the ego-*avidya-kama-karma* [the Hindu cycle of ignorance, worldly attachment, and rebirth], the egocentric predicament of man” (681). Reading *Macbeth* in this light, Ramachandra suggests that Macbeth’s initial dilemma of conscience is one that “strengthens the fundamental Indian view that man is essentially good having a fair amount of the divine in him (*daivamsha*) as opposed to the western [sic] concept of man as basically a

sinner” (ibid.). Clearly, Ramachandra’s view is simplistic, conflating Hinduism and Indian culture and blurring Western and Christian traditions. Yet her contention locates Madhu’s foregrounding of Macbeth’s “milk of human kindness” (1.5.16) accurately within a tradition of Hinduism rather than postcolonialism.

Furthermore, Madhu implicitly aligned Macbeth with the figure of a commoner rather than a royal oppressor, in a sympathetic Marxist reorienting of the Shakespearean protagonist. Madhu declared that “Macbeth also goes through the [sic] conflicts, fears, and temptations like any other ordinary person. It is a story that anyone can relate to” (Nileena n. pag.). Additionally, Paulose posits that this sympathetic reading is typical of local performance art, maintaining that “an important characteristic feature of Kerala [sic] classical theatre is its adherence to [the] anti-hero cult” (“Mahabharata” 3). Paulose traces this tendency to the influence of the Sanskrit playwright Bhasa, writing: “Sympathy for the anti-heroes endeared Bhasa to the Kerala audience” (ibid.). Paulose feels that Bhasa “rebels against the traditional readings of the *itihasa* [epics] [...] and reveals the inner struggle of these characters who are ordinarily condemned as evil. [...] Consequently the *Kutiyattam* and *Kathakali* theatre became stages for the display of the valour and struggle of the anti-heroes” (ibid.). In particular, Paulose emphasises the comparative local popularity of wicked kings such as “Bali, Ravana, Duryodhana” as opposed to those responsible for their deaths, “real heroes like Rama, Krishna” (the divine protagonists of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics, respectively) (ibid.). Correspondingly, in lending Macbeth Ravana’s costume, Madhu intentionally aligned the Shakespearean protagonist with a popular anti-heroic character and demon king. Having illustrated Madhu’s nuanced reconception of Macbeth as an anti-heroic character, the next section analyses Madhu’s

directorial choices in the context of his cultural translation of both Shakespearean narrative and Sanskrit dramatic genre to accommodate his artistic vision.

Reinscribing Sanskrit theatre with Shakespearean tragedy

“If he were dead, you’d weep for him” (*Macbeth* 4.2.62): Madhu’s *Macbeth* teased the audience by avoiding the protagonist’s death while hinting at it throughout. Madhu’s production subverted the tragic dynamic, featuring Duncan’s murder onstage while cutting Macduff’s revenge. In portraying the regicide of a virtuous character, Madhu both altered Shakespeare’s staging materially and broke with *Natyasastra*-inspired kutiyattam convention. In altering both traditions, Madhu’s intercultural work hybridised his own heritage. Madhu averred that kutiyattam convention does not proscribe onstage death, and that there “is no restriction...but, actually [it] is only acting, not real killing!” He explained that “we have very detailed dying scenes in *Balivadham* [*Bali Slain*]” that “take one hour.” Rajagopalan concurs with this assessment, remarking that in the *Natyasastra*, “death scenes are not to be shown on the stage and if at all there be a necessity, some methods are suggested for it. In Kudiyaattam[,] however[,] these tenets are not observed and Vali [*Bali*] dies on the stage showing all the pangs of death” (*Preliminaries* 157). However, neither of these declarations takes into account the fact that the character of Bali is not the hero of the drama.

Nor is there a logical argument to be made for a cultural parallel between the tragic characters of Bali and Duncan. In the *Ramayana*, the monkey-king Bali is a wife-stealing, fratricidal usurper, a character more reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Antonio in *The Tempest*. In *Balivadham*, Bali achieves enlightenment upon being slain by Rama, the divine avatar and hero, in a cycle of fall, expiation, and redemption. Thus, Bali’s death is not that of an innocent, nor is

there a related cultural precedent. This divergence demonstrates the extent of Madhu's deviation from tradition in order to show Duncan's death. In addition, Madhu explained that he had cut Banquo's murder only in the interests of time. The performer declared that he had enacted Duncan's death expressly to illustrate Macbeth's psychological conflict. Madhu averred that Macbeth was "not ready to [start] killing, because he is, love[s] Duncan. At the same time the, Lady Macbeth, pushes, come[s] to his mind. [...] [Duncan's] death is not the important thing. Just one second is [all it takes], that is happening. But the, before the killing, that is very important. [...] So this, conflicts [sic], that is the important thing." In portraying Macbeth's inner conflict, Madhu introduced a radical change to the kutiyattam genre, simply by choosing to perform a tragedy for his classical Sanskrit art form.

As aforementioned, the *Natyasastra* conceives of drama as an art that evokes sentiment rather than representing reality; thus, tragic endings are avoided and enjoyable emotions are privileged. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese state that "in classical India, the concept of the tragic does not exist, and Sanskrit plays always have a happy ending" (106). Virginia Saunders differentiates between the genres of Shakespearean tragedy and that of the Sanskrit dramatisation of narratives such as the *Ramayana*. She writes of the latter, "Out of the material of this play could have been made a great tragedy. If Rama's moral conflict between his kingly duties and his love for his wife had been kept the central theme [...] we might have had a tragedy worthy even of Shakespeare" (154). Saunders elaborates, that tragedies "have probably been lost to us through the rules prohibiting unhappy endings. ['Tragedy' here is merely] the heroine being bitten by a serpent and seeming to be dead [...]. These incidents might be compared to the supposed death of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, of Imogen in *Cymbeline*, or of Hero in *Much*

Ado About Nothing” (155). Thus, by showing Duncan’s death onstage, Madhu reworked his Sanskrit drama to incorporate the genre of tragedy.

Notably, Madhu is not a pioneer in this reinscribing of Sanskrit drama with Shakespearean tragedy. This convention dates back to the colonial era, when Indians began to appreciate the potential for Shakespearean tragedy to supplement their own literary canon. R. K. DasGupta compares this period to a literary Renaissance, writing of Shakespeare’s extensive influence on India in the nineteenth century. DasGupta suggests that “Shakespeare represented to us the entire literary inheritance of Europe as Virgil represented the whole of classical literature to the Middle Ages. It was through his great tragedies that we came to realize that there was a great literature other than our own and in many ways different from it” (25). To illustrate this difference, DasGupta quotes preeminent Bengali author Bankimchandra Chatterjee on the great classical dramatists of West and East. Writing in 1873, Chatterjee posits that “Shakespeare’s drama is like a sea and Kalidasa’s like a garden. [...] In Kalidasa we have an excess of whatever is beautiful, sweet-smelling, sweet sounding and cheering to mind and body. [...] In this incomparable tragedy of Shakespeare passions rage like the waves of the sea: and terrible anger, hatred and jealousy batter minds like a stormy wind” (ibid. 25-26). While the classical Keralan arts such as kathakali and kutiyattam include these passions, as aforementioned, typically these emotions are reserved for the villain. Bhattacharji explains that in the original Sanskrit drama, “if there is a conflict it is rarely between good and evil within the hero’s consciousness” (10). Thus, for Sanskrit dramatic convention, Macbeth’s inner conflict represents an aberration. Perhaps the absence of psychological conflict in the Sanskrit tradition motivated Madhu’s choice to frame Macbeth’s indecision through suitable choreography from kutiyattam’s more evolved derivative form of kathakali.

By inserting a Shakespearean narrative into kutiyattam, arguably Madhu also subtly reemphasised the former's Christian symbolism, as inherited from the morality play tradition. Bhattacharji posits that the absence of tragedy in the Sanskrit dramatic tradition derives from its Hindu origins, where "[u]nlike in Christian tragedies there is no fall, no expiation, no redemption" (15). However, Kerala demonstrates a mixed religious demographic, with a population that is approximately 55% Hindu, 26% Muslim and 19% Christian (*Census of India*). Moreover, Kerala's Hindu theatre dramatises legends of fallen heroes such as Bali. Accordingly, while Madhu's *Macbeth* featured neither expiation nor redemption, Macbeth's post-murder fall and his resultant guilt were shared with the audience through both Christian and Hindu Keralan cultural symbolism.

Madhu's wife Indu expanded on his directorial choices in a pre-performance narrative synopsis for those who were unfamiliar with either Shakespeare or kutiyattam (or both). Indu narrated that Macbeth hallucinated in his panicky mental state immediately after Duncan's murder: "When he see[s] the blood, he again become[s] frightened, and he feels that, from the drops of the blood, snakes are coming to him" (n. pag.).⁴⁴ Later, Madhu elaborated on this idea: "And when he [is] killing the Duncan, then the blood come[s] to[wards] his body, he [is] feeling [it] is a snake, attack[ing] him. So that is also Keralite [...] the sign of the *paapa* [sin]." Madhu described the snake as a typical symbol for sin in Kerala, citing this symbolism as both Hindu and Christian. Madhu's visualisation of Duncan's blood drops, writhing towards him as poisonous snakes, arguably echoes Macbeth's later description of the stings of his guilty fears: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (3.2.37). Thus, Madhu transformed both form and genre in order to accommodate Macbeth's split conscience. Having examined the effects of this

⁴⁴ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Indu, I refer to her pre-performance lecture.

transformation, the chapter now turns to an exploration of Madhu's strategic use of Macbeth's costume as a visual signifier of moral ambiguity.

Demonising Macbeth: the kutiyattam costume

For Macbeth's costume, Madhu retained the traditional kutiyattam costume without innovation. When the curtain dropped, Madhu stood there in the *vesham* (stock clothing-and-makeup combination) belonging to the demon king Ravana, arch-villain of the epic *Ramayana*. Madhu's selection of Ravana's *vesham* for Macbeth suggests that he perceived the Shakespearean protagonist as an anti-hero. Ravana's codified face paint is a heroic colour base of virtuous green, mingled with red and black demonic touches, arguably fitting Macbeth's personality as a valorous yet flawed royal protagonist (see Figure 8). In kutiyattam, the stock costumes for hero and villain correspond to their personality types, with set colour, makeup, and design codes, resembling the conventions of the stock characters in the *commedia dell'arte*. Here Madhu justified his choice to dress his Macbeth in a demon king's robes by comparing the character to a demonic anti-hero: "Personally I like Ravana very much. [...] [I]n kutiyattam, the anti-human characters, they are very human." Thus, Madhu established that in using Ravana's *vesham* for Macbeth, he chose a demonic villain with a human side, his ambiguity acting as a metaphor for the human condition.

In selecting Ravana's costume for his character of Macbeth, Madhu aligned Shakespearean drama with the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the ubiquitous classical Indian literature. As aforementioned, these two Hindu epics are the primary mythical and religious source texts for the narratives underlying Kerala's traditional performing arts, and together these epics represent a thread intrinsic to the local cultural fabric. Possibly, Madhu's decision to dress



Figure 8: Margi Madhu as Ravana, the same *vesham* he wore for his *Macbeth*, photograph © Ranjith S.

Macbeth in the *vesham* of the demon king Ravana—arch-villain of the *Ramayana* epic—was a choice rooted in Madhu’s aforementioned belief that kutiyattam’s Sanskrit source narratives and Shakespeare share a “similar status.” In a kutiyattam performance, episodes from these well-known epics are narrated expansively and elaborately through expression and gesture, with a skilled performer evoking the appropriate *rasa*. As Erin Mee notes, the “foreknowledge of the story allows the artist and audience to pay attention not to the what, but the how it is told” (*India* 7). Accordingly, for Madhu’s *Macbeth*, audience members were given a pre-performance

lecture and a handout with an English synopsis of Madhu's production, ideally allowing his Indian audience to gain an equal familiarity with Shakespeare as with their household stories.

Several layers of local tradition further informed Madhu's choice of *vesham* for Macbeth. As in the rest of India, Kerala's literary and performance traditions are typified by the triumph of good over evil, yet as aforementioned, there is a marked Keralan sympathy for the anti-hero. In local legend, the anti-hero provides the human foil to the divine avatar, who incarnates to redeem both the demon and the world from wickedness. This redemption is effected by killing the demon's body and pride simultaneously, granting him salvation through purging his ego and releasing him from the karmic wheel of life and rebirth. One Keralan legend, often performed in kathakali, recounts the tale of the demon king Hiranyakashipu. The demon gained a boon of invincibility that preserved his life from man and beast, whether indoors or outdoors, by day or night, on the ground and in the sky. However, like the witches' prophecy in Macbeth, the boon did not guarantee immortality. The crafty god Vishnu incarnated as Narasimha, a hybrid half-man, half-lion and slew the demon across a doorstep, at twilight, and on his lap, at the midpoint of all. The tale illustrates several points relevant to the chapter: the ongoing tradition of retelling ancient legends in Keralan art forms; the popular narration of the triumph of virtue rather than tragedy; the idea of hybridity as a means to overcome rigid absolutes and effect harmony.

This legend also demonstrates the Keralan fascination with the anti-hero, as exemplified in the related tale of Hiranyakashipu's great-grandson, the kind and just demon king Mahabali (or Maveli), king of Kerala. Mahabali's reign represents a golden age that is of great nostalgia for the Marxist-minded Malayali; in Mahabali's time, '*ellarum oru pole*' or 'everyone was

equal,' and the average man was celebrated.⁴⁵ Eventually, fearing Mahabali's kingdom would rival heaven, the jealous gods appealed to Vishnu, who banished the demon to the netherworld while vanquishing his pride. Yet legend holds that the immortal King Mahabali returns annually during the secular Thiruvonam festival, to ensure the continued happiness of Malayalis. Thus, in selecting the costume of a demon king for Macbeth, Madhu realigned his protagonist with culturally-inscribed notions of equality, prophecy, anarchy, and immortality. Investigating this realignment, the next section examines Madhu's cultural translation of *Macbeth* in terms of the performance language of kutiyattam.

***Macbeth*: strategies of cultural translation**

Madhu's cultural translation refashioned *Macbeth* to showcase the multiple performance languages of kutiyattam: vocal recitation, gestural narration, emotive elaboration, and narrative recapitulation. Madhu's drastic alterations to Shakespeare's play resulted in an exciting performance, with Macbeth's perplexity spectacular in its cultural transformation. In remaking Macbeth as a Keralan king, Madhu joked that his cultural translation had effaced nearly every trace of Shakespeare, to the extent that "nobody can [sic] say this [is a non-traditional narrative], if I [had] not said this is a Shakespeare play [...]; maybe, I can change the name of the king!" While Madhu declared that he did not radically alter Shakespeare's narrative, he did claim that he was selective: "Actually, I am trying to not [sic] do the full text. I just [aim] to use the thread of the [narrative of] *Macbeth*." Conversely, Madhu had faithfully retained the outer form in moulding Shakespeare for the performance grammar of kutiyattam, as he explained: "I am not changing any traditional things in my traditional repertory; [...] the same costume, the same

⁴⁵ This myth is retold in Kavalam Narayana Panikkar's *Folklore of Kerala*; for further details, see pages 25-26.

tradition, the same [dance] steps and stage, the stage, everything [is the] same.” In a post-performance review for the national newspaper, Nileena noted that Madhu’s *Macbeth* did not dilute kutiyattam: “The plot was transplanted into a Kerala scenario [...] in doing so he strictly adheres to the traditional tenets of the art form” (n. pag.). Yet despite his professed faithfulness to the overall narrative, Madhu’s version was a radical relocation of the Shakespearean original, involving multiple changes in its language, narrative trajectory, staging, setting, and thematic focus.

In its unidirectional flow, Madhu’s cultural translation resembled Patrice Pavis’ hourglass model, albeit inverted so that East now appropriated West. As aforementioned, a closer parallel is Poonam Trivedi’s metaphor of intercultural performance as a translation that cannibalises Shakespeare’s work to then reconstitute it in a perverse homage (*Quarterly* 158). Yet Madhu’s cannibalisation of *Macbeth* was more drastic, constituting homage not to a foreign playwright but to his own indigenous art form of kutiyattam.

Madhu suggested that his hybrid innovation was shocking for both the Shakespeare and kutiyattam purists present at his 12 February 2011 performance, among a cross-section of college students and laymen: “There is a nice audience there, because that is a Shakespeare festival, so peoples [sic] they know very well, Shakespeare. But at the same time [it] is a shock for them, because with a traditional forms [sic], [I am] doing [this] through *Macbeth*, Shakespeare’s play.” To ease the transition, presumably, the performance on 12 February was preceded by the aforementioned brief lecture-demonstration in English by Madhu’s wife Indu, herself an accomplished traditional kutiyattam dancer. Thus, for those unfamiliar with *Macbeth*, a non-traditional story was summarised through the handout and this pre-performance synopsis,

allowing the audience to focus more fully on Madhu's interpretation of the character and his emotions.

In her lecture, Indu warned the audience to expect subtle changes in Madhu's dress, posture and expression, according to the different characters he portrayed. She explained that the way one "can identify the posture of [Madhu as the] witch is from a special manner of standing, and he [Madhu] will take the, both end[s] of his cloth upwards, and he will stand in a peculiar position, and it will be easy for you to understand." Bruce Sullivan describes this device as the "stage convention of tucking part of the costume into the waistband to indicate a male character's enactment of a female character" ("Kerala's *Mahabharata*" 11). While an audience member familiar with kutiyattam would have recognised this convention, Brown recalls that for a new spectator, the mere view of Madhu in Ravana's makeup was alienating and distancing from an understanding of the character (*New Sites* 82). Therefore, for a lay audience, both Shakespeare and kutiyattam needed this extensive translation. Without Indu's prologue it would have been difficult for a new audience to identify the witch as either a Shakespearean character or a female character. Accordingly, Indu narrated the entire Shakespearean plot beforehand, both preparing an audience unfamiliar with *Macbeth*, while allowing Shakespeare and kutiyattam to perform a mutual introduction.

In producing a cultural translation of *Macbeth* to contribute towards the survival of his individual art form, Madhu also emphasised its function as human heritage. The artist claimed that it "is not easy, mixing the culture. But at the same time I think, the culture is the same all over the world [...because the] central point is the human." When I asked the performer what his challenges were in using a non-Sanskrit play, Madhu answered, "I think [it] is not very difficult." His only outside assistance, he stated, came from, "One of my friend[s], he wrote a

shloka [verse] for *Macbeth*, in Sanskrit,” (as will be detailed later in this chapter). This *shloka* distilled the English text to a few lines, which Madhu sang in Sanskrit translation as a single opening verse beginning, “To be thus is nothing” (3.1.49-53). While remaining faithful to the Shakespearean text in translation, as the only oral recitation in Madhu’s *Macbeth* the *shloka* represented a radical distortion of its original proportion of text to action.

While kutiyattam performances typically include Sanskrit *shlokas*, critics such as G. Venu claim that it is a “gross misunderstanding that one needs Sanskrit to appreciate Kutiyattam. The potential of this theatre is beyond spoken language” (*Fifty Years* 118). One young kutiyattam artist expressed his idea that kutiyattam in performance was different from its Sanskrit text: “These are Indian plays, not Kerala[n] plays, but Kutiyattam has survived because only the text is in Sanskrit [...] You cannot do theater in a foreign language” (Leah Lowthorp, “Voices” 218). While it may seem oxymoronic to enjoy a *Macbeth* that has none of the original text, it can be argued that the play is more than its English text alone. Harold Bloom declares that Akira Kurosawa’s film *Throne of Blood* (1957) is the most successful adaptation of *Macbeth*, despite the film’s containing no textual translation at all (519). Similarly, kutiyattam has the ability to transform Shakespeare’s narration of invisible internal conflict into a range of external, stylised facial expressions, gestures, or choreography. Madhu’s kutiyattam *Macbeth* translated the playtext not only into a foreign language and culture, but into a physical dimension through its codified sign language.

A kutiyattam performance represents enactment of a story rather than a text, with a minimum of verbal recitation and an extended performance elaboration. Suresh Awasthi and Richard Schechner write that a “kutiyattam actor speaks 40 to 50 words and then his/her body “speaks” for 40 to 50 minutes, transforming the multiple semantic layers of the verbal text” into

“a performance text of plastic, visual images” (54, 52). The gestural alphabet that constructs this text can be traced “back to sacred Vedic gestures” (Barba and Savarese 156-157). The kutiyattam hand gestures are among the more esoteric symbols of its intangible human heritage, having originated as ritual Brahminical hand symbols, before the drama evolved as an independent form. Accordingly, Indu’s introductory summary was accompanied by kutiyattam sign language gestures and eye movements at appropriate points in the foretold action.

Madhu’s wife began her lecture by referring to the audience’s presupposed familiarity with Shakespeare and *Macbeth*. This familiarity evidently surpassed their knowledge of kutiyattam sign-language: “I think all of you have got the synopsis of the story, otherwise also you know the story very well, and I will be saying [recounting] the thread of the story, only the thread of the story, with some gestures.” Thus, Indu’s synopsis effectively functioned as an introduction not only to *Macbeth* but also to the sign language of kutiyattam. Narayanan describes the gestures of kutiyattam as “very similar, even identical in some instances, to those used by most classical dance and theatre forms in India that are based on the *Natyasastra*, including kathakali, bharatanatyam, and kuchipudi” (146). Therefore, Madhu’s signed enactment of *Macbeth* would have been partially intelligible to an audience familiar with another classical form, arguing that his translation of Shakespearean metaphor into hand symbols has the potential for an intracultural exchange beyond his own art form.

It can be difficult to imagine a Shakespeare play without any speech, when even a deviation from the expected text or a translation can confuse an experienced viewer. Yet Brown is of the opinion that in a play such as *Macbeth*, Shakespeare intentionally includes silence, simplifying the text during death scenes to allow for greater expressiveness in the interim (*New Sites* 85). In Madhu’s cultural translation, the orchestral score grew silent at points to allow for

gestural elaboration and extensive expression, as detailed in the next section. The potential for kutiyattam to transcend spoken language through silence, gesture, or *rasa* as a shared actor-audience experience is especially important in the twenty-first century, when outside audience appreciation is essential for the art form's survival. Accordingly, the next section examines the potential for kutiyattam to transcend cultural barriers through a language of imagination.

Kutiyattam: the theatre of imagination

In producing *Macbeth* for kutiyattam, Madhu exploited his art form's inherent potential for depicting scenarios of imagination and the otherworldly. David Shulman depicts kutiyattam as "staged in a dimension distinct from the ordinary plane of perception" where a performer can hold an audience's attention for hours on a bare stage (16). In Madhu's *Macbeth* and in kutiyattam, the set is as bare as that of original practice Shakespeare, with only a hand-held curtain and a wooden stool. To offset this bareness, the costumes are opulent, augmented by richly coloured face paint coded to stock heroic or demonic character types. Downstage, musicians play sacred instruments including the oboe, cymbals, conch, and drums, which alternately announce and accentuate the dancer's movements. The holy copper *mizhavu* hand-drums are said to have souls of their own, and provide the heartbeat of the largely mimetic performance. This performance typically unfolds over the course of one or more nights. The stage is lit by the flames of a large foreground oil lamp that burns throughout the overnight performances, both illuminating the action and representing the spirit of the divine spectator.

The kutiyattam scene is illustrated in the audience's imagination by the skill of the performer, who "should have the emotive ability to picture the events unfolding in the three worlds using minimal stage properties such as a lit lamp, a wooden stool and a small curtain"

(Venu, *Into the World* 32).⁴⁶ In this theatre, Shulman argues, the action is performed not before “the outward-oriented organ that exhausts itself with visible objects” but takes place instead “mostly in thin air” (16). Thus, kutiyattam differs from Shakespearean drama in that the former art imitates, rather than depicts, “ordinary processes of living as if they were happening on the stage: in Shakespeare, and not in Kutiyattam, a mother may wipe the face of her son who has become ‘scant of breath’” (Brown, *New Sites* 82). As a theatre of imagination, kutiyattam opens up a third space with possibilities for audience participation. The act of imagination or abhinaya can facilitate a hybrid co-creation, where “[p]ercussion instruments provide the sound of the water pouring, punctuating the actor’s movement and making the objects and actions vivid for the spectator. But it is the spectator’s responsibility to provide the ‘water’ and the ‘pot’ [...] as co-creator of the moment” (Kevin Wetmore, Siyuan Liu, and Erin Mee, 205). Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is an excellent text to facilitate this act of co-creation between artist and audience, as it possesses multiple instances of this suspension of the outward organ in its scenes of magic, dreaming, sleepwalking, and hallucination.

For Madhu, depicting such “horrible imaginings” (1.3.137), *Macbeth*’s text functioned similarly as a medium of performance rather than its end. While kutiyattam playtexts are valued for their literary qualities, they are prized further for “their ability to stimulate the actor’s imagination to create interesting improvisation on the text” (Wetmore, Liu and Mee 197). This can include the elaboration of scenes or the presentation of multiple characters. In this reinscription the kutiyattam artist can also become “a great writer, a Shakespeare” who enters “into each and every part of a fictive world, moving from one character to another with total

⁴⁶ Female performers enact the female roles in kutiyattam. In addition, the nangiar koothu branch of kutiyattam is performed only by hereditary female performers or ‘nangiaris’ and it represents the manifestation of the goddess on stage as narrator. The nangiar caste traditionally intermarries with those of the nambyar caste that perform on the drums, and hence the dancers’ husbands are present to safeguard their person and honour.

commitment” (Brown, *New Sites* 82). As aforementioned, Madhu’s solo *Macbeth* employed this meta-narration through *pakarnnattam*, or the acting of multiple parts.

In this narration, a primary or solo actor may recount the story and mime the different characters before the audience, while staying in his/her own costume and often remaining in his/her own character. Paulose remarks that the kutiyattam performer is not merely “an imitator; [...] he is a narrator and interpreter too” (“*Mahabharata*” 2). Accordingly, the performer transcends the author and text, as the “actor himself turns out to be a stage on which multiple characters, through the technique of transformation of roles, enact their roles. Also, [...] the actor breaks the frame of the dramatic text and context. Liberated from the text, he creates his own sub-texts” (ibid.). Similarly, Madhu noted that the characters in his *Macbeth* were presented as if seen through Macbeth’s viewpoint, not as independent entities. He clarified that “Banquo is a character. [He is present] As a character, but not on the stage; [...] [instead presented] through the, Macbeth’s words, thinking.” Madhu elaborated that through this method, he was able to display Macbeth’s internal monologue: “The audience can feel [...] everything [...] through Macbeth—he [shows what he] is hearing, and he is said [sic], [...] ‘Oh what? Oh yes, killing the, Banquo—ah yes! That is good!’ like this.” Thus, Madhu presented every character in the play through the eyes of Macbeth, rendering the character a narrator. This technique presented the audience with an unusual unifocal insight into Macbeth’s own perspective and motivations.

However, Madhu’s use of *Macbeth* as a new playtext potentially detracted from his opportunity to foreground his personal interpretation of the play’s characterisation. Traditional kutiyattam narratives, as aforementioned, derive from the well-known *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics. Therefore, for a local audience the artist’s perception of familiar characters

and situations, and the consequent skill in portraying this, is often of greater interest than the narrative. Thus, the *pakarnnattam* tradition allows a kutiyattam actor to showcase his or her range of acting ability not only through improvisation but also in elaborating on a familiar model before an audience that is already prepared. Thus, Madhu's choice of *Macbeth* represented both an opportunity to showcase his innovation before a new audience and the danger that the new narrative would lessen the pleasure for a seasoned spectator.

In producing *Macbeth*, Madhu described his excitement at getting under the skin of the titular character, declaring that it involved "very minute level acting; that's the interest for me. It's very deep and deep, [on a] deeper and deeper level; the character's mental statements [inner monologue] we can reproduce, to the stage." This ability to emote, inhabit a character, and wordlessly convey the meaning of the inner monologue, is one that arguably translates across cultures. Vatsyayan maintains that the imaginative experience is a universal leveller, as "the theory of Bharat transcends the cultural specificity of India" (*Bharata* 26). Similarly, Brown vividly recalls relating to Margi Madhu's interpretation of Ravana's character while watching him rehearse: "I had entered into his mind and everything had become as real for me as it was for him" (*New Sites* 75-76). Brown suggests that Shakespearean drama appears static in contrast to the infinite realm of imagination of both actor and character created for the kutiyattam audience:

The freedom for the actor to be what he chooses to be and for the audience to follow him into amazing deeds and states of mind and being began to challenge earlier ideas about Shakespeare's stagecraft and the almost unchanging background of the Shakespearian theatre. [...] Everything is created in the

imagination of the actor [...]. In response, the audience [...] moves through that into an individual experience of the play [...] as if both his and their perception of the dramatic reality were one and inseparable. (ibid. 84)

In Brown's experience, an unfamiliar story, translated into the gestural and emotive language of kutiyattam, still could carry meaning for the uninitiate spectator.

Taking into account Brown's experience, perhaps Madhu's cultural translation of *Macbeth* could present a new view of Shakespeare for those familiar with the Scottish Play. Brown compares the immersive experience of rasa, as elaborated over a long kutiyattam scene, to the experience of the spectator of Shakespeare. Here Brown questions whether Shakespeare's plays "allow for such interpenetration of viewer and performer. Clearly they do not rely upon it as Kutiyattam does, because what happens on stage is changing constantly and no time is given to build up such a deep and sustained reaction" (ibid.). Madhu's solo *Macbeth*, therefore, could theoretically engage with the audience more completely in elaborating through rasa on "the taste of fears" (5.5.9). Yet Narayanan contradicts such a view, arguing: "In kutiyattam, the actor always maintains his or her distinct identity and never fully becomes the character. In other words, the artifice of the theatre [...] is never forgotten in kutiyattam and in many instances is even foregrounded" (139). This difference in opinion is an example of the potential invigoration of kutiyattam through the relaxation of the rules regarding admission of a mixed audience.

Typically, kutiyattam performers place high importance on audience appreciation. However, an audience can be defined variously. Bruce Sullivan observes that kutiyattam artists who perform outside of a kuttampalam bring with them their personal viewpoint on their audience: "Actors insist, however, that their performances are still their dharma (their religious

duty), and [...] their inherited right as well. Every performer I have interviewed maintains that the performance is the same, with or without an audience, because they perform for God” (“How Does One” 80). This view is corroborated by G. Sankara Pillai’s anecdotal recollections, including his interview with maestro Mani Madhava Chakyar: “My enquiry was this: what as a performing artist is his concept of the audience? For that is quite an important factor in the context of any performing arts” (21-22). Madhava Chakyar, Pillai recounts, replied simply, “Why? Of course our audience is symbolized by the [divine] light that is lit in front of the stage” (22). Arguably, this vitality of appreciation has not been lost by transplanting the art form into a secular setting.

In the kutiyattam *Macbeth*, the human spirit within the performer and audience could be said to reflect spiritual rather than religious brightness, fed through the appreciation of shared rasa. Pillai extends Madhava Chakyar’s metaphor, interpreting the lamp flame as representing the brilliant human connoisseur in the audience, or “the *sahrydaya* [...], [who] is the true representative of the burning tongue of the sacred lamp. The interaction of the highly sophisticated presentation is intended for him, whose absorption is as vibrant as that wick” (ibid.). Madhu’s *Macbeth* demonstrates that his attraction of a wider appreciative audience via Shakespeare could prove vital to the contemporary evolution of kutiyattam. Demonstrably, these new audiences can be encouraged by the introduction of new material such as Shakespeare. In exploring these new directions, the next section turns to an examination of Madhu’s strategy in performance.

The performance: “A drum, a drum— / Macbeth doth come” (1.3.28-29)

In contrast to a traditional kutiyattam performance, Madhu’s secular *Macbeth* took place not inside a custom-built temple theatre or kuttampalam, but outdoors on flat flagstones that resounded with the flat-struck beats of the dancer’s bare feet, evocative of Macbeth’s lines “Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts” (2.1.58).⁴⁷ Despite its non-traditional setting and story, Madhu’s truncated two-hour solo *Macbeth* began on the night of 12 February 2011 much like any other typical kutiyattam performance. Breaking the reverent silence, one musician blew the conch ceremonially; simultaneously, another percussionist lit the wicks of a tall brass oil lamp that stood front centre stage. Although the performance took place outside the temple, these male accompanists were bare-chested according to the traditional respectful dress code for male temple-goers. Seated downstage at the rear, the first drummer started the slow invocatory beat, the drum steady in its own wooden bed-holder, as two accompanists raised a bedspread-sized curtain and held it at their eye level. Invisible behind this continued the steady resonant beat of the holy *mizhavu* hand-drum. As Indu described it, the drum is “made of copper and covered with calfskin.” Its introductory rhythm typically raises the audience anticipation in first announcing the start of the performance and then, rising in speed, strength and complexity, signalling the behind-the-scenes entrance of the main character, glimpsed behind the curtain.

The curtain was a typical kutiyattam prop, coloured white with a red centre and gold trim, yet in this intercultural milieu the red suddenly became reminiscent of the bloody Shakespearean imagery for which Indu’s opening description had prepared the audience. The twisted roots of the overarching banyan tree picked up this unsettling effect, the white of the electric spotlight overshadowed eerily by the blood-red glow cast by the lamp flame. As the

⁴⁷ Unless otherwise specified, this description of Madhu’s *Macbeth* is taken from the Prakriti Foundation’s recording of the 12 February 2011 performance at Kalakshetra.

edge of a rounded red, white, and gold headdress appeared above the curtain, it bobbed in time to the chime that joined the thrumming, from a pair of finger cymbals played by Indu, seated stage right and maintaining the *thalam* or tempo. The second *mizhavu* drummer joined in, together with the small cylindrical side-drum or *edakka* that stood stage right, the combined tandem beat creating a trance-like effect. Here, it was also a beat that simultaneously, if perhaps unconsciously, evoked the play's original text: "A drum, a drum— / Macbeth doth come" (1.3.28-29). This build-up heightened the anticipation for the expectant audience of approximately fifty local and foreign visitors. Seated cross-legged on the ground, this audience reflected a secular, democratic interculturalism that transcended the former stratifications imposed by the kuttampalam.

As the rhythmic drumming intensified, the curtain was slowly lowered to reveal Madhu, a slim, energetic performer in his forties, in character as Macbeth. Macbeth was seated centre stage on the only prop, a wooden stool that functioned as his throne. Buoyed by the turbulent rhythm of a tri-drum-ensemble that heralded his appearance and presence with increasing intensity, the king surveyed the scene in a typical regal opening pose. His arms were firmly crossed, holding long neck scarves with mirrors embedded in their ruffled ends, so that these reflected the light from the lamp flames at the audience; his eyes, with their pre-reddened whites, radiated pride and intrigue, narrowing and widening expressively. Macbeth created a terrific effect, fierce and bold, seated centre stage resplendent in the traditional kutiyattam costume for the demon king Ravana. His red eyes contrasted with his face, painted in a thick, mask-like base makeup of bright parrot-green, with red lips, black eye designs, white paper cheek rills, and white papier-mâché ball on the tip of his nose and forehead. This codified *vesham* or makeup type marked him for those in the know as a valorous yet evil character (Kunjuni Raja 24).

The full moon of Macbeth's halo-like gilded wooden crown gleamed, as did the wooden jewellery of multiple necklaces, bracelets and belt that shone against his long-sleeved shirt of red, striped with black. His white, cotton skirt was streaked with gold among its red and black stripes. It covered his bare calves and feet in front, while at the rear it was gathered up into a multi-layered ruff over white shorts that allowed greater movement. A dark blue headdress-apron covered the back of his head, glimpsed in the rare moments when he turned away from the audience; his rose-tinted palms occasionally were held outward towards the audience, showing a vulnerable, human side of the murderous protagonist amidst his demonic, royal outward lustre.

This combined effect of valour and evil was instantly evocative of both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and its supernatural prophecy, both eerie and fascinating. The protagonist's every gesture and expression was accompanied by appropriately soft or loud sharp taps or broad thrums on the drums. The *mizhavu* artists followed the dancer's movements in minutiae, providing individual accompaniment in addition to the sustained backdrop beat. The play began directly in the middle of the rising action of Shakespeare's narrative, at the start of 3.1. Macbeth emerged as a king at the height of his glory and his uncertainty, fearful of losing his tenuous grasp on the throne. From the outset, however, his semi-demonic makeup indicated that his baser nature would undermine his good fortune. In his sole speech during the entire two-hour-long show, Madhu recited the invocatory Sanskrit *shloka* (verse) in a sonorous, sing-song voice:

Nrupa padha adhirodhim dhuskaram naasthi kinchit

Adhigatha bharanambho kashtamevam nrupanam

Sahaja mahitha bhavam pasya Banquogatham than

Prahaniranudhinam mam bheethi bhajamvidhathe.

An English translation of these lines was included in *Macbeth*'s programme leaflet:

There was not at all any difficulty for me to become the king.

To protect the throne and the kingdom thus gained is the most difficult task.

Why is that?

See the wise and mature posture that is natural to Banquo

The impact of that keeps me sacred [scared] all the time.) (1)⁴⁸

While the English has been corrupted in re-translation, clearly, Madhu's verse corresponds to the following lines in the Shakespearean original:

To be thus is nothing

But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo

Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature

Reigns that which would be feared. (3.1.49-53)

In Madhu's *Macbeth*, this verse served as an introduction for the two-hour rendering of the plot in elaborate performance. In her pre-performance synopsis, Indu described Macbeth's inner monologue as represented by the *shloka*: "After that [Duncan's murder], the people made me the king of Scotland. Thus, it was not difficult for me to become the king. But to maintain the throne, it is very, I feel it's very difficult for me; why it is, why is it? When I see the courage and the wise nature of Banquo, I feel frightened." Additionally, Madhu clarified that from a

⁴⁸ Madhu told me that the verse, commissioned for the occasion, was composed by E. N. Narayanan. This English translation, from the 2011 performance programme leaflet, included a typo of "sacred" for "scared" (*bheethi*).

personal viewpoint, these lines held political connotations: “‘I got the country very easily, but is very difficult to maintain these things,’ [Macbeth says]. Actually, I think [this] is not only for Macbeth; in the, contemporary society [it] is also happening. The politicians, [the way] they get the power is very easily; [they] make some tricks or something. You can get the power, but [it] is not easy to maintain.” Thus, Madhu’s *Macbeth* opened with a subtle contemporary political moral for his audience. His introductory recitation completed, Madhu arose, pushed aside the stool, and began the dance, as detailed in the following section.

The performance: *Macbeth* in recapitulation

Madhu stamped his artistic authority on his kutiyattam version of *Macbeth*, reworking Shakespeare in the service of his own art form. In performing *Macbeth* before a mixed audience, Madhu’s undiluted kutiyattam achieved an intercultural outreach, using Shakespeare in self-promotion to invigorate and extend the boundaries of his UNESCO-protected performance art. Accordingly, *Macbeth*’s dance consisted largely of typical kutiyattam patterns: rhythmic swaying movements, hand and arm gestures, slow twirls, and organised combinations of steps that remained within a small square area. For much of the performance, Madhu remained facing the audience with opened, bent knees in a typical narrative pose. More importantly for his cultural translation of Shakespeare, in deferring to established kutiyattam performance convention, Madhu recapitulated *Macbeth*’s narrative for the audience. Thus, Madhu’s performance involved a first half narrated as flashback by Macbeth in mime and expression, and a second half that the character enacted forward in real time. Thus, the narrative arc of Madhu’s cultural translation diverged sharply and irreverently from the Shakespearean original to fit Madhu’s reconception for kutiyattam.

In beginning the action at the midpoint of the Shakespearean narrative, Madhu chose to foreground the titular character's psychological conflict, establishing this at the outset. As Madhu explained to Nileena, "[t]he perplexed and chaotic situation that Macbeth finds himself in is performed at length. Like this, we explore the areas that could be illustrated beautifully" (n. pag.). Thus, when the curtain dropped, Macbeth stood centre stage in his own person. This act located the audience in Macbeth's first-person perspective immediately, rather than introducing the protagonist in the third person through the perspectives of soldiers and sorceresses, as in the original Shakespeare. In telescoping the narrative to a single viewpoint, Madhu drew the audience deeper into the realm of Macbeth's psychology, blurring the boundary between the worlds of 'our' and 'other.'

By introducing Macbeth amid the throes of his post-murder guilt, Madhu heightened the sympathy of his portrayal as a symbol of universal human corruptibility. Madhu explained that he truncated Macbeth's narrative: "To highlight the, Macbeth. How a man [can] *change* through these kind[s] of ambitions—power, and money...is, maybe is a message also, to the...world." The artist's solo production heightened this moralistic focus on Macbeth's conscience, externalising his inner monologue, "So, [there is] only one character on the stage, Macbeth [...]. [The play] started when he was [already] a king, [...] thinking, 'Oh, I got the country very easily, but is not easy to maintain it.' That is a[n inner] dialogue." By illustrating the action solely through Macbeth's perspective, Madhu heightened its sense of immediacy.

Accordingly, after briefly proclaiming his guilty fears in verse, here a guilt-stricken Macbeth mimed the events that had brought him to murder Duncan. Madhu explained that "there is a technique of *kutiyattam*, this, a...recapitulation." Madhu added that Macbeth recalled the events that preceded his "killing the, Duncan: go[ing] to the war, and the witches, [about]

everything, he is thinking.” In her synopsis, Indu recounted that the action flashed back first to Macbeth’s opening battle, then to his triumphant return home, with the hero recalling: “In those days, when I was the general of King Duncan, one day, according to his order, I started for a war, with a convoy of soldiers.” In Madhu’s performance, while travelling home from the battle, Macbeth met only one witch, who prophesied he would become King of Scotland. Madhu clarified that the “witches are female; but in my play, [there is] only one [...], then [s]he just say[s] only one word: ‘You[’ll] become a king.’” After this recapitulation, Madhu compressed the rest of the action in the interests of time, omitting scenes such as Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking, and taking the action forward to an early close at the approach of Birnam Wood.

Consequently, Madhu’s cultural translation was concerned primarily with illustrating kutiyattam performance traditions rather than retelling Macbeth’s plot, thereby using Shakespeare as a medium rather than an end. For a play set in Scotland, this *Macbeth* demonstrated several cultural markers that clearly were not derived from the Highlands. Apparent in Madhu’s cultural translation was his wish not only to showcase kutiyattam, but also to include set performance pieces that highlighted visibly Keralan customs. For example, Indu explained that Madhu/Macbeth recounted his victorious return from war with a typical kutiyattam interlude, enacting various celebratory musicians with their “Kerala percussion, like *chenda*, *maddalam*, *timila*, *edakka* [drums] and *shankh* [conch].” Madhu’s mimicry of each instrument was accompanied here by the appropriate real-life percussion, allowing both the actor and the musicians to showcase their individual skills.

Equally, Madhu inserted an extended meal-serving scene into his *Macbeth* to display his expertise in a typical kutiyattam performance sequence. Madhu had noted in a press interview that “food is very important” in kutiyattam, to the extent that the actor typically elaborates “the

different types of food and how to make it” (Anjana Rajan, “Designs” n. pag.).⁴⁹ Accordingly, as Indu explained, Madhu’s production incorporated this acting sequence at the point when the Macbeths “plan to call King Duncan to their home for a royal feast. [...] He [Macbeth] serves him all the dishes and this, the feast also, is composed as [an] exclusively Keralite form of feast.” Madhu’s incorporation of Kerala customs represents a deliberate foregrounding of his local culture, contrary to the recommendations of critics such as Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni. Nadkarni advocates retaining a Westernised Shakespeare on stage, citing the failed experiment of *Rajmukut* (1954), V. V. Shirwadkar’s Marathi adaptation of *Macbeth* directed by Herbert Marshall: “And what does one make of the powerful banquet scene? Does one ask the guests to sit on wooden planks on the floor and serve them *laddoos* [sweetmeats]? [...] The debate has since then been going on whether Shakespeare should be adapted or translated. In the latter case Macbeth’s guests will at least eat at the dining table – more stageworthy, more dignified!” (18).

In contrast to Nadkarni’s Anglophone vision, in his cultural translation Madhu served Duncan’s food as if his guest was seated on the floor while the host laid out the typical Keralan *sadya*, or elaborate rice and curry banquet, on the traditional banana leaf-plate. In our interview, Madhu included the detail that Duncan’s meal was served “Kerala style, and the *paan*, chewing the *paan*” formed part of the dramatic action. *Paan* is the tobacco-like stimulant and digestive aid offered to esteemed Indian guests after a meal, putting them in a mood evocative of Duncan’s “unusual pleasure” (2.1.12). Consequently, Madhu’s production deliberately subverted *Macbeth*’s Scottish origins to serve his own creative agenda.

⁴⁹ Madhu explained that in kutiyattam a depiction of food often accompanies a philosophical point made by the traditional *koothu* or kutiyattam jester. The *koothu* incorporates the stock satirical recitation of *purushartha koothu*, a humorous take on life’s four ultimate goals, here subverted to include “eating” and “serving [food to] the royal patron” (Rajan n. pag.). This role derives from the *vidusaka* or fool in Sanskrit drama, similar to the Shakespearean fool who speaks in the vernacular, provides social commentary and mocks the audience (Kunjunni Raja 27).

Moreover, Madhu foregrounded his local culture in performance when he signified Duncan's impending doom by miming the howling of a jackal, an inauspicious omen according to Keralan custom. In the kutiyattam *Macbeth*, the jackal's howl substituted for the fatal sound of the raven's croak (1.5.37-38). In Madhu's production this episode was mimed, as Indu recounted together with gestures: "Then he [Macbeth] starts to go to the king. And at that moment he hears the howling of a jackal. And he thinks that, this is a sign which is being sent by, sent from the, heaven, telling him that this is the time to kill King Duncan." Here, the fatal howl also evoked a tolling bell, in occurring at the interlude that precedes Shakespeare's lines in the original text: "Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell / That summons thee to heaven, or to hell" (2.1.63-64). However, such subtleties may have been lost on an audience unfamiliar with the nuances of Keralan culture or of *Macbeth*, as an extensive prefatory narration was beyond the time afforded by the occasion.

Madhu's production substituted verbal elaboration with gestural hesitation to depict *Macbeth's* dagger scene (2.1). Here, Madhu enacted the "hallucination that a sword is hanging in front of him, and he tries to catch hold of that sword and it disappears," as Indu put it, in a scene "composed in peculiar kutiyattam type stylised movements." Madhu's stylised artistry possibly detracted from the horror of the added scene; according to Indu, it was "one of the beautiful moments in the performance." The dagger scene, as with the rest of Madhu's performance, was constructed to highlight Macbeth's internal struggle as elaborated in performance, rather than used to accentuate the protagonist's murderous nature. In extending the dagger scene to showcase his interpretation of Macbeth's hesitation, Madhu depicted Duncan's murder onstage. Indu described the action: "He goes to the king, and on seeing the face of the king, he is reluctant to kill the king. There happens a big struggle in his mind. And

it will be expressed elaborately, and after two-three times, he takes the, courage and he kills the king.” Thus, Madhu’s performance inverted Shakespeare, bringing the offstage text onstage as translated into choreography. The resulting depiction was particularly chilling.

In dramatising Duncan’s murder, Madhu borrowed choreography from kathakali, providing him with an intracultural template to dramatise Macbeth’s vacillation. Madhu used movements from a kathakali episode that portrays a legendary king’s indecision over killing his innocent relative. As Madhu stated, “I do it, because one of the, *Rukmangada Charitham* [*The Tale of King Rukmangada*] [...], you know in kathakali, [it is] very famous, he [nearly ended up] killing his son.” In the legend, the virtuous king Rukmangada is urged to kill his young son by his wicked new second wife Mohini, on penalty of breaking his oath (K. Bharata Iyer 39, 94).⁵⁰ When asked whether he had lent Macbeth the choreographed steps of any particular kutiyattam or kathakali character, as he had appropriated Ravana’s costume, Madhu responded, “No, I take [merely] some of the...situations, like these [aforementioned] situations.” Madhu elaborated on his decision to use kathakali choreography for the scene of Duncan’s murder, explaining that when Macbeth “go[es] to killing [sic], then he saw that sword. That [scene] also [has] some kind of movements, choreography [...] [which] is to take that sword with the rhythm, steps [...], traditional movements.” As the kathakali dance-drama derives from kutiyattam, it was simple for Madhu to adapt its choreography to show Macbeth dancing back and forth, hesitating with the dagger (here, the prop of a wooden sword).

Madhu expanded on his construction of an added murder scene to highlight his artistic elaboration of Macbeth’s inner conflict. Through extending the dagger scene into Duncan’s chamber, Madhu showed Macbeth’s hesitation before the sleeping king: “He is [sic] come

⁵⁰ While Mohini’s incitement evokes that of Lady Macbeth, Mohini is actually a heavenly damsel sent by God to test Rukmangada’s virtue.

[towards Duncan] and back, come, and back. He is just starting [to kill him]; then he sees his face, he is remembering, he love[s] him, and he is the commander of his kingdom. Then he is thinking, he can't [do it]." Following his murder of Duncan, as Indu narrated, Macbeth's recapitulation ended and the storyline returned to the present, with the action resuming at the midpoint described in Madhu's opening *shloka*.

By positioning the scene of Macbeth's guilt as the keystone of his narrative arc, Madhu cemented the construction of his moral for his audience. After Madhu's Macbeth mused on the transient nature of power, the action moved forward in time again, tracing the downward arc of the protagonist's psychological journey, mirroring that in the Shakespearean original. As aforementioned, Madhu emphasised, "Half is [told as a] flashback, and half is live." Madhu elaborated that while he did not alter Shakespeare's plot, "I avoid so many things—because there is the killing [of the Macduffs], her hand [washing scene, or Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking], the...etc. I am not using that." Madhu's streamlined version also omitted secondary characters, such as Fleance.

Here, Macbeth then arranged Banquo's murder. As Indu summarised it, "and there again Macbeth become[s] very happy, and he thinks that 'There's no enemies for me.'" Later, upon being told that his supporters have abandoned him, she elaborated, "Then again, Macbeth thinks that 'So what? The witch is, gave me the blessing that I will not be killed by anyone who have [sic] been born by a woman, and unless when the, Birnam Wood approaches, the mountain, I will not be killed—so, no need to be frightened,' and he sits there happily." Next, Indu recounted, Macbeth's physician informed him that there was no medicine that could save his wife, and her fate was in God's hands. Then Macbeth "gets angry with the physician and he sends him away" and after hearing the wailing of women, "he understands that his wife is no

more, and he becomes [a] little tired in his mind.” Following Lady Macbeth’s demise, here Macbeth declined rapidly, having unsuccessfully tried to recover his courage in the face of impending devastation.

Madhu explained that in his view, Lady Macbeth’s death represented a psychological turning point in the narrative, where Macbeth began to taste fear again (5.5.9). However, in Madhu’s view the hero’s fear stemmed from the loss of his better half. Accordingly, at “the crying of the ladies, then he know[s] he [is]...dying, but he is afraid. Because, I think, the, Lady Macbeth is the power of the, Macbeth. Then after Lady Macbeth [dies], he is very poor and very helpless.” Madhu explained that he reconstructed *Macbeth*’s power relations through his personal reading of gender relations: “I think that is also [a] very interesting thing. The man and women [sic]; if they [are] together, they can do anything; but [not] if they [stay] separate.” Madhu’s reading echoes the Indian classical categorisation of *tandava/lasya*, or masculine and feminine dance styles within the same art form.⁵¹

Arguably, Madhu’s emphasis on female power also represents a particularly Keralan point of view, in a traditionally matrilineal society. Madhu’s depiction of Macbeth’s psychological destruction following the loss of his female half is echoed in the Abhinaya Theatre’s production of *Macbeth* (highlighted in Chapter Three), despite its inclusion of the unsexing scene (1.5). Tellingly, in Madhu’s version, after his wife’s death, Macbeth roused himself momentarily through his faith in the other female character, the witch. As Madhu recounted of Macbeth, “he’s afraid after [the] death of [his] wife; but he think[s] the witch’s word is never false. ‘The witch is said [...] born baby is not kill you, so, nobody is [able to]

⁵¹ While kathakali is traditionally danced by men only, in kutiyattam, the women play female roles and also have a separate twinned art form, nangiar koothu. The concept of *tandava/lasya* resembles *yin/yang* in its symbiosis of mirror-opposites, and recalls the Hindu construct of Shiva-Shakti or the masculine and feminine life forces, where the male and female deities merge into one complete ultimate being.

killing me [sic].’ Then, he take[s] the power from that word from the witch.” Additionally, “the first time [they met], the witch is, said [that about Birnam Wood] to him.” Accordingly, in Madhu’s reconception, Macbeth’s psychological collapse is complete upon his realisation that his wife has departed and the witch has betrayed him.

Madhu rewrote *Macbeth*’s ending to coincide with the terminus of Macbeth’s inner journey, one that culminated in his psychological destruction. As the artist stated, “I am not killing the, Macbeth [...] I think is, that is not important in the play. [...] Because when he saw the Birnam Vanam [Wood], then [it] is finish[ed]. [...] [He] fell down [...]. He is already finished, the play is already finish[ed].” Indu elaborated on this concluding scene, recounting that upon summoning his soldiers, Macbeth “notices that nobody is respecting him and he feels that everyone is mocking” him. Next, the king “comes into the palace, he close[s] all the doors and sits frightened. And again he gather[s] some courage, and opens the door. And suddenly he sees that the, Birnam Wood is approaching. And then he faints. There, the story ends.” Consequently, in Madhu’s first-person narrative, the story ended with the loss of Macbeth’s consciousness.

In cutting *Macbeth*, Madhu’s production also represented an abridged form of kutiyattam. Formerly, “[u]ntil the first quarter of the present century, a seven-act Kutiyattam play generally took a couple of months, each act taking between 8-9 days” (Pandeya 27). In contrast to a traditional kutiyattam production that spans several nights, Madhu stated, his *Macbeth* was “around two-and-a-half hours” in length. Madhu declared that he trimmed his performance to fit the shorter attention span of modern-day audiences: “Now, the peoples [sic] [are] not ready to do six or seven days” [of watching one performance]. This truncation, however, arguably risks the loss of the flavour of a traditional kutiyattam performance, where

“enactment of a single act of a drama takes ten nights or so, the only way (according to many performers) to bring out fully the aesthetic experience of *rasa* for the audience” (Bruce Sullivan, “Masterpiece” 82). Madhu specified, “We can do [as an extended performance], like that, *Macbeth* also, but it is not possible to perform [the same story for several nights] on a stage nowadays. So I plan to [keep *Macbeth* as] just [a] one day performance.” This alteration represents one of Madhu’s few non-traditional concessions in performing Shakespeare in kutiyattam. In seeking to explore the implications of Madhu’s *Macbeth* for kutiyattam’s evolving postmodern identity, the next section concludes the chapter by gathering and analysing themes from the case study.

Conclusions: “[Q]uestion this most bloody piece of work / To know it further”

Madhu uses Shakespeare not only to secularise and modernise but also to reinvigorate his intangible human heritage, both to “question” and to “know it further” (*Macbeth* 2.3.127-128). Madhu’s stress on a universal “human culture” represents kutiyattam’s reinvention from elitism to humanism, to survive in a capitalist economy that has altered the balance of the elements in the art. The artist explained to me that in kutiyattam, “in the past, the words and text were as important as the *vesham* [costume], but that, now market forces are changing kutiyattam.” The uninitiate audience is growing, and must grow, for kutiyattam’s survival as the art form’s geographical and cultural horizons expand.

Madhu’s cultural translation of *Macbeth* marks a two-way interchange between theatrical cultures that is weighted heavily in favour of his own culture. If Madhu had to subvert his kutiyattam costume for Shakespeare, playing Othello in *Desdemona* (2000), conversely in his own production the artist subsumed Macbeth, translating him into an unrecognisable

kutiyattam character, complete with a mask-like painted face. Thus, Madhu's synthesis of Shakespearean and Sanskrit theatre emerged as a transgressive piece of work on every side. His cultural translation highlights Macbeth as a "very nice" ordinary man. The result is a work that marks Madhu as an innovator, replacing the dulled blade of the 'knife' of tradition with a cutting-edge implement.

In grafting Shakespeare onto kutiyattam, Madhu sidestepped most intercultural tensions by assimilating Shakespeare into Keralan culture. This cultural translation enabled Madhu to retain references to local customs, and to maintain traditional performance codes from the costume to the opening Sanskrit *shloka*. However, Madhu claims that "there is no such thing as a permanent tradition. [...] My innovations are not anything new per se, rather they are a re-working, a revitalisation of the old" (Sathyendran n. pag.). In using new material to reinvigorate a dying art, both art forms were transformed in a fertile destruction and reinvention, reinforcing Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan's aforementioned contention that "hybridization causes changes in both directions" (10). In affirming Kerala's individuality, choosing a work that is internationally recognisable and making it locally relevant, Madhu conversely appropriated a formerly elitist symbol of Indian heritage to serve as a vehicle for Shakespeare.

For Madhu, Shakespeare is appropriated not as a Western symbol but as a marker of international theatrical excellence in demonstrating and marketing his own creativity. In an age where the non-resident Indian (NRI) expat uses a digital app to worship at a virtual temple, Shakespeare can serve as a cultural bridge enabling Madhu's art form to attain a global outreach. Madhu's school Nepathya is one that "includes traditional performances but also innovative adaptations such as "Macbeth" [...], and sends out all over the globe their monthly email announcements of scheduled performances" (Bruce Sullivan, "How Does One" 80). In

promoting kutiyattam on a global scale, Madhu simultaneously secularises his heritage to ensure its optimum survival. As the artist told Sathyendran, “My aim is to give a contemporary almost human touch to traditional stories that are mostly full of divine characters. [...] [B]ecause it [kutiyattam] was a temple art form, there were only a limited number of stories that could be performed. [...] The [remaining] challenge then is to change the [audience] mindset” (n. pag.). Accordingly, Madhu averred that he adapted *Macbeth* not only for but also *as* kutiyattam. When asked where he had performed his *Macbeth*, Madhu replied, “Mainly in [Chennai at the] Hamara Shakespeare Festival, and in Palakkad, in one of the *Natyasastra*—one of the centre[s], performing [arts] centre[s]; and one is, in [the city of] Alappuzha, and one is, in [the] Sanskrit College of Performing Arts.” However, given Madhu’s limited number of performances, it is debatable whether his local audience is yet receptive to his experimental production.

Furthermore, Madhu’s use of Shakespeare to reinvigorate kutiyattam represents a strategic attempt to challenge the mindset of his society of performers. Kutiyattam traditionalists remain particularly resistant to solo experiments such as *Macbeth*, warns Lowthorp. She writes that while the “standard repertoire” is “more collaborative [...], many view the newer choreographies as motivated by the pursuit of money and personal fame, rather than for the greater good of Kutiyattam” (“Voices” 14-15). Yet without such individual pursuits, given the shifts in sponsorship surrounding the art form, it is debatable whether kutiyattam can achieve continued economic sustainability as a lifestyle.

Such tensions between the interests of the individual and the collective can arise during periods of cultural evolution. In discussing the relationship of culture to society and the economy, Raymond Williams addresses this evolution, asking cogently: “Are we to understand culture as ‘the arts’, as ‘a system of meanings and values’, or as a ‘whole way of life’ [...]?”

(13). Williams traces disjunctions arising from “the secularization and the liberalization of earlier metaphysical forms” in late eighteenth-century France and England (15). He suggests that these tensions occurred in the transition from a “religious emphasis” to that of a secular “metaphysics of subjectivity and the imaginative process,” which repositioned ‘culture’ as the imagination and inner life of ‘the individual’ (ibid.). Following this evolution, “‘Culture’, or more specifically ‘art’ and ‘literature’ [...], were seen as the deepest record, the deepest impulse, and the deepest resource of the ‘human spirit’” (ibid.). Williams’ account evokes Madhu’s directive to his students that on the kutiyattam “*arangu* [stage] there is unlimited scope to explore emotions and individuality” (Sathyendran n. pag.). In this evolution, which relocates the religious centre of the stage to the human, individual experimentation need not entail iconoclasm.

Moreover, Madhu’s own institution actively dismantles the formerly sacred hierarchy of the guru-disciple relationship. He told the press, “I started Nepathya [...] with the aim of creating a democratic work space where the traditions of training are intact but with a whole new outlook, which I feel is necessary for the survival of Koodiyattam” (ibid.). Thus, Madhu’s effort to alter his performing culture reflects a challenge to the wider culture of his society, if applying Lan’s aforementioned definition of culture as representing a “collocation of practices and attitudes” (“Of Spirits” 48). Accordingly, Madhu’s emphasis on the need to democratise kutiyattam for its survival aligns with his eagerness to produce new secular, solo kutiyattam works such as *Macbeth*.

In exploring Madhu’s kutiyattam *Macbeth*, this chapter has argued that his production achieved a cultural translation of Shakespeare on practical, theoretical, and spiritual levels. First, Chapter One outlined Madhu’s strategic negotiation of tensions between his *Natyasastra*-

derived kutiyattam theatre and Shakespearean tragedy. I demonstrated that in ending his narrative before Macbeth's death, Madhu circumvented the *Natyasastra's* prohibition on killing the hero of the drama. Concurrently, Madhu displayed his own rasa-based artistry in illustrating Macbeth's psychological collapse. Subsequently, Chapter One investigated Madhu's removal of his art from its sacred temple setting to accommodate *Macbeth*. I posited that Madhu exploited Shakespeare as an excuse to democratise and secularise the elitist Hindu art form of kutiyattam and attract new audiences. Next, Chapter One traced local and global rhizomatic networks of influence on Madhu's unorthodox *Macbeth*. I argued that in producing Shakespeare, Madhu derived inspiration from his kutiyattam-inspired performance of Othello in Ong Keng Sen's 2000 intercultural production of *Desdemona*. Following this, Chapter One analysed Madhu's strategy of cultural translation with reference to his 12 February 2011 performance of *Macbeth*. I maintained that Madhu intentionally realigned Macbeth with his own local mythical anti-heroes, in particular King Ravana from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Furthermore, I suggested that Madhu's sympathetic Marxist portrayal of Macbeth as a postmodern Everyman transcended postcolonial preoccupations with subverting Shakespeare. Finally, this first chapter examined the implications of Madhu's cultural translation for the future of kutiyattam and the evolving postmillennial identities of his own art form and of Shakespeare performance worldwide, in their ongoing cross-fertility.

Overall, Chapter One concludes that Madhu's *Macbeth* re-envisioned Shakespeare's supernatural narrative as a Marxist morality play. Accordingly, Madhu's interpretation suggested that our inner demons possess the dangerous potential to seduce our natural humanity with the lure of "power" and "money." Concurrently, Madhu exploited Shakespeare's nuanced portrayal of Macbeth's indecision over whether to murder Duncan for the crown. The artist

highlighted *Macbeth*'s ambiguities, humanising its protagonist as “a very nice man” even while lending him the anti-heroic kutiyattam costume used for the demon king Ravana. Madhu's purpose reflects that of kutiyattam maestro Mulikulam Kochukuttan Chakyar, “to lead people onto the right path of good conduct through enacting the stories, and to have personal satisfaction from a good performance” (Bruce Sullivan, “Skirting” 268). Equally, Madhu used Shakespeare to highlight his own artistry and to hybridise his heritage art form, democratising its practice and updating its repertoire to facilitate its continued survival in a globalised twenty-first century. In twenty-first-century Kerala, “this pressure for change is more evident on Kathakali and other art forms” than it is on kutiyattam (Bruce Sullivan, “Kerala's *Mahabharata*” 14). Accordingly, the next chapter takes up this issue in exploring another recent postmillennial Keralan production of *Macbeth*, a solo version by kathakali artist Ettumannoor P. Kannan titled *Macbeth Chollyattam*.

CHAPTER TWO – SHAKESPEARE IN THE MIDDLE THEATRE:

MACBETH CHOLLIYATTAM

The old masters of the Kathakali have a rule which says: “Where the hands go to represent an action, there must go the eyes; where the eyes go, there must go the mind, and the action pictured by the hands must beget a specific feeling which must be reflected on the actor’s face.”

Eugenio Barba, *The Kathakali Theatre* (40)

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men / May read strange matters.

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1.5.61-62)

Chapter Two maintains the preceding chapter’s focus on foregrounding individual Keralan artists’ perspectives on Shakespeare to illustrate the research area of postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares. Accordingly, this second chapter makes an illustrative case study of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, as adapted by kathakali artist Ettumanoor Parameswaran Kannan in a solo production titled *Macbeth Cholliyattam* (2009). Chapter Two draws on my first-person perspective of Kannan’s performance of *Macbeth Cholliyattam* as performed on 19 November 2013 at Seva Sadan in Bengaluru, India. I argue here that profiling Kannan’s work can facilitate a deeper understanding of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Keralan performance art, and the field of intercultural Shakespeares. In viewing this field as dynamic, the thesis modifies and extends extant intercultural performance theory to accommodate Keralan productions that no longer fit postcolonial theoretical paradigms. Consequently, Chapter Two continues to trace these productions’ rhizomatic interrelationships through highlighting their practitioners’ perspectives, locating these amid local, national, and global conversations on Shakespeare.

Kannan describes his version of *Macbeth* as a parallel “cultural collaboration” between the Shakespearean text and the performance grammar of kathakali. Investigating Kannan’s premise, the chapter first looks at the evolution of his *Macbeth*, originally performed as *Kathakali Macbeth* on visits to the USA in 1998 and 2001. Deriving from kutiyattam, kathakali similarly narrates Kerala’s epic stories through mime and dance, with rich costumes and an instrumental and vocal accompaniment. By reconfiguring his *Macbeth* for kathakali’s simplified rehearsal form of cholliyattam, Kannan sidestepped former Keralan traditionalist criticism of his handling of the conflicting codes of Shakespearean tragedy and kathakali drama.⁵² Chapter Two analyses Kannan’s strategic negotiation of these intercultural tensions across practical, theoretical, and spiritual levels. Accordingly, this second chapter investigates Kannan’s cultural collaboration, beginning with a broad focus on the kathakali codes derived from India’s *Natyasastra* treatise, before narrowing this focus to examine regional Keralan performance conventions, and finally synthesising the resulting implications for intercultural Shakespeares.

Accordingly, the first section of Chapter Two highlights the challenges involved in adapting Shakespeare for kathakali traditions inherited from the *Natyasastra*. These conventions range from the prescription of makeup codes for various character types, to the proscription of tragedy. While kutiyattam is traditionally elitist, kathakali is more often performed outside temples and termed “the most popular performance tradition in Kerala” (Phillip Zarrilli, “Gods and Demons” 1).⁵³ Yet Kannan is presented with similar challenges to those faced by Margi Madhu (as detailed in Chapter One).

⁵² In mentioning Kannan’s *Macbeth* throughout the thesis I refer to his later cholliyattam version of the production, unless otherwise indicated.

⁵³ Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Kannan throughout Chapter Two I continue to reference our interview.

Thus, Kannan faces challenges in harmonising the conflicting cultural codes of Shakespearean and traditional Keralan theatre. In discussing the challenges facing twenty-first-century Indian Shakespeare productions, Shormistha Panja and Babli Moitra Saraf locate such cultural conflicts in a complex ongoing “negotiation of postcolonial identities, which in the case of India also imply the emergence of regional identities” (2). Panja and Saraf posit that this emergence results in the more complex formation of regional identity through “internal contestations” of social and political power (ibid.). Similarly, K. G. Paulose maintains that the “contributions of Kerala actors are the daring deviations they made from the national pattern. They [...] regionalized national theatre and localization, as a form of resistance, itself is a progressive step” (“Popular” 4). Accordingly, this first section of Chapter Two suggests that while Kannan’s model of cultural collaboration differs from Madhu’s model of cultural translation, their *Macbeths* maintain a shared emphasis. Both Macbeth and Kannan contest the cultural status quo as a means to reinvigorate their regional heritage following post-Independence sociopolitical instability. In accommodating intercultural tensions in a flexible format, Kannan’s *Macbeth* demonstrates a parallel “braiding” of two dramatic forms that echoes Erika Fischer-Lichte’s metaphor of “interweaving” (*Beyond Postcolonialism* 15). I argue that this flexibility is symptomatic of non-binaric postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares, outgrowing rigid postcolonial models, in multiple strands of hybridity.

Continuing this theoretical analysis within a narrower contextualisation of the interculturalism involved in Kannan’s production, the next section situates *Macbeth Cholliyattam* in the historic emergence of intercultural kathakali adaptations. In contextualising Kannan’s *Macbeth* in a minimally documented performance history of Keralan Shakespeares, this second section of Chapter Two engages with Ania Loomba’s critique of Sadanam

Balakrishnan's 1996 kathakali *Othello*, which similarly rewrites Shakespearean tragedy. Additionally, I discuss Annette Leday and David McRuvie's controversially tragic 1999 kathakali *King Lear*, evaluating Diane Daugherty's representation of its "intercultural theatre" as a "pendulum" and contrasting this with Patrice Pavis' less useful unidirectional "hourglass" model ("Pendulum" 52; *Crossroads* 4). Additionally, this second chapter builds on primary evidence gained through interviewing a range of kathakali practitioners, including Kannan, Balakrishnan, and Leday, comparing their strategies in handling potential tensions between the kathakali codes and their own views of Shakespeare. While re-evaluating Daugherty's and Loomba's models of intercultural theatre in the light of postmillennial performance, I argue that Kannan's work bears a different intercultural emphasis in highlighting a model of collaboration. Accordingly, I differentiate Kannan's *Macbeth* from performance adaptations that foreground postcolonial tensions, such as Arjun Raina's *The Magic Hour* (2000) for the kathakali-Shakespeare hybrid form of *khekkali*. *Macbeth Cholliyattam* juxtaposes Shakespeare and kathakali, an intercultural relationship that Maurizio Calbi terms a "dangerous liaison" ("*Dancing*" 38). Yet I argue that Kannan's production accommodates rather than fosters intercultural tensions.

In turning to an account of Kannan's performance of 19 November 2013, I posit that Kannan adapts *Macbeth* with a dual objective, using Shakespeare as both a medium and an end. Here I argue that Kannan's bifocal perspective evidences a typical Keralan preoccupation with displaying the tragic protagonist's human side and baring the workings of his psychology. This strategy manifests as an artistic focus on the performative elaboration of Macbeth's internal conflict. At the same time, this sympathetic perspective exemplifies a Keralan Marxist morality that relocates Macbeth to the category of the anti-hero. The concluding section of Chapter Two

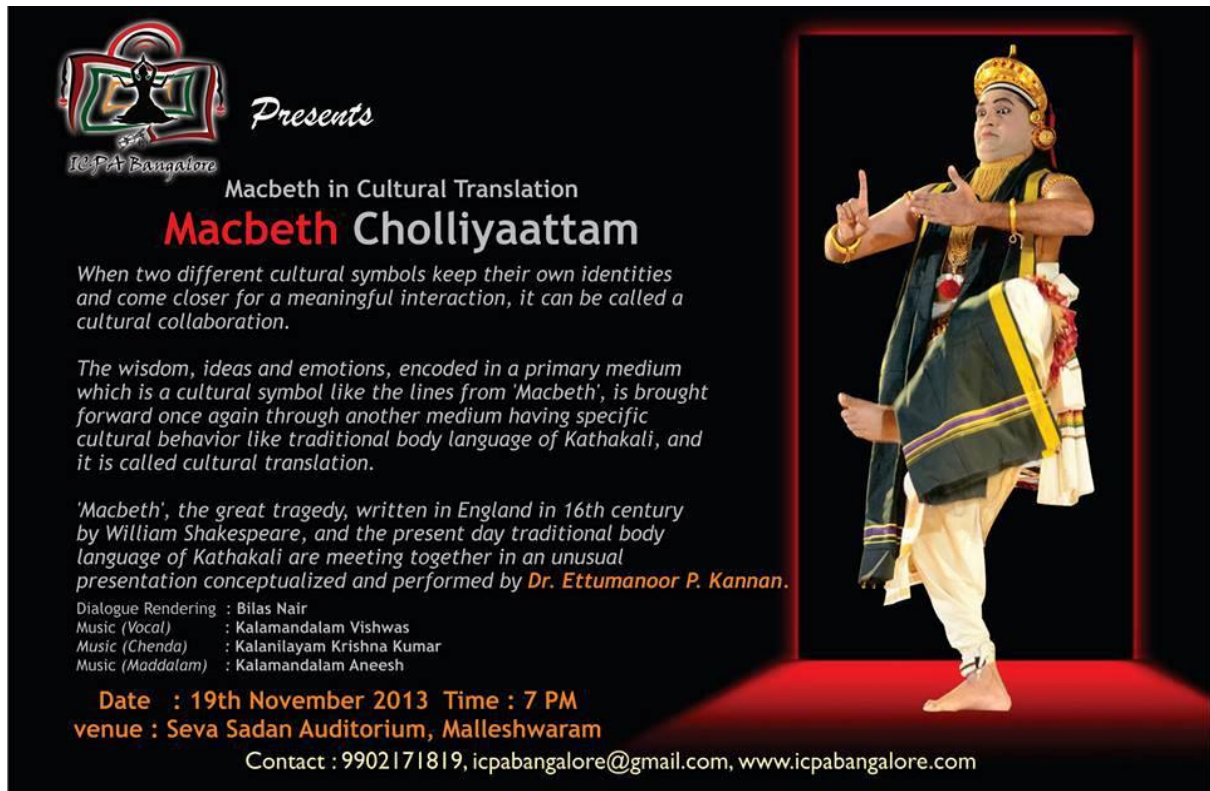
discusses Kannan's use of Shakespeare as a medium through which to revitalise his declining art form, attract new audiences, and ensure kathakali's survival amid the replacement of royal patronage with that of the tourist industry. In closing, this second chapter examines the implications of Madhu's *Macbeth* for the evolving postmillennial identity of Shakespeare, kathakali, and the rhizomatic cultural cross-fertility between Keralan and global Shakespeares.

Macbeth Chollyattam: intercultural challenges

Kannan's 2013 performance of *Macbeth Chollyattam* represented the culmination of an artistic evolution intended to sidestep former intercultural tensions. In 2001, Kannan had travelled to Pittsburgh to perform *Macbeth* in a production titled *Kathakali Macbeth*, following his 1998 solo performance of the same in Los Angeles. Kannan stated that the idea to adapt Shakespeare for kathakali began with "Lissa Brennan [sic], who was my student at that time. She [...] asked me to do a production for her company. She wanted a Shakespeare play...and I chose *Macbeth*." In 2009, Kannan reconfigured his earlier *Macbeth* as *Macbeth Chollyattam* (both detailed in a later section of Chapter Two). In so doing, Kannan waited nearly a decade due to harsh criticism received at home from traditionalists upset by his original *Macbeth*'s experimental format.

By transplanting a Shakespearean tragedy into kathakali, inevitably Kannan confronted intercultural tensions. As an Indian classical performance tradition deriving from kutiyattam, similarly kathakali inherited codes from Bharata's seminal *Natyasastra* treatise on drama. As in kutiyattam, kathakali lacks the tragic genre. A typical kathakali plot, like the English morality play, has "one common characteristic: good and the gods always triumph over evil and the demons" (Eugenio Barba 38). In depicting these battles, as opposed to the codes of kutiyattam, kathakali performance conventions are flexible enough to permit "fighting and bloodshed

shown on the stage, which is taboo according to the *Natya Shastra*” (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 16). Conversely, the kathakali convention of avoiding the killing of innocents, even offstage, obviously presents difficulties in adapting an exceptionally bloody Shakespearean tragedy such as *Macbeth*.



The poster features a central photograph of a Kathakali performer in traditional makeup and costume, standing on a red stage. To the left of the photograph is a logo for ICPA Bangalore, which includes a stylized figure in a colorful frame. Below the logo, the text reads 'Presents Macbeth in Cultural Translation Macbeth Chollyaattam'. The main title 'Macbeth Chollyaattam' is in a large, bold font. Below the title are three paragraphs of text: a quote about cultural collaboration, a paragraph about the translation process, and a paragraph about the play's history and the director. At the bottom, there is a list of credits for dialogue rendering, music, and a date/venue/contact information section.

ICPA Bangalore Presents
Macbeth in Cultural Translation
Macbeth Chollyaattam

When two different cultural symbols keep their own identities and come closer for a meaningful interaction, it can be called a cultural collaboration.

The wisdom, ideas and emotions, encoded in a primary medium which is a cultural symbol like the lines from 'Macbeth', is brought forward once again through another medium having specific cultural behavior like traditional body language of Kathakali, and it is called cultural translation.

'Macbeth', the great tragedy, written in England in 16th century by William Shakespeare, and the present day traditional body language of Kathakali are meeting together in an unusual presentation conceptualized and performed by **Dr. Ettumanoor P. Kannan**.

Dialogue Rendering : Bilas Nair
 Music (Vocal) : Kalamandalam Vishwas
 Music (Chenda) : Kalanilayam Krishna Kumar
 Music (Maddalam) : Kalamandalam Aneesh

Date : 19th November 2013 Time : 7 PM
venue : Seva Sadan Auditorium, Malleshwaram
 Contact : 9902171819, icpabangalore@gmail.com, www.icpabangalore.com

Figure 9: Poster for *Macbeth Chollyattam*, featuring Ettumanoor Kannan, photograph © ICPA Bangalore.

In his *Macbeth*, Kannan chose to perform Duncan’s murder onstage. When asked whether this act contravened kathakali and *Natyasastra* tradition, Kannan clarified: “That is [a] totally wrong concept that *Natyasastra* says the murder cannot be presented onstage. *Natyasastra* is *not* saying that.” Kannan attributed this misconception to a common misunderstanding of the classification system of Indian drama. He maintained that Bharata

categorises drama into ten types, and that the ban on onstage violence is only meant to apply to the *natakam* form of “family entertainment.” Thus, Kannan stated, it is only in the *natakam* that “embracing should not be presented, [...] kissing should not be presented, [...] murder should not be presented as well, you know, killing on stage, [...] [and] war. Because this [form] is meant for the appreciation of parents with children, in short, *sex and violence* should not be presented.” Yet kathakali contains scenes of both romance and violence.

Kannan related this controversy to his production of a Shakespearean tragedy. Accordingly, he clarified: “Kathakali is not *natakam*. So, in kathakali, we present murder scenes. We have killing enacted on stage, you know, Roudra Bheeman killing Dusshasana.” While these two legendary characters from the *Mahabharata* epic are royal cousins, Kannan’s analogy remains inapplicable to Macbeth’s killing of Duncan. Kannan’s assertion elides the fact that Roudra Bheeman is a war hero who kills Dusshasana, a confirmed villain, in open combat. In kathakali, as mentioned, the murders of innocents are not dramatised. We are never shown the war scene where Bheeman’s five young royal nephews are assassinated Duncan-like while asleep in their army tent.⁵⁴ The contrast between death by martial combat and murder invalidates this particular cultural parallel between the *Mahabharata* and *Macbeth*.

In his *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, Kannan inverted the *Natyasastra* tradition of showcasing the triumph of good over evil, by omitting Macduff’s slaying of Macbeth. Conversely, he foregrounded several of *Macbeth*’s offstage murders by enacting these onstage. Kannan not only mimed the play’s performed *and* reported crimes, including regicide and the murder of the innocent and elderly, but he showed even those slaughters at which Shakespeare only hints. For example, the artist elaborated the action of Lady Macbeth’s hypothetical dashing out of the

⁵⁴ Abhishek Sarkar refers to this and other unfair killings in the *Mahabharata* in translating the views of nineteenth-century Bengali essayist Akshay Chandra Sarkar, who declares that Macbeth’s murders are even worse (118).

brains of her babe in arms. Therefore, Kannan used Shakespeare as a vehicle for the exploration of kathakali's bloodiest aspects, enhancing the horrors of an already gory play through artistic elaboration.

Possibly, Kannan may have transgressed the *Natyasastra* intentionally to better foreground its emphasis on rasa (emotional tone), highlighting the horror of onstage violence in order to enhance the underlying rasa of his *Macbeth*. Balakrishnan attributes this focus to the dance-drama's classical background, writing that "the Kathakali dance-drama is perhaps the only real survivor of the classical tradition of presenting a particular rasa as the only content of a dramatic performance" (*Kathakali* 74). Yet kathakali derives this tradition from the kutiyattam convention of foregrounding one or more rasas for the audience's recognition and appreciation. However, kathakali departs from kutiyattam in its display of onstage violence. David George writes of the rasa of "bhayanaka" (fear or horror) that the viewer can experience during a bloody kathakali death scene, such as the slaughter of Dusshasana by Roudra Bheeman (usually copiously drenched in red paint): "The blood-display in Kathakali is a mystic awe-inspiring rite, a grim departure from the *Natyasastra* but, as we watch this apotheosis of blood, terror-struck and in speechless wonder, we experience the triumph of bhayanaka as a major rasa" (61). This experience of rasa is expected by a traditional kathakali audience, and in turn the audience's attentive participation is essential to this shared performance experience.

Accordingly, Kannan's version of *Macbeth* foregrounded the expression of rasa through a focus on the titular character's murderous psychology. The actor affirmed that his production deviated from Shakespeare's play in presenting a more abstract interpretation of Macbeth's mental state:

I call my presentation a lyrical presentation [...], it is rasa, totally. That is why it is lyrical; it is more abstract. It is not about incidents; it is about the effect on [sic] the incidents in [sic] Macbeth's mind. That is what I am presenting, in the beginning, his veeram (heroic expression) [...]. We are presenting only bhavas, and the words/dialogues and hand gestures/body movements are to support the bhavas.

Here, Kannan's emphasis on rasa and bhava highlighted not only his character's internal monologue but also the performer's own versatility. As K. Bharata Iyer explains, "the ambition of Kathakali is rather to adhere to the classical Sanskrit ambition of creating a dominant mood in the audience—a rasa" (62). Iyer adds that "the plot [...] has little to do with the success of a performance. The drama is judged more by the rasa aspect[,] which depends on the excellence of the performance of the actors" (61). This underlying emphasis on creating rasa arguably also informed Kannan's choice to adapt one of Shakespeare's more well-known plays. For a typical kathakali audience, Meera Manu writes, the performer's skill takes precedence as the plot is already familiar: "How it is presented is of paramount importance. As the plot is familiar to all, telling the story from beginning to end is not a necessity" (n. pag.). Equally, a foreknowledge of Shakespeare's story would leave the cholliyattam audience free to focus on Kannan's interpretative skill, rendering his *Macbeth* an artistic demonstration as well as a critical innovation.

Kannan's exploration of rasa through his interpretation of a Shakespearean, non-Hindu narrative holds further implications for the continuing secular evolution of his art form. Like kutiyattam, kathakali has been forced to balance internal tensions in adapting to India's secularisation and democratisation. Kathakali's emphasis on rasa remains rooted in the spiritual,

as well as practical, origins of the art form. Thus, in producing *Macbeth Chollyattam*, Kannan performed a delicate negotiation of resultant tensions between his classical art form's sacred and secular aspects. The following section examines these tensions further by exploring the ritual Hindu roots of the kathakali dance-drama, tracing its similarities to the pre-Shakespearean Christian theatricals while differentiating the religious bases of these performance forms.

Macbeth Chollyattam: ritual and mythical origins

In analysing the intercultural tensions that Kannan navigated in producing *Macbeth Chollyattam*, it is vital to record his own viewpoint in disambiguating the extent to which his production is predicated on the Hindu ritual arts of Kerala. In deriving from a similar tradition of religious theatre involving gods and demons, Shakespearean drama may naturally appeal to Keralan kathakali performers. Superficially, Kannan's performance of *Macbeth* in a traditionally Hindu performance form clashes with R. A. Malagi's contention that *Macbeth*'s "extraordinary beauty and poignancy" is intrinsic to a tragedy "profoundly embedded in an irreversibly pregnant Christian culture" (544). Yet kathakali's religious roots echo the ritual and mythical origins of the Shakespearean theatre. Krishna Chaitanya records that in Kerala: "Somewhat like the miracle plays of Europe, but in incipient form, ritual plays had been enacted in temple precincts from very early times" (172). Barba concurs that "the dramas of the Kathakali repertory are in fact religious plays, and true Mysteries [sic]" (44). Barba equates these two forms in their content and delivery: "Neither the story nor the characters are ordinary, and every element of the stage technique emphasizes their extraordinary aspects" (ibid.). Arguably, these same intercultural parallels drove Kannan's selection of *Macbeth* as a Shakespearean narrative fit to accommodate kathakali's extraordinary, otherworldly characters.

Shakespeare's work is appropriate for Kannan's cultural collaboration, as kathakali is designed to deliver a transformational experience akin to *Macbeth's* witchcraft. Balakrishnan recalls that for a spectator witnessing kathakali, "the line between the divine and the supernatural and the mundane and prosaic gets blurred, albeit temporarily!" (*Kathakali* 88). Consequently, *Macbeth's* supernatural content complements kathakali's inherent function as a portal to otherworldly experience. Traditionally, kathakali retains ritual features common to Keralan temple arts, such as the dancer's opening invocation of one or more Hindu gods. However, George argues that in kathakali, "what the actors prepare for is not to incarnate a god but to generate the basic 'rasa' or mood around which the whole event is shaped" (62). The typical kathakali narrative is distinctly religious, as it is "derived from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Nala Charita* [sic] and other Hindu mythological texts, adapted by a series of authors from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries" (George 61). Yet George claims that the art of kathakali highlights the adventurous nature of these myths over their spiritual nature, as its "repertoire dramatizes the whole range of Indian gods, heroes, spirits and demons and, moreover, focuses on the heroic rather than the mystical aspects of their various cults" (ibid.). Consequently, in kathakali, the generation of rasas such as veeram (heroic expression) provides theatrical magic that takes precedence over the performance of ritual.

The nature of rasa as a shared experience between actor and audience complicates Kannan's performance of a non-Hindu narrative in a theatre tradition derived from the Hindu *Natyasastra*. Arguably, in Kannan's work, Shakespeare functions as a bridge between his art form and secular audiences. Significantly, kathakali's Hindu source texts are well known to the local audience, whose preknowledge of these epics allows them to focus on the actor's elaboration of rasa rather than plot. Possibly, Kannan chose a comparatively well-known

Shakespearean story to enable his audience to focus on his performative elaboration of *rasa*. For the performer and audience of a ritual Hindu temple art, the experience of *rasa* can be deeply religious, representing a gateway to the divine consciousness within. In Hinduism, this union with the cosmic universal through self-knowledge is the desired culmination of eons of life cycles of existence, an experience that frees one from the bondage of birth: “*rasanubhooti* (aesthetic experience) [...] is considered akin to *brahmanubhooti* (ecstasy of realisation), the ultimate aim of human beings, according to Hindu philosophy” (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 71). Consequently, a clear communication of *rasa* can be considered essential to the Keralan performing arts, and this core concept remains linked to spiritual self-awareness even when presenting a non-Hindu narrative such as *Macbeth*.

Whether dancing *Macbeth* or the *Mahabharata*, Kannan averred that he does not disconnect his performance from his own spirituality and culture. He explained that “[s]omebody cannot think of [...] *kathakali* or any kind of art, separated from his cultural background, cultural life. So for me, I am very strongly rooted in yogic philosophy, and [...] my *yoga sadhana* [spiritual journey] is directly connected with whatever I do.” Kannan’s view tallies with Barba’s observation that “[m]oreover, the *Kathakali* began as a form of *yoga* and retains some *yoga* characteristics” (50). Barba describes the spiritual significance of the *kathakali* technique as “a means to reach the metaphysical. It is also an offering and a consecration like that of *Karma-Yoga* [selfless action] [...]; for the true believer the dance is a form of *yoga* [union], a method to eliminate the ego in order to attain final identification with the Eternal” (ibid.). Similarly, Iyer sees the *kathakali* actor as one who achieves divine union through his art, regardless of the narrative. Accordingly, Iyer writes: “The actor has been trained from childhood...to act as a medium for *lila*, the sport of the gods. [...] The actor is compared

to a yogi, somebody who follows the way of yoga (union) or mental concentration in which the subject and the object, the believer and his god, the actor and his character become one” (25-26). Yet Kannan’s *Macbeth* complicates this intention of divine union, by presenting a tragic narrative in which the protagonist is a villain rather than a virtuous hero or god. Furthermore, the kathakali tradition of yoga suggests that Kannan immersed himself in the character of Macbeth. Conversely, Kannan subverted this code, insisting that he inhabited his character, rather than the reverse.

Moreover, Kannan’s decision to perform *Macbeth*, a play that opens with a spell cast by malevolent entities, contradicts the kathakali tradition of opening with an invocation to the divine. Performed behind the curtain, this invocation traditionally invites the gods to come down to earth and dance in sport among humans. ‘Kathakali’ translates to ‘story-play,’ and the word ‘kali’ also denotes artistic performance, such as to dance or to ‘play’ an instrument. Consequently, in this Hindu art form, a traditional kathakali actor effaced himself to become an instrument for the divine, in the great ‘play’ of the cosmic dance of creation, preservation, and regeneration. In Kannan’s *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, which discarded the opening curtain and invocation, the performance remained visibly connected with the divine only through the presence of multiple idols onstage. Iyer elaborates on the complex spiritual symbolism of kathakali’s typical opening sequence:

The stage represents the world that has come into being in space by the primal act of the Creator. [...] The curtain is *rajani* or *tamas* (the darkness that divides). Behind it a couple of dancers execute an invocative dance called *Todayam*. They stand for [the divine attributes of] *Maya* [illusion] and *Sakti* [sheer power]. The

dancers remain unseen by the spectators, just as these forces work beyond the ken of human perception; the activities represent *lila*, the endless play of cosmic forces. [...] In this endless process of the advent of gods and mythological heroes, there is only an un-veiling or falling off of the veils that obstruct vision. Therefore, the curtain is not fixed but held up by human agency (two men hold it up) and it falls away the moment reality approaches. (23-24)

Here, the kathakali prologue functions as a Creation story detailing the nature of God, the origin of the world, and the development of human civilisation. Accordingly, Iyer's description corroborates the assertion made earlier in this chapter that the kathakali dramas often represent the Keralan equivalent of a mystery play.

Kannan revealed a secular, humanist perspective on such sacred narratives, opining that "through a process, the history becomes mythology. Like, people believed that Sri Rama, Ram and Sita [of the *Ramayana*] existed. [...] And also Jesus, [...] there may be historical facts about his life, but still, it is a, mythology." Similarly, in Kannan's view, *Macbeth's* Scottish history became myth through Shakespeare's treatment of the material, rendering it suitable for kathakali. Correspondingly, Kannan declared that he had chosen to produce *Macbeth* primarily because kathakali "is not, totally, a contemporary form. It has [a] tradition, and the tradition always uses [the] universal quality of all [its] elements [...]. Like if you use a story, that story should have a universal nature." Like Madhu, Kannan compared Shakespeare's works with the Keralan epics in their "classical" and "universal" nature. Kannan elaborated on this parallel, explaining that:

Mythical stories are presented though kathakali [...]. Because, myth has a universal and impersonal aspect in it. [...] [M]ythology is not the narration of incidents. It is the expression of the imagination, or the expression of *the experience* of imagination. So the incidents in mythology happen right now, at present. So [...] the Shakespearean play is not an old story. It happens when I am on stage. That is, the story is free from space and time. And, when, when I present [a] *Ramayana* story, when I present [a] *Mahabharata* story, [...] I don't believe that it ever happened; it is only [a] story, a mythical story.

Thus, Kannan equated the fabric of Shakespeare's plays with the inherently mythical nature of the legendary kathakali narratives, belonging to the ever-contemporary realm of imagination.

In discussing his *Macbeth*, Kannan applied Sanskrit drama theory to Shakespearean drama, elaborating on the *Natyasastra*'s dual principles of real-life versus onstage action, or *lokadharmi* versus *natyadharmi*. The artist stated that these concepts are applicable to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, declaring that the playwright:

did not think of whether it [actually] happened [...], the witches, you know, and the apparitions—because all these things, might not have happened, anywhere. We call it *natyadharmi*. [...] So whatever happens in the world is *lokadharmi*. *Natyadharmi* is that what happens only on stage. For example, Ravana lifting huge Mount Kailasa in his bare hands. Then you can ask, is it foolishness to say so, because no one can lift a mountain. But an actor can! That is *natyadharmi*.

Thus, Kannan connected *Macbeth*'s supernatural with the magic of performance, considering the narrative a mythical tale with the potential for improvisation and embellishment rather than a factual (if embellished) history. In discussing Shakespeare's supernatural drama, Michael Dobson posits that the theatre is a "threshold between this world and the next, and it can represent spirits, ghosts, deities—or, it can also be a place you just go just to see the world as it is, just to show human behaviour that is completely secular and completely rational" ("Shakespeare and the Supernatural" n. pag.). Viewed accordingly, *Macbeth Chollyattam* functions as a portal to transport the audience between the worlds of *natyadharmi* and *lokadharmi*. Correspondingly, in Kannan's view, *Macbeth* fits into a tradition where magic of myth is presented and experienced through the immediacy of the actor's imagination and expression, a rasa-based metaphysics transcending culture, time, and space.

It is also relevant here to note Kannan's (likely unconscious) association of Macbeth and Ravana, the kings of Scotland and Sri Lanka, as archetypal epic anti-heroes. In Hindu mythology, Ravana represents the antithesis of Rama, the divine avatar born to slay him. In a kathakali play that dramatises this mythology, Phillip Zarrilli explains, "the 'heroic' is an idealized state of being/doing dramatically marked by the necessity of the hero's sacrificial acts of blood-letting, usually accomplished by the end of the performance when he 'kills' one or other demon or demon-king" (*Dance-Drama* 6). By definition, Macbeth cannot function as a kathakali hero; while his acts are bloody, they represent the murder of innocents, rather than the slaying of demons. If Kannan had dramatised the full Shakespearean work, in facilitating Macbeth's killing, instead Macduff would manifest the kathakali ideal of the 'heroic.'

In juxtaposing the Shakespearean work with sacred Hindu theatre, moreover, Kannan's *Macbeth* hints at his redefinition of the English author as sacred. Simultaneously, Kannan

realigned his own sacred cultural tradition with that of humanism. Accordingly, Kannan concluded that the imaginary nature of myth holds an immense potential for imaginative artistic reinterpretation: “So it has a lot of aspects in it, which express my mind. [...] Both [Shakespeare and the *Mahabharata* share this capacity], all myth, mythology, all over the world.” Having explored intercultural conflicts and correspondences between the mysteries of *Macbeth* and Kerala’s myth, the discussion now segues into an analysis of Kannan’s self-expression through producing *Macbeth* as a cultural collaboration.

Kathakali: semiotics and performance grammar

In effect, Kannan’s *Macbeth Chollyattam* used Shakespeare to foreground the chollyattam art form as a stripped down rehearsal mode of kathakali. Kannan’s art form demonstrates a mixed heritage, having evolved from ritual Brahminical gestures and the classical codes in the *Natyasastra*. Kannan’s innovative new work, packaged as chollyattam, was a comprehensive appropriation of its intercultural heritage. The production incorporated selected aspects of conventional kathakali costume, dance, music and set, as well as sections of Shakespeare’s text and plot. Kannan’s production of *Macbeth* was approximately ninety minutes in duration, presenting only a snapshot of the full Shakespearean play. As an improvised work, the show also featured Kannan’s chollyattam passages within it, further marking his production as an individual innovation.

In paralleling Shakespeare with kathakali in his creative cultural collaboration, Kannan preserved what he terms the latter’s “performance grammar,” or the mudras and movements, gestures and expressions. His methodology differs from that Mark Thornton Burnett describes as used in Royston Abel’s 2003 film *In Othello* (*Marketplace* 138). While Kannan’s hybrid

production does “locate the Bard at a point of cross-fertilizing intersection,” his production parallels kathakali “acting conventions [...] and European theatrical methods” rather than combining them in a “performative fusion” (ibid.). Similarly, in acting the role of Macbeth, Kannan’s strategy was opposed diametrically to Madhu’s. The kathakali artist discarded his classical *vesham* (stock costume and makeup combination), retaining a version of unorthodox simplicity that stripped his protagonist of any familiar visual semiotics. Aside from kathakali gestures, Kannan retained few external kathakali conventions to convey Macbeth’s semi-demonic character.

As in kutiyattam, in kathakali the different colour codes and makeup designs not only lend a character an otherworldly effect but also provide an informed audience with visual context clues as to the character’s social status, inner nature, and role in the narrative. Poetically, Iyer describes the spectacular effect of a traditional kathakali *vesham*, its symbolism rooted intrinsically in Indian philosophy:

The soft light of the oil lamp, the twilighted [sic] zone and the darkness beyond are admirable foils to accentuate the colour effect. The patterns reveal that the colours used are selected for their sensitiveness to communicate ideas and their transforming qualities. [...] ‘The deeper the nature of the thought we wish to express, the more it ought to be steeped in the fire of colour’ is an ancient Indian belief; this feeling fully permeates the colour scheme of the Kathakali make-up and here, more than elsewhere, colour exists as the language of symbolism. (44)

The kathakali character's colour-coded facial makeup therefore not only transforms the actor, but it also communicates significant information to the initiate audience.

For example, as Barba explains, the kathakali makeup “expresses a type of character and not an individual personality” (43). Accordingly, an actor's face is painted “green for the gods and the heroes, red for the violent characters and the ambitious, yellow for the simple mortals, [and] black for the demons” (ibid. 42). The “bellicose characters [such as Ravana] have two little white balls, one at the tip of the nose, the other on the forehead” (ibid.). George suggests that this “convention dates back to the *Natyasastra* in which the semiotics of colour were already classified: green for love, white for comic, red for anger, yellow for the supernatural, black for terror, blue for odious” (58). George elaborates on the connotations of the five main kathakali *veshams*:

Pacha [sic]—literally green; symbolizing refinement, poise, heroism, high ethical ideas [...] [;] used for noble and virtuous characters: kings, gods, heroes; [...] Kathi [sic], also green but with the addition on the cheeks of a red mark in the shape of a knife; used for characters who combine a mixture of noble sentiments and evil passions [...], fierce, defiant, ambitious, arrogant, self-willed—demons, titans [...] [;] Tati: bearded make-up of three types [for] [...] villains [...] [;] Kari [...] for primitive savages and ignorant creatures [...] [;] Minukku: yellow-orange, flesh-colour; [...] used for human characters, including wise men, brahmins [sic], messengers and most women. (ibid.)

The noble or ambitious male characters generally have rills of stiffened paper glued onto the cheek or jaw, demarcating the area of the facial paint-mask. Moreover, eighteen special *veshams* exist for “special characters” such as individual personalities, animals, or animated objects (ibid. 59).⁵⁵ Whereas Madhu chose a similar *katti vesham* for his Macbeth, Kannan adopted a more passive *minukku* styled *vesham*, perhaps unconsciously imbuing his protagonist with a wiser and more feminine character.

Kannan’s use of a less masculine kathakali *vesham* for Macbeth is ironic, as the actor retained the masculine performance grammar of kathakali, an art in which all roles were formerly performed by men only. The kathakali body movements derive from “martial dances of the warlords” (George 48). These dances derive from kalarippayattu, the feudal Keralan martial art that has influenced several Keralan performance forms (Iyer 5 fn. 7). In performing *Macbeth*, Kannan retained the basic kathakali posture, which is “recorded in the *Natyasastra* as the Mandala Sthana [literally, ‘wheel stance,’ or round posture], and all major movements of the body are arranged around and form this basic square or cube” (George 51). This basic kathakali posture predates the Shakespearean text by barely a century, as “temple sculptures and Mattancheri [Palace] frescos show that the basic Kathakali positions in use today were established by the 15th century” (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 21). Yet George suggests that the cultural origins of the Asian dance are more ancient, distinctly interrelated in concept if not in anthropology, stating “no actor of Noh or Kabuki or Kathakali is content or trained merely to reproduce a series of fixed, mechanical postures and gestures. Rather, these traditional poses and gestures provide the essential framework within which and upon which he is taught and encouraged to develop and express his own individual application of the tradition” (52). As with

⁵⁵ These styles include those for special characters including several birds, a serpent and a divine discus.

Madhu's kutiyattam *Macbeth*, the classical structure of his performing art provided Kannan with a strong yet flexible framework for his own innovative interpretation of Shakespeare's Scottish Play. Accordingly, while renegotiating the makeup codes of his art form to accommodate a new Shakespearean character, Kannan refused to compromise kathakali's core performance grammar.

In featuring Shakespeare's English text alongside its free rendering in sung Malayalam verse, and providing a simultaneous translation through kathakali performance grammar, Kannan's performance opened up his art form to the uninitiate audience. Barba writes of the uninformed viewer's difficulty in grasping the underlying symbolism of kathakali in its allusive nature: "Each gesture, each little motion is an ideogram which *writes out* the story and can be understood only if its conventional meaning is known. The spectator must learn the language, or rather the alphabet of the language, to understand what the actor is saying" (38). In effect, the kathakali mudras (signs) form their own sign language, along with that of the body. Barba describes this intricate alphabet: "There are nine motions of the head, eleven ways of casting a glance, six motions of the eyebrows, [and] four positions of the neck. The sixty-four motions of the limbs cover the movements of the feet, toes, heels, ankles, waist, hips-in short, all the flexible parts of the body" (39). While the actor's face communicates the character's reaction, his hands describe a story's action, writes Barba: "There are twenty-four fundamental mudras which, when combined with one another and with gestures and facial expressions, can express approximately three thousand words, enough for a play" (41). These hand symbols and gestures can denote the expression of an "idea, an image, an action, or even a punctuation mark" (George 56). A traditional audience masters this 'alphabet' of signs and signals only over a prolonged period of exposure: "Local informants estimate that about 20% of an audience understands the

mudras, mostly older people and brahmins [sic]" (ibid. 57). Here, Kannan hybridised *Macbeth*'s English text with Malayalam verse and the kathakali alphabet to narrate the story in multiple languages, strategically using Shakespeare to attract a variety of audiences to his own art form.

Thus, through Kannan's *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's text functioned as a tool to reinvigorate and modernise kathakali. Kannan's production facilitated a multidirectional intercultural understanding of both Shakespeare and kathakali, whether by domestic or international audiences. This dynamic reflects John Phillips' observation regarding the Leday *Lear*, suggesting that the production was "as much about what Shakespeare can do to and for Kathakali, as it was about Shakespeare when, like Bottom, he is translated into something quite different but still recognizable" (236). Leday expressed the same idea in interview, stating, "Why Shakespeare? Because kathakali!" (n. pag.). Similarly, in mixing the international language of English with the locally comprehensible kathakali performance grammar and Malayalam verse, Kannan's production facilitated a combined greater potential for its comprehension by the younger, non-Brahminical audience members, or the remaining 80% of his audience.

Through his interpretation of *Macbeth*, Kannan also exploited the freedom for a kathakali artist to innovate in performance despite kathakali's set texts and performance grammar. This flexibility of improvisation is woven into the fabric of a kathakali performance. For example, in describing a woman, an artist would first show the gesture or mudra for 'woman.' Next, he might "elaborate on the description by improvising attributes such as "beautiful as a lotus," or "tender as a rose petal," or "with eyebrows which look like waves" (Barba 40). Through this *manodharma* or "imaginative capacity," the actor is given freedom to elaborate on the lines of sung verse during their repetition (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 45). Kannan

employed this freedom by elaborating on both *Macbeth*'s English text and its Malayalam translation through improvised gesture. His improvisation provided the Shakespearean text with a rich counterpoint of visual metaphor that extended scenes and enhanced emotions. In exploring Kannan's strategies for producing and performing *Macbeth* through kathakali, this section has examined his selective retention and employment of *Natyasastra*-derived practical, theoretical, and spiritual conventions. Accordingly, next I analyse Kannan's artistic choices in a narrower regional context, examining Keralan influences on *Macbeth Chollyattam*.

Macbeth Chollyattam: intercultural inheritances

What, then, are *Macbeth Chollyattam*'s implications for Shakespeare and for kathakali, which Kannan views as equals in his collaboration? To contextualise the issue, it is important to evaluate the role of Shakespeare in Kerala. Moreover, it is necessary to locate *Macbeth Chollyattam* along the evolutionary continuum of Kerala's art forms, from their early ritual function through postcolonial democratisation to their ongoing postmodern era secularisation. Kathakali evolved from the classical dance form Ramanattam, developed by the royal Kottarakkara household as a rival to the Krishnanattam dance-drama of the Zamorin of Calicut; both forms are offshoots of kutiyattam (ibid. 11-12, 20). Historically, the local monarchs represent the traditional gatekeepers of the Hindu arts, both as patrons and influential artists. For example, Prince Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), trained in Europe and considered India's greatest classical painter, first popularised depictions of the Hindu gods in human form; Maharaja Swathi Thirunal (1813-1846) was an illustrious Indian classical music composer whose royal descendant Rama Varma today hosts and sings in the annual nine-day Hindu music festival that bears his ancestor's name. Following its 1947 independence, India's princely states

of Travancore and Cochin, and its districts of Malabar and Kasaragod, eventually merged to form the southern state of Kerala. Accordingly, the Keralan classical performing arts, comprising kathakali, kutiyattam, and mohiniyattam (the female ‘dance of seduction’), faced a decline after the loss of their royal patronage.

In the decades after Independence, Kannan’s art form faced a difficulty identical to that of kutiyattam, with the loss of temple-based income following Kerala’s new Marxist governmental land reforms and the abolition of its caste hierarchy. In an effort to stabilise kathakali, the renowned Malayalam poet and art connoisseur Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) established Kalamandalam, the first state kathakali school, at which Kannan is currently a visiting lecturer (ibid. 33; Narayanan 142). Formerly, the system had relied on a gurukula (master-apprentice) relationship, which developed a pupil’s expertise according to the genius of the individual teacher rather than a regulatory body. Kannan describes the new Keralan governmental recognition of kathakali as a mixed blessing:

The institutionalisation of kathakali happened through Kalamandalam. And that happened through the efforts of great visionaries. Unfortunately, that institutionalisation itself destroyed certain values, in it. [...] [L]ater, the *life* of the tradition, [...] the dynamic nature of the tradition, is not seen. That moving nature or keep-going nature, it is almost lost.

With state institutionalisation, kathakali was condensed to the recognisable marketing symbol of the green face worn by its heroes, and it quickly became identified as *the* Keralan art (Zarrilli, “Gods and Demons” 1). With a comparatively populist audience base, as opposed to

the elitist audience of kutiyattam, kathakali was more easily reinvented for the new international tourist industry, providing the art form with a wider patronage and audience. For kathakali artists such as Kannan, a Shakespearean narrative provides them with a more familiar work to present before these international audiences, resulting in an easier mutual access.

Interwoven with Kerala's similarly institutionalised tradition of English Shakespeare is an individualised tradition of the playwright's works in translation and performance, from street theatre to temple recitation. As the introductory chapter outlined, Shakespeare's texts entered Kerala primarily through the dual route of colonial English education and touring indigenous theatre. However, Kannan's collaboration reflects yet another local legacy, a Marxist inheritance of Shakespeare's works as common-property world literature. Poonam Trivedi describes the local climate of Keralan Shakespeares as one containing cross-currents of class wars. She writes of the "myriad and mingled modes in which Shakespeare circulates in modern Indian culture, challenging notions of him as an author who speaks only to the highbrow and the educated elite" ("Rhapsodic Shakespeare" 3). In profiling Keralan Shakespeares it is therefore vital to undertake a case study-level examination of such individual perspectives and intercultural experiments.

Kannan first encountered *Macbeth* in English in college, yet he attributes his introduction to Shakespeare to a love of English literature inspired by his own family, in a generational rather than institutional inheritance. Kannan recalls that his father was "very particular" regarding his son's education, telling him, "If you are less than third rank [among the students] in your school classes, your private kathakali lessons will be stopped. So I had to study well." Through kathakali, Kannan's father motivated his love of English literature: "And every evening, he used to make me read as well. [...] So around [the] 7th standard, 8th standard,

I started reading English literature, even though I was studying in a Malayalam medium school.” As aforementioned, Kerala’s college and university instruction is entirely in English, as is most private schooling, while free schooling in Malayalam is provided through the Keralan government. Kannan recalled that when he was in the “11th or 12th standard, I read *Macbeth* [...] in my lesson,” studying the “full English text” on the Kerala government syllabus. Eventually, the artist “became very much interested in Shakespeare [...] [and] fond of almost all the plays like [*The*] *Tempest* and *King Lear*.” Consequently, for Kannan, Shakespeare represents both a postcolonial and a familial inheritance.

Kannan’s encounter of Shakespeare at home is indicative of postmillennial India’s familiar relationship with the playwright. As described by filmmaker Ashish Avikunthak, Shakespeare “has been domesticated within the Indian cultural consciousness” (Calbi, “*Dancing*” 39). However, Kannan credited his initial familiarity with English literature to Kerala’s international tourism rather than India’s postcolonial heritage. The artist recalled that in the “7th standard, 8th standard, I started interacting with foreign people, so for that purpose, I started developing my English language by reading.” The intercultural parallels between Shakespearean drama and Indian classical literature sparked Kannan’s interest, with the artist viewing the former as “similar to the Indian mythology [...]. So it really provoked my imagination.” This parallel between Shakespeare’s works and the Indian epics is a recurrent theme in my interviews with Keralan performing artists.

However, Kannan explained that he was determined to present *Macbeth* in cholliyattam rather than in kathakali, as he felt that Shakespeare in kathakali would represent an “imitation” of a Keralan story, rather than a personal innovation. Kannan stated that through *Macbeth*, “I want[ed] to do something new, [a] challenge—present a solo performance.” In conceptualising

his cholliyattam production, Kannan listed three major challenges: “How to present [the story] effectively? In kathakali, [I use] *pakarnnattam*—one character becomes another character; [...]. 2) How [the] English dialogue can be performed with [the Malayalam] rendering, without disturbing the structure of them [sic]? 3) Also, how should I end this? [As I] can’t do [the] whole ending, [it] is abstract.” Kannan addressed these challenges through his strategy of “cultural collaboration,” interweaving the kathakali performance grammar and Shakespearean playtext.

Arguably, Kannan’s idea of “collaboration” also derived from his prior intercultural experience at his Asia Pacific Performance Exchange residency at UCLA in 2000. In the residency, when asked: “Did you find any collaborative forms that you would like to pursue in the future?” Kannan responded: “Yes. [...]. I used dialogue in “Oedipus [sic].” I want to do the same thing in the future, performance like this using dialogue and hand gesture” (Denise Uyehara n. pag.). Later, Kannan recalled, “Be it *Macbeth* or *Oedipus*, I consider adapting them a part of my growing up and attempts at experimentation as an artist” (Bhawani Cheerath n. pag.). In positioning kathakali and Shakespeare as cultural equals, and mingling *Macbeth*’s dialogue with his own gestures, Kannan’s collaboration further enabled him to assert his creative authority. In presenting his own independent, innovative perception of Shakespeare, Kannan simultaneously used the playwright’s work to expand the audience base for kathakali.

Kannan stated that he decided to retain *Macbeth*’s original English text in his production to preserve its nature of cultural collaboration:

It has [its own] cultural connotation in it only when you use the original English passages from the play. Otherwise, it is only a kind of adaptation. [If] [y]ou adapt the story into Malayalam language, then just like any other usual kathakali play,

you are presenting *King Lear*, or *Hamlet*, whatever it is. So the name is different. That is the only difference. Instead of calling it ‘X,’ you are calling it ‘Y.’

Consequently, Kannan’s strategy of cultural collaboration is opposed diametrically to Madhu’s method of cultural translation. As mentioned in Chapter One, Madhu declared that he intended his *Macbeth* to be indistinguishable from a regular kutiyattam performance. Thus, Kannan intentionally avoided cultural translation, presenting instead an interweaving of cultures as Shakespeare and kathakali moved in tandem while remaining discrete. Kannan explained to Debjani Paul: “Collaboration is different from adaptation. In a collaboration both [art forms] should be able to keep their individual identities and find a meeting point between them. This [production] is a collaboration between kathakali body language and Shakespearean text” (n. pag.). Yet Kannan’s depiction of cultural collaboration ignores his own innovations such as the crown he created for cholliyattam, suggesting an unconscious overlapping interculturalism. Having examined local influences on Kannan’s *Macbeth* and traced its intercultural inheritances, the next section explores Kannan’s own views on culture, religion, and morality, and the extent to which he incorporates these in his cultural collaboration.

Keralan Shakespeares: contemporary influences

Arguably, Kannan’s view of theatre as immediate and contemporary provided him with the increased freedom to experiment, using Shakespeare as a mouthpiece for both artistry and social commentary. The title *Macbeth Cholliyattam* itself sets up expectations for innovation. The term ‘cholliyattam’ is interchangeable with *ilakiyattam*, in referring to an artist’s in-performance personal, signed commentary. This commentary may be pre-prepared or

impromptu. George writes that “such improvisations are prized [...] a Kathakali performer is evaluated and appreciated by those passages—called Chholliattam—in which he extemporizes and improvises a phrase or narrative passage entirely and exclusively by pantomime” (52). Kannan’s production effectively repositioned *Macbeth* as a postmodern morality play. The actor’s viewpoint, however, was not overtly imposed on the audience.

To the question of whether his *Macbeth* incorporated contemporary issues of politics or society, Kannan responded:

No, no, I did not do that directly [...] [although] all presentations based on [a] mythical story—they are contemporary. [...] So, Macbeth killed Duncan at *that* time. [...]. So, it is about murder. It is about your ambition and murder, and it is about the aftereffect of it: *karma phalam...* [...] *gahanaa karmano gathih* [quoting the *Bhagavad Gita*] [...]. If you do an action, there will be a reaction to it. So it might be immediate, or it might be after some time. That is what I am presenting through the story of *Macbeth*. It is [...] about right now, about us, about the contemporary world. It is indirect, [...] suggestive.

Kannan’s perspective on *Macbeth* as a karmic morality play is arguably a typical Hindu reading. His view recalls that of Bengali essayist Akshay Chandra Sarkar, writing on *Macbeth* during the 1880s. Translating A. C. Sarkar, Abhishek Sarkar writes that the essayist “accepts the play as a cautionary fable” that “makes possible an explanation of the Bengali Macbeth’s fate in terms of the time-honored Hindu principles of karma and predestination” (118, 125). In a multireligious state such as Kerala, however, shared secular values and common Marxist

political leanings contribute to a greater cultural homogeneity. Attending the “Shakespeare on the Indian Stage” seminar and theatre festival held in 2001 in the Kerala town of Kasaragod, Poonam Trivedi recalls that the audience was “evenly split between those inculcated with a reverence towards the canonical poet and the Marxist iconoclasts who wanted class struggle justified through Shakespeare” (67). The typical local Kerala audience member is discerning enough to grasp Kannan’s underlying subtle political and moral message, without the insertion of a Hindu perspective through added verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Kannan’s production builds on the established precedent for kathakali artists to incorporate a personal political agenda into performance. Occasionally, this secular morality takes precedence over the story’s religious karmic doctrine. L. S. Rajagopalan recounts the humorous anecdote of kathakali maestro Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, “one of the greatest actors in Kathakali,” in his role of the mythical King Rukmangada. At the end of the two-hour narration of Rukmangada’s ultimate dilemma (described in Chapter One), the god Vishnu descends to escort the king to heaven, allowing him a moment to transfer rule to his son and bid farewell. Nair chose this moment to compose an impromptu *ilakiyattam* (extemporised pantomime commentary), and “gave a lecture (in gestures of course) on socialism for half an hour, to his son. [...] All the time Lord Visnu, [sic] was standing behind cooling his heels” (Rajagopalan, *Preliminaries* 159). Here, political discourse was so important that God could be kept waiting on the kathakali stage by a senior artist expounding upon socialism.

While kathakali originated as a Hindu art form, Kannan feels that his performance transcends religion: “Art should be free from religion. It has spiritual aspect[s] in it; it has cultural aspect[s] in it; but it should be free from religion.” This statement could be seen to indicate that religion is a private belief not to be imposed on the audience, or, conversely, that

religion is institutional and should be kept separate from art. Religion is a very public feature of life in secular, tolerant Kerala. For example, the typical shop establishment counter or hire vehicle dashboard sports at least one idol or symbol of the owner's religion, if not a popular composite representing the state's three main religions of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Kannan stated his own, tolerant position as: "Whatever be the religion you are following, [...] [e]ven if you are an atheist, you need to depend upon a kind of a universal law." Kannan's view echoes the typical Keralan humanism, a spiritualism that is rooted in human commonality, influenced by Marxism.

On practical, theoretical, and spiritual levels, Kannan's cultural collaboration is intrinsically linked to his own perception of culture as well as his performance culture. As Ian Watson suggests, culture is "a holistic complex, with an interrelated palimpsest of determinants which comprehends, among other things, socio-historical identity, mytho-religious belief systems, rituals, kinship, ethnicity, national heritage, value systems, various modes of creative expression, as well as social behaviour" (2). In describing kathakali, Zarrilli writes that the art form is, "like the concept of culture itself, not a set of fixed conventions and attributes but, rather, a dynamic system of human action constantly undergoing a process of negotiation" (*Dance-Drama* 8). This fluidity is reflected in Kerala's typical interculturalism.

In discussing Kannan's cultural collaboration, it is relevant to note that Kerala's interculturalism complicates the question of the constitution of the state's 'local' culture. When asked to define Keralan culture, Kannan stressed two main aspects, or universal values and individual practices:

Yoga Sutra [a Hindu scripture] says, ‘*Desha, kala, samaya, anavachinna, sarvabhauma mahaavrutham.*’ That means, there are certain ethical values which are followed by people all over the world [...] cooperation, truthfulness, and nonviolence...[the] internal part of culture [...]. And the experience of the Kerala people, because it is totally divided from the other world through the Paschim Ghat [Western Hills], is different, and so is the cultural *behaviour*. [...] There is no difference internally.

Next, when asked to provide an example of typical Keralan culture, Kannan elaborated on local habits regarding food and clothing:

Wearing white *mundu* [lower cloth]. It is a cultural behaviour. When you go to Assam, you can see people wearing white *mundu*. But it is slightly different. Even in Tamil Nadu, they wear *mundu* in a different way [...]. And also when you have food [...] in Kerala, even that table etiquette has a North-Kerala tradition, Mid-Kerala tradition and South-Kerala tradition.

Accordingly, in Kannan’s detailed definition of Keralan culture, universal values underlie individualised local behaviours that differ even across the state. Kannan’s definition of culture reflects his accommodation of both aspects of culture that Raymond Williams differentiates. Williams describes the European late eighteenth-century evolution of an “important alternative sense of ‘culture’—as a process of ‘inner’ or ‘spiritual’ as distinct from ‘external’ development”

(14). Kannan's liberal worldview is symptomatic of the historic Keralan tolerance for multicultural and multireligious practices.

The typical Keralan openness to other cultures may partly explain the easy appropriation of Western authors into the kathakali canon. Yong Li Lan maintains that twenty-first-century intercultural performance involves "bridging cultures," and arguably, Keralan society is already adept at this act ("Fiction" 539). Lan describes the increasing complexity of intercultural Shakespeare performance that "involves a spectator in intermingling partial identifications and alienations that are porous to one another, dynamically related by the mobility of people and media" (ibid.). In its position as a cultural and geographical crossroads, Kerala represents a nexus for particularly porous identifications and dynamic migrations. Kannan highlighted this lack of cultural opacity in his response to the question of whether his audience responds differently if he performs Shakespeare or a traditional story:

No, in Kerala, people already have that mentality, to receive the stories, from other culture[s]. People from other countries used to be here, not just now, but even from [the] 1st century AD, and all different kinds of performances existed here. And even our great masters in kathakali have produced Shakespeare plays, like *King Lear*. A very famous *King Lear* production from Kalamandalam travelled through England.

This last production, he clarified, was David McRuvie and Annette Leday's *King Lear* for the Keli Company, which played in London at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in 1999. Accordingly, having examined Kannan's personal definition of culture, I move on to an analysis of his

assessment of his audience's openness to Shakespeare, and a contextualisation of his cultural collaboration in relation to other kathakali Shakespeares such as the Keli *Lear*.

***Macbeth Chollyattam* and kathakali-Shakespeare hybrids**

In analysing the directorial and performative strategies underlying Kannan's *Macbeth Chollyattam*, it is useful to contextualise his production in a brief performance history of intercultural kathakali Shakespeares. Shakespearean narratives are not the sole non-traditional sources for new works in kathakali. Zarrilli lists a range of contemporary kathakali experiments that include productions for tourists, new plays based on the Indian epics, and new plays based on non-traditional sources such as the stories of "the Buddha, and Faust, as well as *The Iliad* and *King Lear*" ("Kathakali" 320). Among these, Zarrilli details Iyyankode Sreedharan's 1978 *People's Victory (Manavavijayan)*, "a modern *kathakali* morality play pitting the evil demon-king, 'Imperialism' in his 'red beard' make-up against the [victorious] heroic lead, 'World Conscience' in his shining 'green' make-up [sic]" (*Dance-Drama* 196). Kathakali has benefited from this incorporation of innovative narratives, following the dearth of new twentieth-century material in a situation similar to that of kutiyattam. This stagnation resulted in the institutionalisation of kathakali for survival, in Kerala and across diasporic locations.

Such institutions include the International Centre for Kathakali (ICK) in Delhi, established in 1960, where the principal Sadanam Balakrishnan adapts, directs, and performs Shakespeare among other non-traditional narratives. Balakrishnan lists twenty-nine traditional kathakali *attakathas* or playtexts as the only ones "worth mentioning" (*Kathakali* 30). Balakrishnan comments on the "few *attakathas* of [the] 20th century," remarking that "[r]ecently, Shakespearean dramas have also been successfully included in the Kathakali repertoire as experimental productions. *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* are the plays that have

found favour” (ibid. 31-33). Since 1980, ICK has produced experimental plays including Shakespeare, for the purpose of “propagating, promoting and popularizing” kathakali (*Othello* programme brochure 1). Additionally, Kannan recollected a prior involvement in a kathakali production of *The Tempest*: “I acted a part in it. That was normal kathakali [...]. The actor comes in the morning, he gets a script, then he goes and performs, just [...] like you are doing *Nalacharitham* [the story of Nala], or just like you are doing *Duryodhanavadham* [the killing of Duryodhana], you are doing *Tempest* [sic].” This *Tempest* was produced by the Kathakali Club, and Kannan indicated that this institution hosts intercultural kathakali performances regularly.

In contextualising Kannan’s *Macbeth* among hybrid kathakali Shakespeares, this section examines three such productions: the Keli-Leday *King Lear* (1989-1999), Balakrishnan’s *Othello* (1996), and *The Magic Hour* (2000), directed and performed by Balakrishnan’s student Arjuna Raina. Combining kathakali with Shakespeare to form the new art form of ‘khealkali’ in a postcolonial reappropriation, dancer Raina speaks of “hijacking” Shakespeare much as one commandeers a plane to grab attention (“Quest” n. pag.). Ashish Avikunthak, filming Raina, feels that his “hybrid performance [...] shatters the traditional and conventional practice of Kathakali, by introducing Shakespeare as the narrative focus” (Calbi, “Dancing” 34). In this view, with two art forms representing the “quintessence” of the “classical” traditions of “the East and West,” each is “de/reconstructed” simultaneously by the other (ibid.). Conversely, Kannan is careful to represent his work as a paralleling rather than a mutual reconstitution. Kannan emphasised to Paul: “More than an adaptation, it is a collaboration between the play and Kathakali. We’ve made no changes to the original dialogue, but we enact it with the hand

gestures” (n. pag.). Rather than a combative hijacking of the latter by the former, Kannan’s cultural collaboration represents a partnership between kathakali and Shakespearean drama.

Unlike Kannan’s *Macbeth*, Raina’s work is self-consciously postcolonial. Yet Loomba posits that “Raina uses both Shakespeare and Kathakali to question not so much India’s colonial heritage as what some describe as a neo-colonial situation that lingers today” (“Possibilities” 134). Equally, Rustom Bharucha warns against using postcolonial theory to frame such attempts to hybridise Shakespeare with kathakali. Bharucha writes that the latter’s “nonnegotiable codes and taboos” require a treatment that is beyond the scope of “postcolonial theory [that here] runs up against walls and has no other choice but to bang its head” (“Foreign Asia” 16). Bharucha maintains that to impose the “hegemony of postcolonial norms” would ignore the complex variety of the diasporic, metropolitan, and secular locations involved in producing kathakali, which “can be said to be part of the larger schisms between the local, the national, and the international” (ibid. 17). Conversely, Loomba grounds intercultural kathakali productions in postcolonial theory. She disagrees, however, with the suggestion that “the answer to cultural plunder is a return to some notion of cultural purity, either of Shakespeare or of these forms [including kathakali]” (“Postcolonial Performance” 126). Yet while these critics each advocate their own position, neither one notes that kathakali Shakespeares do not represent a fixed recipe.

In attempting to reconcile the conflicting cultural codes of Shakespeare and kathakali, producers of kathakali Shakespeares have attracted both popular praise and critical condemnation. The Keli *King Lear* received particularly fierce criticism in its rearrangement of both kathakali and Shakespeare. Following its 1989 premiere in Kerala, *Lear* toured to Italy, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Singapore, and Edinburgh, before its Globe debut in 1999 (ibid.

125). The Keli production emulated Balakrishnan's *Othello* in altering both Shakespeare and kathakali, annoying a range of spectators in its resultant impenetrability (Loomba, "Possibilities" 129). Daugherty describes the kathakali *Lear* as "a model of successful intercultural work" ("Pendulum" 53). Yet her opinion is unrepresentative of the typical spectator, as she draws on a rare familiarity with both English and Keralan cultures.



Figure 10: The 1999 Keli/Leday-McRuvie kathakali *King Lear*: the storm scene, photograph courtesy of Keli Paris.

To accommodate Shakespeare's tragedy within traditional kathakali codes, *Lear* was trimmed to nine scenes featuring eight characters (ibid. 57). These characters' *veshams* or coded

makeup combinations included the: “King of France (*paccha*; green), Cordelia (*minukku*; shining), Goneril and Regan (*kari*; black), Tom (*teppu*; painted), Fool (outside *kathakali* typology), Lear (*katti*; knife) [sic] and a soldier (male *minukku*)” (ibid. 60). This version featured Lear’s and Cordelia’s deaths, yet here the King of France killed both of the wicked sisters, and the Gloucester subplot was omitted. The traditional music and staging was retained, resulting in a near-faithful replication of Keralan conditions.

However, the lukewarm reception accorded the *kathakali Lear* is indicative of the intercultural tensions Kannan faced in performing Shakespeare. Zarrilli writes that in producing a comparatively familiar Shakespearean story, “Leday and McRuvie chose to challenge their European audiences by maintaining as much of *kathakali*’s structure and technique as possible” (*Dance-Drama* 180). Similarly, Loomba posits that the production was “entirely oriented towards the western market, and to audiences who knew nothing about Kathakali” (“Possibilities” 129). In this respect, she contends, it differs from Balakrishnan’s *Othello*, which “addressed itself to Indian audiences with their double-consciousness (however imperfect) of both Shakespeare and Kathakali” (ibid.) Ideally, the *Keli Lear* was intended to demonstrate what Lan terms “the productive tensions between the largely presentational forms of Asian theater and the highly verbal Shakespearean text” (“Fiction” 131). As aforementioned, Daugherty likens the intercultural process behind the *Keli Lear* to “the widening swing of a pendulum” rather than “the sand of an hourglass flowing from source to target culture” (ibid. 67). In Daugherty’s pendulum model: “Both India and Europe were the intended target cultures. Both India and England were the source cultures” (ibid.). Yet Suresh Awasthi felt that the result was “a mistranslation of performance codes between two cultures” (*King Lear* 172). Ultimately, the *Keli Lear*’s innovations combined to confuse audiences across cultures.

In representing a tragedy through kathakali, the team behind Keli *Lear* negotiated tensions identical to those faced by Kannan in producing *Macbeth*. Arguably, *Lear* was successful in foregrounding rasa for the scene where Lear took the dead Cordelia in his lap, precipitating his own death from grief. Daugherty writes that “Even those unfamiliar with the text also “heard” through the singing that exquisitely invoked karuna rasa (the audience’s aesthetic experience of sadness, grief, pathos)” (ibid.). Zarrilli echoes this opinion, maintaining that “at least some in the Edinburgh and European audiences savored *karuna rasa*—pathos—the closest emotional tone in Indian theater to Western tragedy” (“Kathakali *King Lear*” 19). However, as aforementioned, the tragic genre is atypical of Indian classical theatres derived from the *Natyasastra*.

Consequently, Kannan chose to avoid traditionalist tensions that *Lear* incurred in retaining the tragic genre and showing the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Performer Padmanabhan Nair avers that “Lear’s death is very different from death scenes in kathakali” (qtd. in “Pendulum” 66). C. Achyuta Menon estimates: “Ninty five [sic] percent of Kathakali plays end in the death of a demon or a Tamasik [evil] hero” (iv). Menon likens this “‘bloody’ aspect of Kathakali” to that which “Shakespeare portrays in his tragedies” (ibid.). Yet Padmanabhan Nair clarifies: “If you die in kathakali it is because you have been killed. There is pain, but it is physical pain. It is nothing compared to the pain Lear feels when he thinks about the loss of Cordelia” (“Pendulum” 66). While the death of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* aligns with the typical bloody ends of evil kathakali heroes, and Balakrishnan’s production featured Othello killing Iago, still Kannan chose to omit the scenes of Lady Macbeth’s and Macbeth’s deaths. Similarly, Kannan’s *Macbeth* omitted the atypical scene of Macbeth’s loss of his wife, which Madhu’s production retained.

By choosing to perform *Macbeth* in the simplified cholliyattam makeup, similarly Kannan sidestepped the intercultural tensions generated by *Lear*'s and *Othello*'s reassignment of the kathakali costume codes. Kannan himself declared, "I can never see *katti vesham* as Macbeth, or King Lear, or any other Shakespearean character." Yet in the Keli production, Lear was assigned the *katti* makeup traditionally used for Ravana, resembling Ravana's kutiyattam *vesham* that Madhu selected for Macbeth (see Figure 10). As in kutiyattam, the *katti vesham* in kathakali is worn by characters who are "generally demonic in nature but with some noble characteristics [...] [like] King Ravana, ill-starred villains ultimately defeated by their uncontrollable desire and egotism" (Clifford Reis and Betty True Jones 27). Even in Balakrishnan's *Othello*, the protagonist wore the virtuous *paccha vesham*. Here, Lear's *katti vesham* functioned to illustrate his egotistical, semi-demonic nature. This strategy equates to Madhu's use of Ravana's *vesham* for his kutiyattam Macbeth, hinting at an intracultural relationship among Keralan Shakespeares. Arguably, Lear's half-demonic makeup was a conscious selection by Sreedharan, *Lear*'s translator and co-producer, who had depicted Imperialism unambiguously as a demon king.

However, this perceived misattribution of the kathakali makeup codes in producing a Shakespearean narrative angered Keralan critics even as it confused intercultural audiences. Eminent Malayalam Shakespeare translator Ayyappa Paniker was outraged: "Imagine bringing Lear to the stage as a *katti*!" (qtd. in Daugherty, "Pendulum" 61). Equally, critic P. Rama Iyer declared, "Lear is the most innocent of beings. He should surely be played as [a noble] *paccha*" (ibid.). While the traditional green makeup was assigned to the King of France instead, causing Daugherty to view him as the hero, Leday later commented that he was *not* the hero of her production (ibid. 65; interview n. pag.). Similarly, Lear's ambiguous *katti vesham* was

misinterpreted (or ignored) by Jyotsna Singh. She argues that through their stereotypical makeup types, characters such as “Cordelia and the King of France represented absolute virtue and Goneril and Regan absolute evil, thus destroying the moral complexity” of the Shakespearean original (“Colonial Narratives” 82). Loomba levelled the same criticism at Balakrishnan’s reworked *Othello*, complaining that its “binaries of good and evil” realigned Iago with pure evil and Othello with ultimate virtue, and “flattened” Shakespeare’s multi-layered text (“Othello Fellows” 161-162). Further complicating *Lear*’s costuming, in the absence of a kathakali *vesham* for a fool, a kutiyattam jester’s costume was substituted (Daugherty, “Pendulum” 63) (see Figure 10). This innovation bemused experienced and new kathakali audiences equally.

Particularly controversial was the scene of Lear’s madness, where he forewent his kathakali crown. This action is so tabooed for a royal character in kathakali that its mere consideration caused Balakrishnan to proclaim that playing *Lear* was “virtually impossible” (qtd. in Daugherty, “Pendulum” 62). Here, Lear’s appearance without his crown signified “an erosion of his entire selfhood” (Loomba, “Postcolonial Performance” 126). Accordingly, Zarrilli writes, *Lear*’s actors feared “they would be severely criticized for transgressing the boundaries of appropriateness” (*Dance-Drama* 180). Similarly, Balakrishnan’s 1996 “daring” *Othello* “was criticised” for “stretching, playing upon the rules” even while it “sought to expand the vocabulary of Kathakali” (Loomba, “Possibilities” 128-129). To avoid equally harsh continued criticism, Kannan remade his 2001 *Kathakali Macbeth* a decade later in the simplified format of cholliyattam (complete with his own small crown).

Furthermore, often kathakali Shakespeares must negotiate intercultural tensions that precede the moment when a production engages with an audience of any culture. In his

observation on the process of preparation for *The Tempest*, Kannan illustrates a vital difference between the rehearsal models of the traditional Keralan theatre forms such as kathakali and kutiyattam, and the postmodern theatre produced by companies such as Abhinaya, highlighted in Chapter Three. While a kathakali drama typically has principal, supporting, and minor parts, and producers prefer to hire star actors for the leads, therein ends the similarity to the Western model of director-led theatre adopted by contemporary Malayalam-language theatre companies. Kathakali productions function entirely without a director, in a model closer to a democratic theatre ensemble (Suresh Awasthi and Richard Schechner 52). As in Kannan's description, for a typical production, kathakali actors practise individually and come prepared to perform on the night. Often, members of the cast belong to a company of artists that prepares a repertoire, individually learned and practiced and then presented together.

Therefore, Kannan termed his *Macbeth Chollyattam* a "group effort" by the actor and narrator "plus kathakali musicians," in a process where "a [Malayalam] dialogue rendering comes along with the music. That gives a different kind of possibility of collaboration." Equally, the lack of directors in kathakali complicates Bharucha's assertion that in intercultural Asian Shakespeare, Shakespeare is just an excuse for a directorial "deconstruction (or destruction) of the play" ("Foreign Asia" 1). As Kannan averred, "An actor is always a director in kathakali." Kannan encountered a similar situation in preparing a kathakali version of *Macbeth* that preceded and informed his *Macbeth Chollyattam*. Having examined other adapters' strategies in combining Shakespeare for kathakali, this chapter now makes a deeper examination of Kannan's strategy. Accordingly, I turn to a comparison of *Macbeth Chollyattam* with Kannan's *Kathakali Macbeth* as performed in 2001 in Pittsburgh, USA, to explore his evolution as director, adapter, and performer.

Macbeth Chollyattam: evolution

Kannan stated that in selecting *Macbeth* for his original, US-based production, his choice was driven primarily by Shakespeare's plot construction, which provided him with a clear template for the protagonist's linear character development:

Because when I studied *Macbeth*, I had a very strong feeling that Macbeth has a straight internal journey from the point of his meeting with the witches until his last moment. There is a continuous, eventful and clear internal journey for this character. [...] Macbeth's mind is moving from one mood to another from the beginning depending on these different characters or events.

In presenting the arc of Macbeth's internal journey, Kannan retained the entire narrative, yet compressed it into several scenes. Kannan stated that in his first *Macbeth*, the "script was entirely different." For his original production, Kannan "created a version (in English) out of the complete text of *Macbeth* to make a 40-minute performance. To the accompaniment of traditional Kathakali music, the text was rendered in parallel" (Manu). Kannan described his *Kathakali Macbeth* as a "very, very fast-forward kind of presentation. The whole play will be presented in one hour [sic]." In its truncated length, *Kathakali Macbeth* resembled Kannan's later chollyattam production, which is detailed in a later section of this second chapter. Yet Kannan's first *Macbeth* featured only the original Shakespearean text, perhaps because the production was intended primarily for a foreign audience.

Kannan explained that *Kathakali Macbeth* was "very different" from his later solo performance, including variations in structure and genre. Kannan recounted of his earlier

production that the “whole play was presented as a kind of love relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.” This construction is not unusual; adapting *Julius Caesar* in 2001 as *Charudattam*, kathakali artist Sadanam Harikumaran complained that he chose a political narrative intentionally, as “Most *kathakali* plays are man-woman love stories” (Graham Vanderstoel 570). Similarly, Leday described that she “invented a *sringara* [romance] scene for the wedding of France-Cordelia” in attempting to remake *Lear* as a typical kathakali production (interview n. pag.). In highlighting both Macbeths, *Kathakali Macbeth* featured Kannan’s student Lissa Brennan as Lady Macbeth, speaking the English lines and signing her kathakali part simultaneously. Meanwhile a narrator recited Macbeth’s dialogue as Kannan mimed and danced its meaning. Kannan described the process: “there was a person who was rendering [the English] dialogue. And the actor who enacted Lady Macbeth [Brennan] was saying her own dialogue while doing hand gestures. I was doing only hand gestures.” Overall, Kannan’s US-based production differed from his later *Macbeth* in its intercultural equation. The former demonstrated the dominance of Shakespearean elements over those of kathakali drama, while the latter reversed the situation, representing a more equal cultural collaboration.

In its recombination of kathakali with Shakespeare, Kannan’s first *Macbeth* does not represent the later production’s intercultural braiding. Kannan’s earlier *Macbeth* better resembles Bharucha’s model of “cultural pluralism,” which aims to position Orient and Occident as equal partners (*World 3*). Here, to align the rhythm of his kathakali sign language to the Shakespearean metre, Kannan formed a creative partnership with American Shakespearean actor Jay O’Berski. Their partnership perhaps influenced the style of the presentation of the English dialogue in Kannan’s own later solo work: “Jay taught [me] the iambic pentameter, how Shakespeare has written the metre [...]. There are some places where

it should be stopped. There are some words which should be emphasised. He knew the traditional methodology to do that. We sat together; he would render the dialogue and I [would] do hand gestures according to the meaning of the words he rendered.” At first, Kannan narrated, he adjusted his signing to the rhythms of the Shakespearean speech: “The speed of my hand gestures began to vary according to his dialogue rendering.” As a mutual understanding developed between the two actors, Kannan’s gestures began to influence O’Berski’s delivery of the poetry: “And after some time, he too began to understand my gestures. Gradually my gestures began to direct the style of his rendering. How fast it should be, how slow it should be. Maybe it should be more strong and the like [sic].” As this partnership resolved the tensions between the oral Shakespearean verse and its signed delivery, the Shakespearean metre mutually inflected the tempo of kathakali.

In its deliberate fluidity, kathakali sign language is better accommodated by the repetitive cadence of the sung kathakali verse than the measured linearity of recited iambic pentameter. Kathakali verses are repeated twice or thrice, with the lead singer’s rendering echoed by that of the *sankiti* (secondary singer), allowing the dancer time and space to elaborate on the meaning through his gestures. Accordingly, Kannan’s later solo production featured a slow, drawn out recitation of the English lines that blended with the instrumental music and Malayalam song, allowing his own performance to dominate overall. In interweaving these elements more subtly as a background score, Kannan’s later *Macbeth* more successfully harmonised the Shakespearean verse with kathakali performance grammar. Conversely, Kannan affirmed, his former *Macbeth* “was an edited version of the entire play.” The artist retained only several English lines from his *Kathakali Macbeth* in his later *Macbeth Cholliyattam*.

Kannan's *Macbeth Cholliyattam* condensed the:

main incidents in Macbeth's life. Like meeting the witches, [his] conversation with Lady Macbeth, deciding to kill Duncan, and then Duncan's arrival, the murder of Duncan, the banquet scene after murdering Banquo, Banquo's ghost appears there, and again Macbeth going [sic] to the witches, they say that 'only when Birnam Wood comes to your castle, a man who is not *born* to his mother will kill you.' After that he becomes more egoistic and more confident. Then, the death of Lady Macbeth. At last, somebody comes and says [to] Macbeth that the, Birnam Wood is coming towards the castle.

At this point, Kannan related, his plot deviated from the Shakespearean narrative, to heighten the unfolding of suspense and foreground Macbeth's ultimate realisation of his mortality:

First, I revealed the birth secret of Macduff, that he is not *born* to his mother. [...]. Then, [I introduced] the sight of [the] approaching Birnam Wood. Because knowing that Macduff *can* kill him makes Macbeth more frightened that Macduff might come at any moment. Macbeth opens the window, and sees the, Birnam Wood coming towards him. That frightens him. He sits as if he is seeing the death appearing in front of him [sic]. And at that moment, he hears a sound from the other world: 'Macbeth...' Then Lady Macbeth calls. And Lady Macbeth appears onstage, and then she takes him to the other world.

Thus, in Kannan's *Kathakali Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth became another spectre. Consequently, in this earlier production, which highlighted the rasa of sringara, "even the [Macbeths'] death is interpreted as a kind of reunion of the lovers in the other world." Functioning almost as Dante's Beatrice, Macbeth's lady facilitated his 'death' as a gentler crossing over rather than the slaughter (and damnation) Shakespeare suggests. Concurrently, Kannan's reinterpretation lessened the scope of the Macbeths' personal tragedy.

Conversely, Kannan's later solo work evaded these potentialities entirely in elaborating on the rasa of bhayanaka (fear) instead of sringara, portraying Macbeth's psychological rather than physical destruction. In so doing, Kannan's strategy differed from that of Margi Madhu, who foregrounded both the terror of the guilty conscience and Macbeth's apprehension at his own impending death. Arguably, Kannan's solo production represents the evolution of postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares towards an increasing freedom to experiment with human tragedy.

Despite its brevity, Kannan's *Macbeth Cholliyattam* captured the pivotal moment of Macbeth's psychological conflict over whether to commit murder, turning on the crux of his maxim regarding the nature of humanity: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (1.7.46-47). Kannan's production telescoped Macbeth's mental turmoil, allowing the audience an intimate view of his psyche, and positioning the protagonist as an anti-heroic Everyman. Kannan told reviewer Paul that "*Macbeth Cholliyaattam* [sic] is about Macbeth's state of mind. It does not depict the entire play, but his personal journey and the internal emotional and mental process he goes through before the king's murder and right after it" (n. pag.). Emphasising the importance of staging Duncan's killing, Kannan compared the play to a "thatched building" and the murder to its "middle pole" of its construction, or "pre-action,

action, post-action.” Kannan reiterated of Duncan’s murder: “that action is the centre of the play. [It] divides ‘before’ from ‘after’—so I showed it onstage.” In dramatising Duncan’s murder, Kannan’s production both foregrounded Macbeth’s merciless nature and expanded on the Shakespearean narrative’s scope for horror. However, *Macbeth Chollyattam* illustrated key conflicts by evoking a variety of rasas—bhayanaka (fear) in the dagger scene (2.1); husband-wife sringara (romance), juxtaposed with raudra (rage) and adbhuta (surprise), in the scenes dealing with Duncan’s murder (1.5, 1.7, 2.2); the shanta (peace) of eternal sleep that eludes Macbeth throughout. Thus, in compressing the narrative radically, Kannan enhanced its multiple underlying emotions and highlighted Macbeth’s conflicting motivations.

In presenting the Malayalam and English verse in parallel, Kannan’s strategy contradicts Madhu’s methodology of translating *Macbeth*’s poetry into a single Sanskrit quatrain. Kannan’s methodology better resembles Raina’s strategy in *The Magic Hour*, where he “dances key lines from Shakespeare in the style of Kathakali” while mouthing the English text or having it read aloud simultaneously (Loomba, “Possibilities” 134). Consequently, Loomba feels, Raina’s “fusion of Indian form and English words is immediately accessible to the audience” (ibid.). Kannan prefers to use the term “collaboration,” representing a synchrony in which the cultures retain their individual identities.

In crafting this cultural collaboration, Kannan maintains, Shakespeare’s language cannot be wholly translated. When Kannan was asked, “So, for you, what is the root of that culture, the Shakespeare[an] culture?” the actor replied that he located this culture in Shakespeare’s original English text: “A language has its own images, its own way of putting images together.” As an example, Kannan referenced Macbeth’s statement from 1.7.46-47: “‘I dare do all that [may] become a man; / Who dares do more is none.’ You can never translate this kind of expression

into any other language [...]; it comes from a cultural root.” Kannan traced this idea to an encounter with Zarrilli, declaring that the latter had convinced him that “when you translate a play into Malayalam, into [a] Malayalam poem, then its cultural connotation is totally lost. I agree with this idea. That is why I kept the [Shakespearean] language as it is.” Kannan’s adoption of Zarrilli’s critical viewpoint indicates the continued influence of rhizomatic intercultural networks on the theory and practice of Keralan Shakespeares.

Kannan clarified that in selecting the Shakespearean text for translation and recitation, he was led by *Macbeth*’s imagery, rather than the play’s soliloquies. Arguably, Kannan’s strategic avoidance of the soliloquy is an independent decision rather than a regional tradition, as it contrasts directly with that of Jyotish M. G., director of the *Macbeth* production detailed in Chapter Three. In dramatising selected lines of *Macbeth*’s text rather than entire speeches, Kannan expressed his reluctance to “put a soliloquy, as it is, in this—because I was not sure how people will [sic] receive [it].” The artist clarified that he engaged with the Shakespearean narrative primarily through the performance grammar of kathakali, basing his production on his prior “experience of doing it [*Macbeth*] in 2001. So based on all these experience[s], I read the play many times and I planned a rough kind of choreography. After planning the movements I chose necessary lines. [...] I took many ideas from the poem, [yet I] did not take all the lines.” Thus, the needs of kathakali guided Kannan’s selection of the Shakespearean text.

Kannan maintained that in selecting lines from *Macbeth*, such as 1.7.79-80, he exploited the text’s potential for artistic elaboration: “And the reason for selecting some of the lines, like ‘I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat,’ is the powerful effect of rendering [these] along with the kathakali hand-gestures.” In so doing, Kannan sometimes first signed a verbal exchange between characters, and then mimed the action in their dialogue,

altering between parts: “The lines are rendered first and the actor abandoning temporarily his original role, [he] takes the necessary different roles during the course of narration through changed body language.” Accordingly, “sometime[s] the actor said the dialogue first, then I enacted the meaning of it.” To illustrate his methodology, Kannan referred to Lady Macbeth’s metaphor in 1.7.54-55: “Like, the lines of Lady Macbeth talking about the baby... ‘I have given suck, and know / How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me.’ [...] People got the idea; then later, I enacted [its meaning].” By leading with the English text, Kannan employed Shakespeare as a translator, enabling his intercultural audience to engage with his multiple performance languages.

While claiming that the essence of the Shakespearean text cannot be translated, Kannan translated lines from *Macbeth* into Malayalam poetry, setting the latter to music to accompany his performance. Typically, a kathakali episode opens with a Sanskrit shloka to set the scene, while the situation and dialogue are then elaborated through sung Malayalam verse. However, in creating *Macbeth Chollyattam*, Kannan streamlined his performance for modern audiences by avoiding the use of archaic Sanskrit. First, he rendered the Shakespearean imagery into Malayalam, before composing the music with his team of musicians: “Krishnadas [the *chenda* drummer] and Rajeevan [the singer] and me, we three created it through our rehearsal process.” The actor translated the verse himself, approximating the meaning of Macbeth’s soliloquies. Kannan explained that the kathakali performance grammar and rhythmic structure led his translation of Shakespeare: “It is verse, [a] poem—just four lines. That is because I wanted parts in which [there were] only hand gestures, English verses from the play *with* hand gestures, and [the] Malayalam poem *with* hand gestures, in the body of the *Macbeth* performance. These three different aspects should be there, that is what I thought.” During Kannan’s November

performance in Bengaluru, the Malayalam verse and Shakespearean text acted in synchrony to narrate the performance action. In harmoniously accommodating and balancing its cultures, Kannan's experimental production functioned on multiple levels, personal, public, and intercultural. In analysing Kannan's experiment, the next section turns to a deeper examination of his strategies to accommodate intercultural tensions in *Macbeth Cholliyattam*.

Kathakali codes: intercultural tensions

Kannan's streamlined cholliyattam version of *Macbeth* erased the potential for critical contention by eliminating the typical kathakali makeup entirely. In the brief performance history of kathakali Shakespeares, adapters and performers have utilised a variety of strategies to resolve intercultural tensions due to the conflicts with the kathakali makeup codes. One conundrum presents itself in the paradox of reconciling kathakali's proportionate karmic retribution, in which the hero in *paccha vesham* (heroic green makeup) always emerges victorious, with the senseless injustice of Shakespearean tragedy. As aforementioned, Balakrishnan's 1996 *Othello* resolved this conflict through featuring Iago's death, and Leday's *Lear* reassigned the valorous makeup to the King of France. While Kannan's 2001 kathakali *Macbeth* featured an ambiguous end for its villain, Kannan's solo cholliyattam version sidestepped the issue of Macbeth's death entirely.

In rejecting the typical kathakali makeup for his solo performance, Kannan simultaneously stripped his *Macbeth* of visual signifiers as to his royal status or character type. Among the kathakali makeup colour combinations, the mixed green and red colour scheme that signifies the bellicose, ambitious villain of noble birth was used for *Macbeth* in an earlier kathakali version that was developed by the International Centre for Kathakali. Ultimately, the

project was shelved, although its legacy exists in photographs of the sample makeup styles for its characters, possibly documented for publicity.⁵⁶ One photograph depicts Macbeth's face in *katti* makeup in close-up; in 2014 it was reproduced on the repainted wall of the La Cartoucherie entry hall, larger than life, among the collage of intercultural symbols that formed the décor for Ariane Mnouchkine's *Macbeth*. It is debatable how many in Mnouchkine's audience recognised the mask-like visage as Shakespeare's Scottish tyrant, or whether they noted this subtle appropriation of a semiotic stripped of its performance connotations.

Similarly, Kannan expressed his feeling that retaining the full kathakali costume for *Macbeth* would become unwieldy in translation for new audiences. Instead, Kannan explained: "In chollyattam, there is no costume. It is your casual wear, like white *mundu* [waist wrap]." Kannan elaborated his belief that "when you present [a] full costume performance in front of people who are not familiar with [kathakali] [...], the costume is a block for them to really connect with the performance. Through my experience, I realised that when I do chollyattam, people can connect with it easily." Kannan differentiated his two typical audiences, explaining to reviewer Meera Manu that in performing kathakali "before a traditional audience in Kerala, the costume becomes a medium and they begin to concentrate on the meaning that is conveyed, [...] [but for] the audience from outside Kerala [...] the costumes will take away their attention" (n. pag.). Kannan's audience at Seva Sadan likewise comprised a mix of older, more traditionally dressed aficionados and young people, mostly couples, some in traditional wear and others in urban jeans. Kannan's *Macbeth* was aimed primarily at the newer kathakali audience, one that has grown outside Kerala with the heightened profile of the art, aided by

⁵⁶ Annette Leday showed me the production photographs in her archive and mentioned at the time that Ariane Mnouchkine had requested them.

national government funding efforts as well as the use of kathakali elements in intercultural performances by international directors.

Arguably, in aiming his production at a split audience, Kannan was wise to create a more recognisable intermediate figure for *Macbeth*. Kannan argued that performing kathakali in its simplified rehearsal format, without the complex makeup and heavy costume, can extend the art form's remit beyond its traditional, pre-Independence audience base: "Kathakali must get new-generation viewers and the cholliyattam format will certainly break the mindset that Kathakali is difficult to follow" (Cheerath n. pag.). For the uninitiate audience, George writes, the kathakali colour codes and mudras are more complex than a foreign language in their semiotics and grammar (46). This bewildering complexity is evidenced by Brown's reaction to the related kutiyattam costume, as mentioned in Chapter One, a confused response typical of the viewer unfamiliar with kathakali. Brown expressed that he understood more of the performance when watching the artist during rehearsals, without the barrier of the costume and makeup. Thus, Kannan's intention to facilitate an additional audience understanding, through streamlining his costume through presenting a revised version of *Macbeth* in a rehearsal format, arguably was realised in his 2013 performance.

Concurrently, Kannan expressed his feeling that continuing to do Shakespeare in the traditional costume codes would foster an intercultural clash, in addition to fomenting critical dissent. Primarily, the director-performer argued that the latent visual signifiers in a typical kathakali costume did not particularly lend themselves to Shakespeare. Thus, Kannan declared that he was forced to modify these in reconciling the inherent cultural differences between a Scottish and an Indian royal protagonist:

If I am presenting Shakespeare, it should not be as kathakali. Because kathakali is meant for presentation of the characters from Indian epics having [an] Indian cultural background. There are a number of cultural marks [in kathakali:] [...] *tilak* [status mark] on the forehead, the ornaments, the style of the head-gear. [...] And most of the people will not agree with the idea to change the costume in the traditional performance. [...] So if you are using [a] full costume in that way, then it should be changed. Otherwise, you cannot present Macbeth. [...] So if you are presenting Macbeth in a *katti vesham* [villain's makeup], then it is not Macbeth, it is Ravana.

Thus, Kannan sidestepped cultural clashes by designing his own costume for Macbeth, rather than emulating Madhu's cultural translation that dressed Macbeth in the *katti vesham* used for Ravana. Accordingly, Kannan's Macbeth appeared as a deceptively innocent personality.

In Kannan's *Macbeth Chollyattam*, he was resplendent in a costume of his own invention—draped regally and sombrely in a long black shoulder cloth with a bold golden trim that was echoed by his golden crown, earrings, armlets, and cascade of necklaces. Kannan's costume was completed by cream-and-gold cotton trousers, and in his right hand he carried a gold painted wooden staff or sceptre, signifying Macbeth's already high status. His face bore no other colour other than a simple skin-toned stage makeup, with rouged lips and darkened eyes. Kannan acknowledged that "Everything, I designed [myself] for this performance. And, I use this small crown when I do chollyattam in a formal situation." While Kannan's gold staff and headgear also denoted the character's royal status, Macbeth's simplified flesh-coloured *vesham* evoked the *minukku* makeup used in kathakali. A *minukku* Macbeth is stripped of the connotations that the *katti* makeup makes visible for an informed audience: valour, defiance,

pride, semi-demonic status. Kannan's adoption of a flesh-coloured makeup scheme simultaneously aligned Macbeth with kathakali's wise, pious, and very human characters. Despite Kannan's assurance that his makeup represented merely a basic rehearsal style colouration, for an informed spectator it was difficult to avoid viewing Macbeth as a *minukku* type, denoting a character more human than demon.

While Kannan's simplified costume in *Macbeth Chollyattam* both accommodated Shakespeare and facilitated the potential for participation by a wider audience, his choice eliminated the accompanying elaborate choreography that the kathakali costume's accoutrements require and enable. For example, Kannan's Macbeth had no small, dangling mirrored-ended scarves to modulate in accenting the rasas of humour or rage. Concurrently, Kannan's innovation allowed him to demonstrate his own artistry. C. Achyuta Menon suggests that in chollyattam, "it is the actor that forms the chief centre of attraction, while in a performance it is the action that impresses the spectators" (ix). He warns that "the recital loses much of its dramatic value" even while it has "the advantage of presenting the symmetry and beauty of human form" (ibid.). Possibly, Kannan's performance was intended to market both his art and his own potential as an auteur. Kannan spoke of his vision to pioneer chollyattam as an independent art form, elevating it to the level of other classical South Indian performing art forms: "Now, I present chollyattam, you know, as a full-fledged performance. Just like you are watching a mohiniyattam performance, just like any, a bharatanatyam performance, you can watch a chollyattam performance." However, C. Achyuta Menon worries that if the tendency to substitute kathakali with chollyattam "ultimately succeeds, I am not sure, whether we can congratulate ourselves on our achievement inasmuch as it involves the loss of one half of a rich heritage" (ix-x). Accordingly, while Kannan's simplification of the costume for *Macbeth*

Cholliyattam narrowed the audience's focus on his personal interpretation of the Shakespearean character and narrative, simultaneously, Kannan's strategy robbed his spectators of the typical spectacle that accompanies kathakali.

Therefore, in humanising Macbeth, *Macbeth Cholliyattam* dispensed with the typical grand entrance that kathakali affords to a prominent character. For example, the demon king Ravana's slow behind-the-curtain reveal, or spectacular *tiranottam* [curtain-look], necessitates a full scene. This *tiranottam* is described in its full glory by Iyer:

An occasional weird cry, an angry growl, a thunder-like rumbling or an intermittent shriek rises over the tremendous din [of the drums]. The curtain held up by two men is ruffled violently, like the surface of a wind-lashed sea. We are soon to witness the appearance of Ravana, [...] [as] the drums in a final outpouring release a tempest of sound. The curtain is convulsed in extreme agitation, [...] and Ravana is visible only from his waist upwards. He looks across the flames, a strange apparition, a visitor from a super-world [...] [with] flaming red eyes, the snouty nose, the intermittent cries, the glances at first steady and steely and then sweeping and challenging the quarters [...]. The curtain is let off after a few more pulls hither and thither as if Ravana is fighting against mighty forces and emerges victorious. (106, 110)

Kannan chose to dispense with this marvellous spectacle rather than to use its tensions to heighten corresponding aspects of Macbeth's anguished, indecisive encounter with the supernatural. Furthermore, in omitting the *tiranottam*, Kannan not only simplified his

presentation but also broke with the established protocol that signals the audience to expect the entry of a powerful character. While this strategy enabled a greater accessibility for a new audience, Kannan's performance jettisoned kathakali codes full of meaning for his informed viewership. Such intracultural conflicts may have precipitated Kannan's decision to seek a wider audience in touring his cholliyattam performance, as detailed in the following section.

Macbeth Cholliyattam: the performance setting

In 2013, Kannan toured his *Macbeth Cholliyattam* outside Kerala for the first time, effectively using Shakespeare to gain new audiences for his own art form. The performance detailed here took place in Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) on 19 November 2013. *Macbeth* was performed indoors at the Seva Sadan auditorium of the International Centre for Performing Arts Bangalore, where Kannan had been invited by the cultural organisation. *Macbeth Cholliyattam* followed kathakali tradition in utilising a largely bare set, as in kutiyattam, resembling the original Shakespearean stage in its simplicity.

The traditional kathakali set retains fire elements derived from the Keralan temple rituals, and it includes “the big oil lamp in front of the stage, the hand curtain or thirasseela, the wooden stool on the stage, and the oil torches used to highlight the faces of the characters” (Balakrishnan, *Perspective* 61). A modern-day set juxtaposes the “6 foot high heavy metal lamp kalivilakku” with “electric lights” (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 41). Balakrishnan explains that while the *Natyasastra* mentions “elaborate preparations [...] for the props and stage, none are used in Kathakali. Two wooden stools are the only props. These assume several roles—of a throne, a place, a mountain, or even a boat swaying in the ocean” (ibid. 42). A modern-day kathakali venue is similarly highly adaptable: “The premises of a temple, the courtyard of a

house, or even a paddy field after harvest can be the venue. Four temporary posts are erected to enclose a space of about 16 to 18 feet in length and about 16 feet in width, with only the back portion enclosed” (ibid. 41). At Seva Sadan, the auditorium’s wooden proscenium stage and black cloth backdrop substituted for the traditional raised, square earthen stage and thatched back wall of a makeshift performance hall. The set featured two small oil lamps stage left, and electric lights. The set also held plastic chairs and a small wooden table at the back centre for the musicians; stage left, a lectern and a bronze statuette of Nataraja (Shiva as the God of Dance); and, centre front, a wide flat brass pot behind a small clay idol, both draped with a sacred flower garland. Accordingly, the Seva Sadan set featured a familiar Indian amalgamation of ancient and postmodern, metal and plastic, lit both by fire and by filament, incorporating a mix of South Indian cultural performance markers and modern international inventions.

One felt that this blend of ancient and contemporary elements was an appropriate setting for an intercultural performance that introduced a Shakespearean narrative into a South Indian performance repertoire. Like Madhu’s *Macbeth*, Kannan’s performance took place at night, as common to Keralan dance forms deriving from the temple arts that take place after the daily worship. A kathakali drama is one that “begins around 10 p.m. and must end at sunrise; for it is conventionally viewed by two audiences—the villagers but also the gods themselves, who are believed to attend and whose pleasure is the ultimate aim of the whole event” (George 62). Here, the mortal audience of approximately one hundred people were accommodated in rows of plastic chairs in Seva Sadan’s rectangular indoor auditorium, rather than seated outdoors at random on the ground as at a temple performance. Seva Sadan’s arrangement, intended as a modern convenience, additionally suggested a more equal relationship between humanity and divinity.

The traditional kathakali stage resembles that of kutiyattam in its layout and features. Kathakali performers face the lamp at the front of the square stage, in an orientation designed to facilitate both appropriate stage lighting and religious respect. As in kutiyattam, the kathakali lamp holds especial significance and “represents the deity” (Balakrishnan, *Perspective* 60). Similarly, the singers and drummers are positioned either upstage or stage right. These musicians include the *ponnani* or primary singer, who sings the narrative and keeps the rhythm on the *chengila* (gong); the *sankiti*, or secondary singer, who echoes the lyrics while playing the *elathalam* (cymbals); and two or more drummers, who perform on the *chenda* (vertical kettle drum) and *maddalam* (horizontal hand-drum), or *edakka* (small waist-drum), and occasionally blow the conch to punctuate a moment in the action (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 25, 65-67). This instrumental and vocal orchestra alternately announces and accentuates the kathakali dancer’s movements, and it forms the background score.

Kannan’s production adapted this basic arrangement for Shakespeare, with one major innovation—alongside the lead singer, who sang the narrative of *Macbeth Chollyyattam* in Malayalam verse translation, the second vocalist recited the English text simultaneously.⁵⁷ As befitting *Macbeth*, the effect was both eerie and harmonious. This juxtaposition opened out new rhythmic possibilities in its intercultural blending of Shakespearean blank verse in declamation, backed by an ensemble of skin, stick, and brass instruments, with simultaneous kathakali recitation and mimicry.

Foregrounding his own gestural narration of *Macbeth* against a simplified set, costume, and set of props, Kannan’s chollyyattam performance followed kathakali tradition, in which an

⁵⁷ The Prakriti Foundation’s archival performance CD lists the cast as: Kalanilayam Krishna Kumar – *chenda*; Bilas C. Nayar – narrator; Kalamandalam Anish – *maddalam*; Kalamandalam Viswas – singer.

episode is narrated before the audience primarily through the performer's use of expressive mime. As in kutiyattam, in kathakali it is solely the performer's skill that illustrates the scene in the audience's imagination: "There is no scenery: that has to be created by the actors' mimetic and expressive skills" (George 62). Kannan's simple costume of silk and gold offset the bareness of the set only marginally. As in Shakespeare's own theatre, the costumes of kathakali are typically opulent, compensating for the comparative lack of props or extensive scenery. Kathakali's bright costumes are augmented by richly-coloured face paint for the stock heroic or demonic character types. While the kathakali musicians in Kannan's performance retained their traditional dress, these garments are simply the typical Keralan white-and-gold cotton *mundu* or floor-length waist wrap, and a matching narrow upper cloth. In performance, these male musicians omit the ubiquitous Western shirt in a bare-chested mark of respect, a custom that is retained from the temple setting and worship. However, as Kannan's cholliyattam *Macbeth* took place in a secular setting, the musicians were not required to stand in the literal presence of the deity, but were allowed to share the actor's privilege of remaining seated while onstage.

It is debatable whether Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and kathakali retain their individual identities when hybridised in Kannan's cholliyattam production, as to a certain extent their integrity is already lost in the reduction of text, custom, and form. However, Kannan declared that kathakali "is not a story-telling theatre [...]. It tells the story of the human mind, and the situations are being presented before the audience" (Manu n. pag.). To illustrate *Macbeth*'s inner turmoil, Kannan's production cherry-picked elements of kathakali, presented in collaboration alongside the truncated yet faithful Shakespearean text. Having examined Kannan's directorial strategies in resolving potential intercultural tensions through streamlining and translating kathakali and Shakespeare respectively, the chapter next explores the resulting performance.

Macbeth Chollyattam: the 19 November 2013 performance

To a simple opening drumbeat, Kannan entered stage left, crossed downstage, and half-crouched centre stage before the audience.⁵⁸ In presenting his Shakespeare-kathakali collaboration as chollyattam, Kannan had already altered the very philosophical and cultural fabric of his classical performing art. Kannan's *Macbeth* lacked a curtain to create mystery, a giant lamp to provide otherworldly lighting, or an elaborate costume and enormous crown to signify Macbeth's imposing majesty. Instead, Kannan created an imperious personage through his expressive bearing, aided by a dramatic musical accompaniment. *Macbeth Chollyattam* opened with an unusually simplified traditional invocation by the singer: "*Sri Porkkali [...]* *Nityam upasmahe*" [Oh Goddess, I worship you eternally]. This verse was punctuated only by the *chenda* drum and cymbals, as Kannan had entered the stage without a curtain to agitate in preamble, forgoing its camouflage for his visibly mortal entrance.

The dancer's opening pose illustrated Macbeth's reaction at the moment of hearing the witches' prophecy, as the drumbeat echoed "A drum, a drum— / Macbeth doth come" (1.3.28-29). At first, Kannan's facial expression remained neutral. As the vocalist behind him intoned soberly and sonorously in English, "All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis" (1.3.46), Kannan's face adopted an expression of happiness. This happiness slowly altered to perplexity, next to sorrow, and then to fear, upon the recitation of "Thane of Cawdor" (1.3.47). With the announcement, "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!" (1.3.48) the dancer's face displayed first bravery and then cruelty. Without vocalising a single word in any language, the performer illustrated Macbeth's internal monologue and his psychological journey deftly, displaying a range of rasas.

⁵⁸ This description of Kannan's *Macbeth* is based on my own attendance at his performance of 19 November at Seva Sadan, as well as my notes taken during this show.

Arguably, even a spectator unfamiliar with *Macbeth*'s original narrative could read the emotions that Kannan communicated overtly through his exaggerated facial expressions, in conjunction with the recited text. In the absence of the actor's own speech, as in the ballet, in kathakali the dancer relies on expressive facial and physical mobility to display emotion to an audience who may be seated at a distance. In kathakali, such facial hypermobility is achieved after years of training, resulting in an expressiveness highly valued by the audience. Barba describes the kathakali performer's individual, expressive interpretation as the key for the Indian theatre spectator, who, in contrast to the European audience member, comes to see "the skill and virtuosity of the actor. Every gesture, movement, mime expression of the actor is estimated and assessed by an audience of connoisseurs" (40). While it is debatable as to whether there is such an East-West divide in the tastes of the theatre spectator, the kathakali theatre is perfect to showcase the performer's skill in elaborating the full rasa or flavour of a story. Kannan took full advantage of this performative potential to illustrate his own perception of Macbeth.

In performing the role of Macbeth, Kannan's face moved much like the contortions of a kathakali dancer observed by Barba in 1963: "If he is terror-struck, he raises one eyebrow, then the other, opens his eyes wide, moves his eyeballs laterally and rapidly, his nostrils flare out, his cheeks tremble and his head revolves in jerky motions. To express paroxysmal rage, his eyebrows quiver, his lower eyelids rise on his eyes, his gaze becomes fixed and penetrating..." (38-39). Here, as the lead singer began to elaborate the bars of the opening raga, Kannan vacillated his eyebrows, in a style indicative of *sringara bhava* or romantic love, his feeling upon seeing his wife. As the English voiceover intoned "Greater, [...] hereafter" (1.5.46), Kannan enacted Macbeth's joyous horripilation. Enamoured of Lady Macbeth, he laid down his staff, the better to discourse in gestures. The whole was eerily evocative of the witches' voices,

echoing in the re-read letter, as the spectator became a metaphorical fly on the wall of the Macbeths' bedroom, seen here through the protagonist's perspective.

Against the wordless tune and English voiceover, Kannan began to present *Macbeth's* action through *mudras* or the gestural alphabet. Kannan's gestures accordingly evoked doubt, fear, and ambition, transmitting *rasa* not only through Macbeth's facial expression but also through his body language. First, in response to his wife's demand, he mimed, 'Why are you upset? You want me to kill the king?' Next, miming fear and horror, he refused her emphatically. Then, Kannan mimed an adult's love for a child, indicating that the king had watched him grow, reflecting their family relationship. At this, mournfully, the Malayalam vocalist began to sing the opening lines of a verse, composed by Kannan's friend, which echoed several themes without representing a literal translation of the Shakespearean text:

Ithu cheythidamo (May this be done? [killing Duncan])

Cheyvathuchitamo (Is it appropriate to do so?)

Anudinam gunadosham (Every day, merit,)

Urumodam nalkiyenne (With joy, [he] bestowed upon me)

Prabhuvakki valartthavan (He who raised me, made me a lord)

Gurusaman dayasheelan (He, my guru-equivalent; he, the kind-natured.)

Nidhikkyazham kuzhikkyanee (To dig deep for treasure, [beneath] this)

Vatavriksham chheddikkyayo (Holy banyan tree, am I severing its roots?)

Pravachanam phalippikkyan (To make the prophecy bear fruit,)

Veno mal parishramam? (Are my own efforts indeed necessary?)⁵⁹

⁵⁹ These Malayalam lines are my own transliteration of notes taken during Kannan's performance. In reconstructing these notes I am aided by Kannan, who later wrote out the verse for me in the Malayalam script.

Having enacted the stanza's sense simultaneously in a gestural approximation, Kannan added the typical *kalasam* or dance-interlude to punctuate the end of a verse (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 22). The *ponnani* capped the first stanza with the melodious refrain “*Ithu cheythidamo... Cheyvathuchitamo?*” Simultaneously, the *sankiti* intoned *Macbeth*'s English text evenly, as if in response: “We will proceed no further in this business” (1.7.31). The resultant duologue was both harmonious and troubling in its externalisation and reiteration of Macbeth's confusion. While this device split the character's inner monologue, literally causing Macbeth to be in two minds regarding his decision, simultaneously, it doubled his emotion for the audience.

While *Macbeth Cholliyattam*'s sung verse represents an imperfect translation of Shakespeare's blank verse, the Malayalam lyrics hold its latent echoes in both sense and imagery. The song's opening lines, referencing the appropriateness of Macbeth's action, are reminiscent of: “I dare do all that may become a man / Who dares do more is none” (1.7.46-47). The following lines on Duncan's kindness and mercy evoke: “Besides, this Duncan / Hath borne his faculties so meek” (1.7.16-17) as well as: “First, as I am his kinsman and his subject” (1.7.13) and: “He hath honoured me of late” (1.7.32). The imagery of the boy cutting down the giving tree echoes *Macbeth*'s emphasis on the inevitability of natural retribution and regeneration, overcoming even death or deracination—the vision of the crowned child holding the branch of Birnam Wood (4.1.102); the “rooted sorrows” (5.3.43) and “avarice” that “grows with more pernicious root [...] and it hath been the sword to slain kings” (4.3.85-88), as well as: “Who can impress the forest, bid the tree / Unfix his earth-bound root?” (4.1.111-112). The Malayalam stanza's final lines echo Macbeth's doubts regarding his need to prompt the prophecy: “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me” (1.3.142). Thus, the translation approximates a free rendering that blends Macbeth's poetry into a soliloquy.

Having danced, gestured, and emoted the verse's meaning, Kannan proceeded to recount Lady Macbeth's response, assuming her character through *pakarnnattam*, or the imaginative rotation of viewpoints. Kannan portrayed Lady Macbeth as a cruel demoness, alternately miming her weeping, looking aghast at her own suggestion to kill the king, and becoming angry at his refusal. After miming Lady Macbeth's lines "had I so sworn" (1.7.58), the actor dashed an imaginary suckling baby to the ground in a horrific sequence. First, he danced a *kalasam* in the *lasya* or softer feminine style, and he mimicked looking at a baby that was lying on the ground [on a mat, as is Keralan custom]. Here, her eyebrows wagging with interest and affection, Lady Macbeth took up the child, caressed it and made faces to amuse it, miming, "Don't cry!" This portrayal of Lady Macbeth was reminiscent of the kathakali choreography for the demoness Poothana in *Poothanamoksham* (see Figure 11). In the tale, Poothana adores



Figure 11: *Poothanamoksham* in kathakali, photographs © K. Bharata Iyer (n.d.).

the infant god Krishna, before suckling and attempting to kill him; yet eventually, she is slain herself (Iyer 94, 103).⁶⁰ Accordingly, Kannan mimed Lady Macbeth shaking with joy, undoing her blouse, and beginning to nurse the infant, thrilling to its touch at first, before becoming nervous to the point of madness. Plucking off the imaginary infant, she swung it in a wide circle, dashing it brutally on the ground; then, pleased with herself, she folded her arms and looked at her horrified partner, as if to say, “See?” This imagined infanticide, normally chilling, was doubly horrific, both in its display of Lady Macbeth’s provocative ruthlessness, as well as in its enactment of a graphic scene that Shakespeare constructs as mere narrative. Kannan clarified

[The images have been removed from the online version due to copyright reason.]

⁶⁰ The story, *Poathanamoksham*, from the *Mahabharata* epic, tells of the babyhood of Lord Krishna. The demoness is sent by King Kamsa, Krishna’s wicked Herod-like uncle, in an attempt to slay his prophesied killer by poisoning all newborn males. When Poothana first beholds the infant Krishna, she is so charmed that she forgets her mission temporarily; next, she wavers; eventually, motivated by fear of Kamsa, she overcomes her hesitancy and offers the infant her poison-smearred breast. The divine baby, however, is immune to the poison. He suckles the demoness until he drains her of life, both freeing her from her cursed birth and saving the realm’s remaining male infants.

[The images have been removed from the online version due to copyright reason.]

Figures 12a, 12b: Kannan enacts Lady Macbeth's imagined murder of her infant, photographs © ICPA Bangalore.

that he interpreted Lady Macbeth's lines "had I so sworn" (1.7.58) as a metaphor emphasising the vital importance of keeping a promise, even if this action entails killing one's own progeny. Arguably, Kannan's reading also references the code of the kathakali hero Rukmangada, who is ready to slay his own innocent son in order to uphold his oath, and who similarly displays a range of emotions.

Kannan heightened the bhayanaka rasa through dramatising Duncan's onstage murder as part of the dagger scene (2.1). Here Kannan resumed his role as Macbeth, looking horribly set now after Lady Macbeth's provocation. Miming "false heart" (1.7.82), Kannan displayed Macbeth's mental agony, visibly suffering terrible doubts and fears even while playing the friendly host. Hearing noises in the night, Macbeth gripped his heart and sank to his knees, wrung his hands in fear, and shook his head, slowly becoming consumed by ambition while suffering physical aches. Then, infatuated with thoughts of power, Macbeth motivated himself in sign language, "I'll be king! I'll break his neck!" Suddenly, he started back, seeing the

dagger—then mimed laughing, and “Great! I’ll cut his throat with it! Come!” before falling back to the ground (see Figure 13). Gaining confidence and hardening in his resolve to kill, he danced with the dagger, working himself into near hysteria. Signing to the ground not to “prate of my whereabouts” (2.1.58) he rose, gesturing: “I won’t be afraid!” Here, Macbeth entered Duncan’s chamber *before* the bell tolled, an inversion that allowed the scene to cut to murder immediately. Meanwhile, Macbeth imitated Duncan’s peaceful sleep, smiling sweetly.

[The images have been removed from the online version due to copyright reason.]

Figure 13: Macbeth clutches at the dagger-hallucination, photographs © ICPA Bangalore.

This rearrangement of the Shakespearean text allowed Kannan to elaborate on Macbeth’s indecision. His choreography resembled Madhu’s depiction of Macbeth’s psychological struggle. Here, Kannan demonstrated that Macbeth’s face changed slowly, becoming cruel as he drew a ‘dagger’ from his waist and nearly stabbed the king, before drawing back to hide the dagger again. Finally, in resolve, Macbeth’s face grew cruel again. Visibly screwing his courage to the sticking-place (1.7.60), he thumped his own chest, indicating, “I’ll be king.” To a drum crescendo, Macbeth stabbed the sleeping king repeatedly. The effect was truly horrifying for a live audience, viewing the murder Shakespeare merely reports, and, further, seeing it through the eyes of the murderer. Here, as the drumming intensified to heighten

the dramatic effect, comprehending the extent of his crime, Macbeth discarded the dagger, shocked at his own actions, and unable to confront the sight of the corpse. Attempting to hide his dread, but panting with shock, the murderer turned to the audience. He addressed us as co-conspirators, gesturing: “I have done the deed” (2.2.14). Then, appalled, miming: “Didst thou not hear a noise?” (2.2.14), Macbeth attempted to wipe his hands and forehead of blood, signing: “This is a sorry sight” (2.2.18). Consequently, Macbeth’s dialogue became an internal monologue, re-involving the audience in the action’s horror as the recipient of his soliloquy.

This external manifestation of Macbeth’s inner monologue intensified the immediacy of his psychological deterioration. Dancing with his unclean hands extended, as if suddenly smitten with guilt, to a drum crescendo, Macbeth proclaimed in mime, “Glamis hath murdered sleep!” (2.2.40). Kannan’s anguish left even a new audience in no doubt of Macbeth’s feelings, as the lead singer broke into a new verse that the dancer enacted simultaneously:

Thimirame vizhunguka (Oh dark oblivion, swallow)

Paapa jeernnam deham (This sin-putrefied body.)

Nripapadam arjikkilum (Even in having got the position of king)

Kuthukamilla alpavum (There is not the least joy;)

Dushkarmma pankam cheyva- (The murky residue from wicked deeds)

Thethilum yennum (Is everywhere.)

Priyayude mozhi kettum (Heeding my beloved’s advice,)

Nyan orathe (Have I, unthinkingly,)

Kola cheytho mama (Murdered indeed my own)

Manasshanthiye noonam (Peace of mind? Surely.)

In its emphasis on sin, murder, intrigue, and regret, again the verse echoes the original Shakespearean text, transformed into Malayalam poetry. For example, the verse retains hints of the lines: “Stars, hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires” (1.4.50-51); “Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return / To plague th’ inventor” (1.7.9-10); “Naught’s had, all’s spent / Where our desire is got without content” (3.2.7), and, “Glamis hath murdered sleep” (2.2.40). Here, after miming the lines of the Malayalam song, Macbeth sat down, searching on the floor, apparently for the daggers. He rose with a start, clearly wondering: “Whence is that knocking?!” (2.2.55) and signed “I swear” to demonstrate the desperate extent to which he wished that the knocking could: “Wake Duncan” (2.2.72). With a brief *ilakiyattam*, or gestural elaboration of these ideas, Kannan’s Macbeth picked up his staff again and danced a coda, visibly shaken to the core, his inner peace destroyed forever. The story closed with the artist resuming his own person to pay obeisance with a final prayer of his own choosing, sung by the Malayalam vocalist. Here, Kannan inserted a prayer to the god Padmanabha, or the Maintainer in his attitude of supine peaceful repose. This personal choice evoked the typical concluding rasa of shanta or peace, functioning in stark contrast to Macbeth’s own lack of calm and rest. Having analysed Kannan’s detailed externalisation of Macbeth’s murderous conscience, in seeking a better understanding of his production’s ramifications for intercultural Shakespeares, the next section concludes the chapter with an examination of *Macbeth Cholliyattam* as a model for future cultural collaborations.

Conclusions: future directions for cultural collaborations

Kannan declared that he views a cultural collaboration between Shakespeare and kathakali as an opportunity to develop a new, hybrid work that enhances his existing performance tradition.

The artist stated: “A collaboration between Shakespearean idiom and our own grammar is okay, but the ideal situation is to use our own themes and work on those. A new work should be a new growth and new space for the same work [sic]” (Cheerath n. pag.). Kannan’s view of his cultural collaboration does not fit Christopher Balme’s assessment of kathakali as an example of intercultural theatre where the art form “absorbs foreign elements” but “remains structurally intact” (19). Arguably, Madhu’s *Macbeth* more nearly approximates this model. Instead, Kannan’s “collaboration” invokes Balme’s third model of intercultural theatre in which “a traditional form absorbs foreign elements to such an extent that formal innovation becomes the dominant characteristic, and old and new elements seem to be in equilibrium” (ibid.). As aforementioned, similarly appropriate is Fischer-Lichte’s metaphor of “interweaving” to describe intercultural kathakali productions (*Beyond Postcolonialism* 15). Kannan’s collaboration interweaves its cultural components into a metaphorical tapestry, harmonious in its design.

In this interweaving, the interstices contribute as fundamentally as the intersections, forming spaces for the exploration of new forms made possible by the intercultural dynamic. Where Pandeya describes “the full-bodied libretto of *Kathakali* which can be read and enjoyed like a Shakespeare play,” Kannan’s reduction of the playtext to two verses allowed the actor to insert his own gestural interpretation (181). Indocentric critic Rustom Bharucha acknowledges these spaces as vital in performing Shakespeare: “To borrow the fundamental premise of interstitiality in postmodern theory, it is not simply the here or the there that matters, but what lies in between” (“Foreign Shakespeare 25). Bharucha discusses the productive tensions at work in kathakali Shakespeares, contextualising these in the larger field of Asian Shakespeares. His view sets foreign and indigenous elements in postcolonial opposition, in describing Shakespeare

as a “catalyst” which produces a “countertext” (ibid. 1). As aforementioned, Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan label such a product more aptly as a “third text” created from the intercultural admixture (10). The latter model ideally leaves space for a mutual discourse on these art forms’ commonalities as well as their differences.

Equally, Bharucha’s perspective on intercultural and kathakali Shakespeare demonstrates both illuminating flashes of insider insight and outright contradictions. His discussion is valid, yet it builds an incomplete picture in leaving the audience out of the equation. Bharucha is oddly reluctant to acknowledge that it is possible for kathakali to take on the “conceptual and ideational complexities of Shakespeare’s texts,” in his response to Loomba’s assertion of the same when reviewing a kathakali *Othello* performance in Delhi (“Foreign Shakespeare” 16). Bharucha is vague in outlining the inherent artistic restrictions that might prevent this undertaking. His doubts beg clarification, if not inviting contradiction.

Arguably, as an art form that relies primarily on the performer’s skill and imagination, kathakali is sufficiently sophisticated to present a desired Shakespearean work. Kathakali employs an extremely complex sign language, reinforced by elaborate facial expressions. As kathakali practitioner Appakoothan Nayar told Zarrilli, one cannot “simply translate the text into gestures and say, ‘that’s *kathakali*.’ But that is *not kathakali*! You must take the text and see how much scope there is for expansion and decoration” (*Dance-Drama* 192). Equally, it is often those restrictions in kathakali’s overarching cultural and artistic tradition, rather than the particular codes within the art itself, that prevent an adherence to Shakespearean conventions—a conflict of ideas over and above that of forms.

Consequently, a critic unfamiliar with the nuances of kathakali may miss the subtler shades of meaning that kathakali Shakespeares incorporate. The codes and taboos embedded in

the protocol of traditional performance are more complex than Bharucha suggests. For example, while he complains that the choice of green facial makeup for the kathakali Othello was a misleading indication of the protagonist's royal nature, Bharucha seems unaware that this colour accurately indicated Othello's nobility of mind (*Shakespeare in Asia* 266). This *paccha* (green) *vesham* indicates "refinement, poise, heroism, high ethical ideas" and is used for "noble and virtuous characters: kings, gods, and heroes" (George 58). Similarly, Loomba critiques Balakrishnan's ICK *Othello*, in which the protagonist had a heroic *paccha vesham*, for "ironically whitewashing Othello into a white man" as only his "hands were painted black" ("Possibilities" 129). Loomba conflates this darkening of Othello's hands with "the narration which accompanies the dancing [and] identifies him as "malechh" [*mleccha*], a term that means outcaste, polluted or dirty" (ibid.). Moreover, Loomba views this colour-casting as an erasure of race in which "*Othello* turns into a tragedy of Indian class and regionalism, both heightened by neo-colonialism" ("Possibilities" 133). While Loomba's political reading is plausible, her artistic critique misses entirely the fact that the lead actor Evoor Rajendran Pillai drew upon the character of "Bahuka, the dark charioteer in *Nalacharitam* [sic] [...] to essay the role of Othello" ("Shakespeare in Kathakali" n. pag.). In this tale from the *Mahabharata*, the legendary Bahuka is the disguised, dark-skinned alter-ego of King Nala. Moreover, Nala is induced by a demon to leave his wife, Queen Damayanti, in a triangle paralleling the Othello-Iago-Desdemona dynamic. Such nuances can be revealed by non-Keralan critics through recording the performers' perspectives.

Despite Bharucha's evident unfamiliarity with the technical subtleties of the art form, he posits convincingly that the contradictions in staging kathakali Shakespeares are part of larger cultural schisms between India's local, national, and international levels and along its

regional, sectarian, and communitarian lines, citing the country's "fissured identity" (*Shakespeare in Asia* 270). This acknowledgement of India's cultural heterogeneity, and kathakali's location as an art form within this kaleidoscope, resonates even while Bharucha fails to apply this observation directly to Kerala. Such intracultural schisms, particularly the split between India's traditionally Hindu and the postmodern, secular audience, continue to affect the reception of Kannan's Shakespearean work, and, accordingly, its development. Manu records that following Kannan's 2001 *Macbeth* in Pittsburgh, "there was no performance for years, as he had to face the ire of the traditionalists. Then in March 2013, he presented it again, this time in Thiruvananthapuram, as a solo performance." When questioned regarding the popular and critical opinion of his performance of a Shakespeare play, Kannan remarked that

Usually, traditional people don't care about such. They don't think it is necessary, and they don't, they don't care, because I am a traditional performer, in their eyes. That is what is important for them. Whether I do any contemporary production or not, it is [the] least important thing for them. But for the people who watched it [*Macbeth Chollyattam*], they are very much enthusiastic, they are very much thrilled. Even [when performed outside Kerala, to audiences unfamiliar with kathakali] from Bangalore, the response I got was really wonderful.

Consequently, such creative collaborations between Shakespeare and kathakali are often criticised in the name of tradition rather than on the basis of an individualised evaluation.

According to Kannan, *Macbeth* represents a movement of innovation that is necessary to preserve kathakali for successive generations, adapting it to the rapidly changing tastes of its

audience and forms of its patronage. Rightly, amid Kerala's rapid globalisation, tradition is valued highly as that which preserves the roots of the changing culture. However, in its extreme rigidity, this adherence to tradition can choke these roots. Thus, Balakrishnan warns of the arts in Kerala: "Tradition must be treated like a flowing river, for still water no matter how wonderful to begin with, does become putrefied over time" (*Kathakali* 88). Regarding kathakali, Kannan explained that often, the letter of its tradition is preserved at the cost of its interrogative spirit. He declared that "people have a belief that they need to follow the, tradition. So they are keeping it in a, in a particular way. But they are not ready [...] to study [it] deeply." Equally, he told Uyehara: "If I am performing one character that has been performed for 300 years, then I have to do something new, otherwise it [kathakali] cannot [survive]. If [the audience is] getting the same experience and feeling, then they won't be excited" (n. pag.). Thus, Kannan's *Macbeth* represents a means to retain the kathakali connoisseur's interest with a new character, while attracting a new audience.

The ongoing adaptation of Shakespeare for kathakali represents the latest attempt to protect and preserve kathakali heritage. Kannan's view evokes Madhu's metaphor of the changing knife handle (described in Chapter One). Similarly, the kathakali artist's perspective privileges the individual interpretation or twist on artistic tradition, rather than a mere imitation: "When you imitate the movements and other peripheral aspects, you can never keep the life of it alive. [...] 'I do what my teacher did. I blindly obey what my teacher says. How my teacher walks, I walk.' Then, the life is lost." Instead, Kannan declared, "you start your education through imitation, and after some time, when you grow, you should naturally give up that process of imitation. Then only you can go forward." Unlike Madhu, who sidestepped traditionalist tensions by assimilating Shakespeare unrecognisably into the performing culture

of kutiyattam, Kannan addressed such tensions by repackaging kathakali, interweaving it with Shakespeare into a new, hybrid form of cholliyattam. As Kannan told Paul, he presented cholliyattam to bridge the gap for the uninitiate audience: “Cholliyattam was used traditionally, usually depicting Indian mythological or historical stories such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. But I present solo Cholliyattam with themes and ideas that are new to Kathakali” (n. pag.). In paralleling Shakespeare with kathakali, Kannan effectively incorporated the playwright into Kerala’s Hindu performance canon as well as its English literary corpus.

Equally, Kannan’s experimentation with Shakespeare has promoted his own artistic development. Kannan’s cholliyattam Shakespeare repertoire has grown: “Following *Macbeth* came *Hamlet*, which he performed before the Kerala audience” (Manu n. pag.). Additionally, Kannan has adapted *Oedipus* into Malayalam verse for cholliyattam (ibid.). Kannan recalled that audiences have received such experiments with both suspicion and appreciation. Kannan indicated that *Macbeth Cholliyattam* has been more popular in cities, with their comparatively global outlook: “Yes, we presented in three venues in Kerala. And, we are going to present in Calicut [...], we did it in Pune; we did it in Ahmedabad; people are asking for it now. I am going to do it in Madras.” Kannan’s growing cholliyattam repertoire and his touring schedule are indicative of *Macbeth Cholliyattam*’s popularity.

Kannan’s innovation raises questions as to the intent and outcome of grafting Shakespeare onto kathakali. According to kathakali artist Balakrishnan, the criteria for “new directions based on tradition” is that such experiments must proceed from a pure intent and evoke a mystic experience (*Kathakali* 94). Accordingly, they should not evolve from “efforts to please the crowd with novelty” but “must offer the magical renewal that audiences and artistes [sic] both need to experience when traditions of depth provide a metaphysical journey into the

heart and mind” (ibid.). In selecting *Macbeth*, perhaps Kannan exploits its supernatural metaphysics as a spiritual supplement to the religious symbolism lost in divesting his art form of its Hindu literature and philosophy.

In forgoing kathakali staging traditions such as the opening curtain, Kannan’s *Macbeth* also dispensed with their metaphorical religious significance. As aforementioned, a typical kathakali performance begins with an invocatory dance behind the curtain, “symbolising the process of creation behind maya, literally meaning ‘illusion,’ but in this case encompassing the curtain in a larger philosophical context” (Balakrishnan, *Kathakali* 42). In Hindu philosophy, *maya* is the illusory perception and blindness that traps the human soul in the karmic cycle of the false world thus created. By destroying *maya*, ideally one’s vision clears, resulting in self-realisation and union with the divine universal soul. Thus, the kathakali curtain represents the veil of human ignorance that sees the illusory temporal world as reality, blocking one’s insight regarding the permanent nature of divinity. Accordingly, in kathakali the introductory dance remains fixed regardless of the different narratives to be performed, denoting the art form’s unchanging philosophical base. The opening dancer performs first behind the curtain to invoke the presence of the gods to dance among mortals; this propitiation achieved, the ‘*maya*’ curtain then drops to reveal the actor costumed as divine avatar Krishna, who dances the opening sequence or *purappad* story (ibid. 42-43). This ongoing dance between the human soul and the divine, yearning for union, is played out repeatedly in classical Indian art. In dispensing with this opening kathakali sequence, Kannan not only shortened his presentation but hinted at his character’s mortal origins at the outset, through locating him as one already among us.

Overall, Kannan used Shakespeare to hybridise and secularise his tradition, promoting a new yet distinctly Keralan art form. Kannan explained that innovation need not entail

iconoclasm if one considers kathakali as a performance culture rather than a religious tradition. He averred, “if you consider it as an, as an art, this kind of behaviour [innovation] has less important [sic]. Whether you break it [tradition], or you keep it, both [are] the same.” However, it is debatable whether Kannan intends kathakali’s sustainability to develop at the expense of its recognisability. He maintains that while “cholliyattam should be an independent form” such intercultural innovations “will [only] strengthen it [kathakali]. Yes, of course. Because, people, people are watching, people are becoming more and more familiar with the acting style of kathakali. And so, that will, that will bring people closer to kathakali.” Similarly, Kannan stressed that his creative independence should not precipitate his art form’s cultural isolation, but rather enrich and advance the existing culture in a symbiotic relationship: “Cholliyattam should be a parallel form [for kathakali]. Like, kutiyattam [has the parallel art forms of] nangiar koothu, chakyar koothu, so, [...] we can innovate through] cholliyattam. Like, you can present a lot of poems which are not presented in kathakali. Jayadeva’s *Gita Govindam* can be presented in cholliyattam.”⁶¹ Accordingly, for Kannan, Shakespearean drama represents a worthy subject for cholliyattam, both in its intrinsic quality as well as in its translatability and relateability for both new and initiate audiences.

In analysing Kannan’s strategies for creating a cultural collaboration between Shakespearean drama and kathakali through *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, this chapter has argued that his production transforms both art forms on practical, theoretical, and spiritual levels. First, I examined Kannan’s handling of the conflicting codes of Shakespearean tragedy and the *Natyasastra*-derived kathakali, particularly the conventions regarding the onstage murder of

⁶¹ Jayadeva’s 12th-century Sanskrit narrative poem *Gita Govindam* [*Song of Govinda*] is an erotic song in which the lovers Radha and Krishna (Govinda) represent human and divine souls respectively, yearning for union. The same story is told in Krishnanattam, from which kathakali derives, as Barba writes in *The Kathakali Theatre* (see page 37).

innocents. I also revealed Kannan's emphasis on the performance of *rasa* as a shared actor-audience experience that transcends cultural differences. Next, Chapter Two contextualised Kannan's production in a performance history of kathakali Shakespeares, comparing his and others' strategies in translating the Shakespearean text into the multiple languages of kathakali. Moreover, I re-evaluated theoretical models of intercultural theatre in the light of postmillennial performance, establishing that Kannan's local inheritance of Shakespeare lends his cultural collaboration a different emphasis to that represented by postcolonial Shakespeares. Finally, Chapter Two analysed Kannan's application of his intercultural theory in performance, highlighting his 2013 performance of *Macbeth Chollyattam* among his past and future Shakespearean productions for his art form.

The chapter draws the conclusion that Kannan, like Madhu, uses Shakespeare primarily to hybridise his cultural heritage, for the purpose of expanding its repertoire and also for the joy of experimentation. In reasserting his artistic creativity through *Macbeth*, Kannan concurrently promoted chollyattam as an independent art form. Kannan's hybridisation differed from Homi Bhabha's postcolonial, fixed interstitial stairwell in representing a more flexible interweaving that renegotiates the intercultural relationship between Shakespeare and kathakali on his own evolving terms (5). Kannan was unafraid to transgress both kathakali and Shakespearean staging conventions in accommodating his own view of *Macbeth*, for example, in foregrounding the onstage murder of Duncan to better display his artistry in evoking *rasa* to play on his spectators' emotions. Additionally, Kannan's production reinscribed his Hindu art form with a humanistic perspective. Exploiting *Macbeth's* nuanced depiction of the ambiguities of morality and temporal reality, Kannan dislocated our primary viewpoint, realigning it with the anti-heroic. Confidently presenting his independent interpretation, Kannan made use of the rhizomatic

cross-fertility among Keralan art forms and the inevitable interrelationship among postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares. In further examining this interrelationship and its potential implications for intercultural Shakespeares, the thesis now turns to an exploration of a third Keralan *Macbeth*. Performed by The Abhinaya Theatre in 2011 as a postmodern Malayalam-language production, this *Macbeth* details the tripartite horrors of the psyche.

CHAPTER THREE – SHAKESPEARE IN POSTMODERN

THEATRE: *MACBETH* IN MALAYALAM

Drama and theatre are different. Drama is written text [...but] 'thiya' [seeing] is, theatre, to be seen. [...] It is chakshushyagna—the yagna [ritual homage] of the eyes.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, “Natyam”

Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses / Or else worth all the rest.

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (2.1.44-45)

This third chapter maintains the emphasis of the preceding chapters, in aiming to redress a critically underresearched area of intercultural Shakespeares by profiling selected twenty-first-century Keralan artistic perspectives and productions. Having so far explored these perspectives alongside theoretical models of cultural translation and collaboration, in this chapter I highlight cultural fusion. While the two preceding case studies centred on solo performances of *Macbeth* for traditional art forms, this third case study references a group postmodern theatre production in aiming to provide a different perspective. Chapter Three highlights *Macbeth*, an experimental Malayalam-language version produced by Abhinaya Theatre, a postmodern Keralan theatre collective. Abhinaya's national award-winning production, directed by Jyotish M. G. [sic] premiered in January 2009 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (“Jyotish M. G.”). Starring Abhinaya co-founder D. Reghoothaman as Macbeth, the Abhinaya production mapped the Freudian categories of Id, Ego, and Superego onto Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and Banquo, respectively. In analysing this transposition, this third chapter builds on primary evidence including my interview of Jyotish and Reghoothaman on 23 November 2013, and an archival

recording of their 11 February 2011 performance at the Hamara Shakespeare Festival. These resources are contextualised against relevant critical sources, practitioner perspectives, interviews and eyewitness reviews of the Abhinaya *Macbeth*.

In evaluating this evidence to address the research questions, this third chapter examines the textual, theatrical, and spiritual implications of adapting William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for experimental Malayalam theatre. This genre is typical of postmodern Keralan theatre, where international works in translation are employed in a cultural revolution to enrich and reclaim indigenous theatre for a secular populist collective. Keralan theatres of protest represent a reaction against casteism and capitalism rather than colonialism. Simultaneously, these theatre productions reimport Shakespeare's works through international routes, in an era of globalisation. Jyotish locates his *Macbeth* at the centre of this evolution, explaining that in postmillennial Kerala, "we live in a postmodern era" where, "it's happening like anything, the, cultural fusion."⁶² To address such complexities, I contend, current postcolonial critical models are no longer sufficient.

In making this case, Chapter Three explores the forces, movements, and rationales that shape the Abhinaya *Macbeth*. The first section contextualises Abhinaya's work in the post-Independence evolution of Keralan experimental theatre, amid a national theatre movement of protest and cultural reclamation. Here I examine the wider artistic return to a *Natyasastra*-inspired indigenous 'theatre of roots,' led by directors such as Kerala's Kavalam Narayana Panikkar. Interviewing Panikkar, I contextualise his ongoing influence on postmillennial Indian theatre by situating his work in related Anglo- and Indo-centric performance criticism by Homi Bhabha, Nandi Bhatia, Suresh Awasthi, and Richard Schechner, among others. While aiming

⁶² In quoting Jyotish and Reghoothaman, I continue to reference my personal interview of these artists, unless otherwise specified.

for a balanced consideration, I engage particularly with criticism that moves beyond notions of postcolonial binaries to address the global complexities of postmillennial productions such as the Abhinaya *Macbeth*.

Having set out the critical and historical context for this *Macbeth*, the chapter next situates the Abhinaya work in the context of other relevant twenty-first-century Indian collective theatre productions. These works include Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Dash Arts (2006), and Paddy Hayter's *Indian Tempest* (2013) with Footsbarn that starred Reghoothaman as Prospero. While these productions include similar Keralan performance elements and languages, they employ different models of interculturalism to the Abhinaya *Macbeth*. In investigating these overlaps and divergences this second section further explores their implications for the rhizomatic relationships between Keralan and other postmillennial Shakespeares.

The third section narrows the chapter focus to examine the Abhinaya *Macbeth* with reference to the performance of 11th February 2011. This third section looks at the performative and directorial strategies underlying the production's relocation of the Shakespearean textual, the theatrical, and the supernatural to the realm of the metaphysical and Keralan ritual. I argue that this production requires a model of interculturalism other than cultural translation or cultural collaboration, differing from the *Macbeths* highlighted in Chapters One and Two respectively. Jyotish's *Macbeth* instead demonstrates a fusion of Keralan linguistic and performative elements with European material and themes, from Shakespeare and Freud to the morality play. The final section of Chapter Three analyses the Abhinaya *Macbeth* in relation to evolving paradigms of intercultural Shakespeare. I close in tracing the themes between this and

the other thesis chapters in suggesting that both closures and new openings can occur in producing Keralan intercultural Shakespeare performance.

Post-Independence Keralan theatre and the “theatre of roots”

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* (2009-present) fits into a performance history typical of Keralan Shakespeares, in negotiating an uneven transition to postmodern theatre. This transition parallels a decisive shift in the intercultural currents surrounding Shakespeare in India. Once exported to India via a one-way sea route of colonial transference, Shakespeare has since been recirculated through multiple fluid interpretations. Post-Independence, Shakespeare’s works have re-entered India in non-colonial forms and guises, circulated via the films of Akira Kurosawa or international theatre festivals. Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* influenced Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Maqbool*; accordingly, Blair Orfall writes that the director “came to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* not through a colonial canon or global imperialism, but through Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa” (2). Keralan critic G. Sankara Pillai mentions Kurosawa’s work as one ideal method of cultural transformation, to be emulated by Indian Shakespeares, citing

Throne of Blood as independent of *Macbeth* [sic] and 100 percent Japanese—understood and transformed into a modern ideology, [but with] age old Japanese relationships between husband and wife, family and society. This is the goal to be achieved [...] to imbibe totally the innate cultural climate, and to subject our entire experience to the demands of a contemporary form, which alone will suffice for contemporary expression. (82)

This reverential attitude towards the adapter of Shakespeare, rather than the text, indicates a shifting of the locus from postcolonial to individual Shakespeares.

Thus, other *Macbeths* function as the holy grail of inspiration by nature of their transculturation and use of contemporary forms. These interconnected routes of ideas no longer conform to the one-way model of Patrice Pavis' hourglass; the intercultural dialogue now flows asymmetrically along myriad rhizomatic, global streams. Ania Loomba posits that the "intricate pattern of borrowing and difference" that occurs where "Shakespeare meets India [...] can move us beyond the formulaic ways in which the terms "empire" and "postcoloniality" are often invoked" ("Possibilities" 122). While Loomba's contention is applicable to the Abhinaya *Macbeth*, the statement presupposes binaric notions of Commonwealth or colony in discussing "Shakespeare" and "India" (ibid.). The third-hand reimport and recycling of Shakespeare across India transcends such distinctions in its multiplicity of intracultural and intercultural borrowings.

Accordingly, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* represents the inheritance of one interrelated Indian theatre movement that saw Shakespeare pressed into service in a transition from colonialism to democracy. Postmillennial Keralan theatre evolved from modern Indian drama, in turn influenced by Shakespeare, indicating direct and complex rhizomatic links between these traditions. Bhatia posits that "modern theatre's beginnings can be identified in the colonial encounter" (*Reader* xv). B. Ananthakrishnan dates this encounter to the mid-1850s to -1860s, when the "earliest period of modern Indian playwriting was inspired by Shakespeare and other British dramatists" (257). The contemporary "adaptation and translation of Sanskrit texts into the regional languages," is indicative of an early dual regional appropriation of both national and international works (ibid.). Awasthi locates the origins of modern Indian theatre more

precisely in mid-nineteenth-century British Calcutta (*Performance Tradition* 50). This period follows the late eighteenth-century establishment of the Calcutta Theatre with David Garrick's assistance, a further indication of the latent Shakespearean influence on the resultant Indian "great rupture from the [*Natyasastra*] performance tradition of more than two thousand years" (73). In mid-twentieth-century India, a national movement sought to reclaim Indian heritage from its former colonised status through a return to the indigenous roots of the national arts.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* retains theatre elements derived from this period, when Indian theatre figures revisited the *Natyasastra* in seeking to construct a new national 'theatre of roots.' To restore artistic traditions "interrupted by colonialism" and regain a lost connection with India's "ancient past," modern Indian playwrights and directors returned to the ancient dramatic tradition, including Keralan Sanskrit theatre (Bhatia, *Reader* xxi). Concurrently, theatre studios such as Adishakti built auditoriums "modelled after the indigenous *kuttampalam* theatre architecture of Kerala" (Ananda Lal, "Tim Supple's *Dream*" 68). Accordingly, this cultural realignment dislocated Shakespeare. Formerly, the colonial theatre proscenium had displaced the traditional native thrust stage; actors now rehearsed Shakespeare in Adishakti's *kuttampalam*, working with Supple on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006). In replacing Shakespearean literary and performative models with Sanskrit, Keralan, and indigenous traditions, while retaining Shakespeare as inspiration, Indian playwrights sought both to decolonise and to invigorate their modern-day theatre. The fusion of the Abhinaya production owes its eclecticism to the resultant hybrid inheritance of both Shakespearean and Sanskrit theatre.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* exists at the nexus of a post-Independence renegotiation of both Keralan society and national Indian theatre heritage. While redirecting modern Indian theatre

from Shakespearean models to those prescribed by the *Natyasastra*, arguably the “theatre of roots” movement resituated India’s new secular national artistic tradition in its original religious, Brahminical elite location. Thus, in a newly democratic nation, with “the rise of Left movements in the 1940s, the idea of a ‘national’ theatre came to be located in the context of class struggle” (Bhatia, *Reader* xx). At the national level, this struggle took the form of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) (ibid.). With Indian independence in 1947, “many leftists joined with some of the liberal reformers to begin new theatre troupes in Indian cities” (Phillip Zarrilli and Carol Sorgenfrei 467). Among these reformers was Utpal Dutt, former member of the Shakespeareana troupe, who “aimed at bringing Shakespeare to the masses and producing a new political theatre” (Jyotsna Singh, “Colonial Narratives” 25). Dutt’s post-Independence Bengali *Macbeth* for the folk theatre of *jatra*, “which toured several villages, created quite a sensation” (Sangeeta Mohanty 40). Despite the national influence of Dutt’s theatre movement, it is probable that his *Macbeth* did not influence the Abhinaya production, for “in the state of Kerala, a very different form of grassroots, anti-colonialist theatre developed” (Zarrilli and Sorgenfrei 468). At the regional, Keralan level, the egalitarian preoccupation translated into a movement to reclaim theatre from elitist hands to share it with the average person, with the establishment of the Kerala People’s Theatre Club (KPTC) in 1952. It is ironic and intentional, perhaps, that Shakespeare is employed to subvert the very high class elitist values for which he stands. In Kerala, Shakespeare has been assimilated as part of a rhizomatic tradition in which Keralan theatre appropriates global literature and reconstitutes it as Marxist propaganda.

Shakespeare occupies an intermediary position in propagandic Keralan theatres of protest. The playwright serves as mouthpiece, whether fondly indigenised as ‘Hamara

Shakespeare,' or admired as the apex of world literature and then appropriated unapologetically. This intermediality locates the playwright at a fulcrum point, positioned for use in a dual capacity: looking backwards in reclamation of indigenous culture, and forwards in the service of the intercultural enrichment of Keralan theatre. Here, Shakespeare is positioned at the centre rather than in a hollow third space that resembles an interstitial stairwell between imperialist and subaltern, unequal First World-Third World structures of culture and power. This centrality is not that of a metaphorical Venn diagram of the sociopolitical power structure. Rather, Shakespeare exists in a simultaneous presence as multiple nodes in a rhizomatic network, where spheres of privilege continually intersect with those of the average person. Through such nodes Shakespeare can function as a recurring touchstone for creativity. Shakespeare is used as a mouthpiece in India, in a transitional phase where internal politics and local globalisation have replaced colonialism as an important frame of reference.

As mentioned, Shakespeare remains the most translated foreign playwright in India. However, Pillai maintains that at times the plays of Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht have been more popular than Shakespeare, with their prose works more often performed in Kerala as political protests (44-45). Pillai terms Brecht a “theatre luminary who has been influencing us and all other regional theatres in India” through his “didactic writings” (45). Pillai also marks a theatrical milestone in 1936, when “Malayali readers came into contact with Ibsen” via A. Balakrishna Pillai’s translation of *Ghosts* (44). By 1940, Ibsen’s popularity in Kerala “resulted in many prose plays” (ibid.). This popularity casts doubt on the claim that the “theatre of roots” remains a twentieth-century movement that “came to define ‘modern Indian theatre’ as a whole – and is thus the movement against which people have reacted in the twenty-first century” (Kevin Wetmore, Siyuan Liu, and Erin Mee 224). Conversely, Pillai’s perspective indicates that

the early Marxist, international focus of the Keralan theatre movement renders it as already outside the parameters of this typical postmillennial rebellion against modern Indian theatre.

Pillai's commentary suggests that in these rhizomatic relationships, third-generation intercultural works can emerge in postmillennial Shakespeare, inspired and influenced by other international reconceptions. In Kerala, the theatre of roots movement adapted global literature with a dual focus, disseminating it to the masses and enriching both traditional theatre and public education. The argument emerged that the "traditional arts should continue to be valued and patronized, but only if they were historically decontextualized, shorn of the vestiges of the regressive feudalistic, superstitious belief systems of the past, and made accessible to 'the people' with new content" (Zarrilli, *Dance-Drama* 201). The Keralan Marxist theatre movement concurrently aimed to "replace the old social and economic order with progressive social-democratic models that would gradually and peacefully move from capitalism toward socialism" (Zarrilli and Sorgenfrei 468). The continuing influence of Marxist institutions such as the KPTC and the importance of theatres of protest can be seen in a visit to the state theatre hall in Thrissur, which displays a standing, multi-panel timeline of its main Marxist actors and directors, in an overt homage.⁶³ The Abhinaya theatre collective has a similar mission in producing experimental work by and for the common man, although the subject matter of its productions is not uniformly explicitly Communist.

Shakespeare's comparative apoliticism creates a corresponding ambivalence of interest among Keralan adapters. Pillai remarks that Ibsen was "very influential on a national level," adding that "Ibsen the propagandist, was welcomed more than Ibsen the artist" (45). In the twenty-first century, Keralan productions continue to play not only at the Hamara Shakespeare

⁶³ This design is in stark contrast to the apoliticism of the entry hall to the National School of Drama in Delhi, where the décor emphasises the evolution of Indian theatre through a focus on cultural landmarks and productions.

Festival but also at the annual Ibsen Festival in Delhi. Pillai claims that Shakespeare “remains the least influential [foreign] playwright in Malayalam theatre” (42). However, Pillai locates this comparative unpopularity in the plays’ theatrical presentation rather than in their content. He blames the early “attempts of mounting Shakespeare on stage [that] have only disgraced the great man as they were presented on proscenium theatres in a Victorian style” (ibid.). Significantly, Shakespeare appears equally popular as a subject of adaptation for traditional Keralan art forms with thrust staging, as for proscenium stage theatres such as Abhinaya, suggesting the situation is more complex than Pillai observes. Yet Pillai’s opinion accurately reflects the Keralan preference for Shakespeare as a playwright reimposed in theatres of protest rather than one acquired as colonial inheritance.

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar: the evolution of the Keralan theatre director

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* shows traces of the theatre of roots approach popularised by highly influential Keralan director, translator, and playwright Kavalam Narayana Panikkar (Wetmore, Liu, and Mee 196). As mentioned in the thesis introduction, Panikkar (1929-2016) is named among those Indian directors who “reversed the colonial course of contemporary theatre,” (Awasthi and Schechner 48). In using Keralan art forms, Panikkar “redefined modern Indian theatre by combining the dramaturgical structure of *kutiyattam* [...] the actor training methods of *kathakali* [...], the physical training of *kalarippayattu* [...] and aesthetic theory from the *Natyasastra*” (Wetmore, Liu, and Mee 196-197). Awasthi and Schechner claim that in Panikkar’s redefinition of contemporary Indian theatre, the playwright simultaneously has “brought the *Natyasastra* and its whole tradition up to date” (56). To gain a better understanding of Panikkar’s approach to theatre, in November 2013 I interviewed the director and attended his

rehearsal at the National School of Drama in Delhi. In rehearsal, Panikkar demonstrated a familiarity with the theoretical and practical applications of the classical Keralan art forms. In an informal pre-rehearsal lecture to the cast, Panikkar elaborated on his *Natyasastra*-inspired rationale of drama as representation rather than realism. Here he related that his: “[p]redecessors criticised me for [making] different theatre, but times [have] changed—drama *has* to change. Drama is part and parcel of life, but at the same time it’s not life. ‘Natyam’ (drama) means ‘to represent’ [life]” (n. pag.). For example, Panikkar suggested that one actor perform a stylised sequence of glances patterned on kathakali, and demonstrated the same until it was performed to his satisfaction.

While Panikkar’s new hybrid theatre appropriated Shakespeare, it simultaneously represented a move away from colonial India, where “the modernity of theatre involved constant referencing and response to western and European drama” and “Shakespeare functioned as a key model” (Bhatia, *Reader* xviii). In interview, Panikkar verified that for him Shakespeare functioned as an “instrument,” explaining that “doesn’t mean that Shakespeare is irrelevant—he is very relevant, in giving you inspiration” (n. pag.). Indeed, Cecile Sandten suggests that the “political and postcolonial dimension[s] are not of much interest to Panikkar” (115). Thus, Panikkar used Shakespeare to reinvigorate indigenous theatre in a symbiotic rather than reactionary postcolonial relationship. In establishing individual artistic perspectives, such first-person viewpoints provide complexity and are especially important to record in the context of the residual struggle to enable the Indian subaltern to speak (Gayatri Spivak, *Live Theory* 122-123). Similarly, Bhatia condemns the myopia of scholarship on Indian Shakespeares that has “largely focused on the cultural value attached to colonial representations of Shakespeare” while ignoring “strategic appropriations of Shakespearean drama by [native] playwrights, directors,

and literary figures” (“Codes of Empire” 98). Such appropriations may indicate divergent creative concerns, however inconvenient for scholarship with a purely postcolonial focus.

As the seniormost translator and director of Keralan Shakespeares in the early twenty-first century, Panikkar’s creative process was influential as a model for Keralan theatre directors such as Jyotish, in the absence of an historic native tradition. Unlike the classical Keralan theatres of kathakali or kutiyattam, contemporary Keralan theatre often features a director. This directorial tradition, inherited from colonial theatre, is accompanied by intercultural tensions. For example, the existence of a director dislocates the *Natyasastra* theory in areas such as the author-actor-audience triad. As mentioned in the preceding chapters, the Keralan theatrical tradition values the artistic interpretation and execution of the playtext above the authorial contribution. In rehearsals, Panikkar held the single copy of the script, and rather than distributing the text, he shared his directorial vision with the cast in open reading-discussions (Wetmore, Liu, and Mee 200). This insertion of a director complicates the *Natyasastra* concept of the actor’s responsibility for elaborating the playtext to the audience to produce *rasa* in performance. Mee suggests that Panikkar’s methodology “places the emphasis of rehearsal on the interpretation of the text rather than on the text itself” (ibid.). However, Panikkar’s work here privileged the interpretation of the director, rather than that of the actor.

Panikkar’s Malayalam Shakespeare remains a theoretical and practical influence on the work of the Abhinaya Theatre. During our discussion of Keralan Shakespeares, Jyotish nodded as Reghoothaman mentioned Panikkar at the outset, indicating the elderly director’s continuing relevance to Keralan Shakespeares: “Here we have Kavalam, you know, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar [...] He has done *Chathankattu* [*The Tempest/Kodumkattu*].” Reghoothaman had used Panikkar’s Malayalam translation earlier that year, performing the role of Prospero in

Footsbarn's *Indian Tempest* that toured to the Globe; cast member Shaji Karyat (Trinculo) stated that for their Malayalam dialogue, the cast used Panikkar's verse (n. pag.). The design for *Indian Tempest* hinted at Panikkar's influential Malayalam performance adaptation, titled *Kodumkattu* (2000). *Kodumkattu* highlighted a Keralan theatre aesthetic, using costumes made from local banana leaf and other natural materials. Panikkar's further stylistic influence could be seen in the *Indian Tempest*'s inclusion of folk songs, movements from kathakali and kalarippayattu, and natural local costume materials (Wetmore, Liu, and Mee 196). The Footsbarn *Tempest* production postdates the *Abhinaya Macbeth* (2009), indicating the continuance of Panikkar's ecumenical influence into the new millennium.

With *Macbeth*, Jyotish followed Panikkar's mode of cherry-picking from *Natyasastra* theory and Keralan theatre forms in producing a chosen play according to his own directorial vision. Reghoothaman maintained that "we took *Macbeth* to show his [Jyotish's] interpretation, not to educate [people on Shakespeare]." Jyotish emulated Panikkar in ignoring political and postcolonial topics in his productions (Sandten 115). Similarly, Reghoothaman averred that in directing *Macbeth*, Jyotish "discard[s] all this political interpretation [...] postcolonial, all these thing[s]. He just take[s it] as a psychological thing. Basically, Freudian, Lacanian theory." In representing *Macbeth*'s central figures as components of the Freudian psyche, through his own perception of Lacanian theory, Jyotish echoed Panikkar's emphasis on the realm of imagination. While critics have focused on Panikkar's habitual predilection for using traditional local theatre forms, the director revealed that he was inspired further by the imaginative potential of Keralan theatre. Panikkar clarified that in his rehearsal lecture, "I talked about *angyik...vachik* [physical and verbal acting]...but [the] mind is [the] main thrust [of dramatic communication]" (interview

n. pag.). Panikkar's emphasis on the mind is reflected in the *Abhinaya Macbeth*, which privileges psychological over physical and verbal aspects in representing Macbeth as the Ego.

A further comparison of these Keralan artists' strategies is revealing, highlighting the creative disjunctions that emerge in their handling of intercultural tensions, whether these are ultimately resolved or exploited. While Panikkar worked within Indian theoretical and practical traditions, the *Abhinaya* team invites global traditions to hybridise their experimental theatre. In relating his approach to acting *Macbeth*, Reghoothaman echoed Panikkar's emphasis on the psyche. Similarly, Reghoothaman grounded his theory in the *Natyasastra*, yet he applied his concept of Stanislavskian analysis to put it into practice. Reghoothaman maintained that he adopted the *Natyasastra* description of acting, as a process of maintaining the appropriate “*avasthana krithim natyam*—state of mind. [...] So you can imitate the body, etc., but you have to be [in] the state of mind, every second. Before Stanislavski, this was written by Bharata” he averred. Accordingly, Reghoothaman explained: “Every actor has to reach [that]—whether an animal mind, or tree [...] we personify...or even neutral[ity]—*shanta bhava*. [...] This explains everything I think—but Stanislavski helps [me to] analyse [it], in a subtle [way].” Reghoothaman added that in performing *Macbeth*, it takes a “conscious approach to reach [a] state of mind. [...] [One must put it] into practice—*Natyasastra* helps me for details—Stanislavski helps me [with]...creative problems, emotional memory.” Accordingly, Reghoothaman's own acting methodology is intercultural.

Reghoothaman's approach to acting corresponds to Panikkar's methodology in its emphasis on the actor's inner state, valuing this aspect over *angyik* and *vachik* [action and speech]. The *Macbeth* actor claimed that one can “imitate any man's body, way of walking, Stanislavski says [...]. But [a] state of mind—makes [an] actor perform. If speaking

Shakespeare's blank verse, you can imitate—but whether European or Indian, it is [essential to understand the] state of mind—otherwise, [you become a] mimicry artist.” Equally rooted in ancient and modern-day theory, and in local and global networks, Reghoothaman's intercultural philosophy represents another example of the rhizomatic relationships between Keralan and intercultural Shakespeares. Having set out the connection between national theatres of roots and the Abhinaya *Macbeth*, this chapter now turns to examine the production in the context of other postmillennial local Shakespeares.

Keralan Shakespeares: intracultural and intercultural cross-pollination

Postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares derive inspiration from native theatre forms in addition to national and global Shakespeares, in a rhizomatic relationship of circular influence. Keralan Shakespeare productions are fluid regarding the patterns of their individual identities. However, taken collectively they indicate a distinct trend of experimentation and revitalisation of local theatre forms, strategically using Shakespeare as new material to change the ‘knife handle’ of tradition. Reghoothaman maintained that for *Macbeth* the Abhinaya team borrowed creative ideas widely. He explained that kutiyattam techniques informed his portrayal of Macbeth: “I studied at [the] School of Drama, [where] I've seen some masters doing kutiyattam, [at] Thrissur. For [a] demonstration, some teachers came without makeup...Mani Madhava Chakyar.” Following Madhava Chakyar's masterclass, Reghoothaman declared, he had patterned Macbeth's “eye movements” on the classical style demonstrated by the kutiyattam maestro.

The symbiotic circulation of contemporary and classical Keralan performance styles is evident in the work of other local theatre practitioners. In June 2015, the University of Warwick

hosted Vinay Kumar, a Keralan experimental theatre artist from Puducherry's Adishakti theatre collective working with Dash Arts on *King Lear*. In the workshop, Vinay Kumar expounded on the enaction of emotions through kutiyattam performance techniques. Kumar told us he had inherited this technique, via his contemporary theatre teacher, from kutiyattam maestro Ammannur Madhava Chakyar (Margi Madhu's uncle and teacher). Such rhizomatic interrelations among Keralan Shakespeares and theatre arts come full circle in Margi Madhu's performance philosophy. Where Reghoothaman borrows eye movements from kutiyattam, Madhu accesses those of other traditions: "Every art form to which I have been exposed must have inspired me. Even films, like the way [Keralan actress and dancer] Shobhana uses her eyes; I have tried using this [technique] in the female roles [that] I do." Such cross-pollination suggests a habitual mutual accommodation of Keralan art forms among postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* is representative of postmillennial Malayalam-language Shakespeares by virtue of their comparative rarity. When I asked the Abhinaya team whether they had seen any other Malayalam-language productions of *Macbeth*, Jyotish responded, "No, nobody has done that [professionally]. There are some amateur productions [...] Chandradasan has done [one] in this year [sic]."⁶⁴ The adaptation of Shakespeare remains a current practice among Keralan art forms, arguing that such incidences will increase. To reinvigorate their dying tradition in the twenty-first century, chavittu natakam narratives have assimilated new heroic characters from Shakespeare, such as Julius Caesar or Hamlet (Mini Muringatheri n. pag.). Without national or international sponsorship, however, productions for traditional Keralan art forms rarely sustain travel outside the state. Malayalam-language Shakespeares face an

⁶⁴ Since this interview, Bengali theatre artist Probal Gupta, training with Sadanam Balakrishnan, has also composed and performed solo kathakali adaptations of Shakespeare's works, featuring Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra.

additional linguistic barrier, restricting their performance geographies to localised and diasporic communities. International Shakespeares that include Keralan practitioners and traditions also typically involve foreign collaborations, providing productions with an additional intercultural platform.

By performing Shakespeare in a cultural fusion, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* arguably appeals to a wider audience. The director and actor explained to me that this cultural opacity was intentional. For example, their *Macbeth* was set in a “non-denominational space,” as Reghoothaman declared, “that space doesn’t confine [it] to India, or Western... [it’s] for anybody.” As detailed later in the chapter, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* was set on a bare stage. This minimalism resembles the imaginative potential of the bare stage in Madhu’s and Kannan’s productions that rely on performative interpretation and elaboration. Yet in the Abhinaya *Macbeth* the stage was divested further of all traditional cultural signifiers, with no Keralan lamp or Hindu idols. This neutrality enabled the setting to function as a transferable venue for a touring production that used Shakespeare both to export the director’s vision and to attract new audiences.

In addition, the Abhinaya production’s costumes demonstrated a mixed cultural aesthetic that was designed specifically to broaden its global outreach. The thanes wore tunics, while the play’s three central characters were garbed in medieval robes, tunics, or gowns, complete with European-style golden crowns. Duncan and his retinue (who doubled as banquet guests and Banquo’s progeny) marched across the stage joined in one long robe, akin to a collective mankind (see Figure 14). As Reghoothaman explained to me, the costumes are “somewhat like Western, you may say. Because [if] we put it in Kerala costume and other thing[s], then everything has to, the character’s name...has to be changed, and the culture has

to be exchanged [replaced]—and, it can be presented only in Kerala...[and then only] as an adaptation.” In its eclectic fusion of Keralan and foreign elements, the *Abhinaya Macbeth* evaded easy generic categorisation by design.



Figure 14: Duncan’s retinue, photograph © The Abhinaya Theatre.

This cultural fluidity presents the Malayalam *Macbeth*’s director with both an opportunity and a challenge. Unlike the traditional Keralan art forms profiled in the preceding chapters, postmodern Malayalam drama has no history of established cultural codes to transgress in adapting Shakespeare. Yet critics of Keralan Shakespeares may still take issue with a director’s perceived misreading of Shakespearean codes, as with a performer’s unorthodox choices. In defending the cross-fertilisation of Keralan performance art and Shakespearean drama, Poonam Trivedi deflates arguments against such intercultural miscegenation, writing: “Interculturalism, we are forced to ask, by whom and for whom?” (“Folk Shakespeare” 186). In 2012, Keralan-trained director Atul Kumar proclaimed that

“Shakespeare is our playwright as much as he is anyone else’s in the world” (n. pag.). Similarly, the artists behind the Abhinaya *Macbeth* appropriate Shakespeare on their own local terms, leading to an independent intercultural engagement. In so doing, they obviate issues of cultural authenticity and exploitation that may occur with productions with Keralan theatre elements that derive their centres elsewhere.

In such twenty-first-century postmodern theatre productions with Keralan elements, these elements risk becoming artificialised or destabilised in engaging with Anglophone Shakespeare centres. One example is Supple’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which Malayalam-speaking Keralan practitioners featured as the leads. Supple’s *Dream* was produced in collaboration with Indian artists and his company Dash Arts, and the production played at the RSC and toured India. Although Supple declared his intention to involve Indian actors intrinsically in the production, he was criticised for Orientalising and exploiting traditional Indian performance elements while omitting to offer native actors a shared collective position (Lal, “Tim Supple’s *Dream*” 75). The same criticism is levelled less frequently at Indian Shakespeare productions that feature an Indian director. For example, Jatinder Varma’s 2005 *Merchant of Venice* for London’s Tara Arts theatre group was uncontroversial; it was set in the Jewish mercantile community in Cochin and including superficial level kathakali elements. Similarly, a kathakali rehearsal framed Roysten Abel’s metatheatrical *Othello, a Play in Black and White* (1999), later remade as the film *In Othello* (2004) (Loomba, “Postcolonial Performance” 132). While these productions are billed as culturally faithful, arguably they also exoticise kathakali, relegating it to the function of a mere cultural backdrop.

The multiplicity of influences on Keralan Shakespeares complicates an attempt to trace their intercultural roots. While Loomba declares that Abel’s 1999 *Othello* was inspired by

Sadanam Balakrishnan's kathakali *Othello*, Abel's interest in Shakespeare also followed his own apprenticeship at the RSC in 1994 (ibid.). Foreign practitioners such as Tim Supple or Maya Thanberg have visited Kerala, directing Shakespeare and providing alternative perspectives. For example, Reghoothaman explained to me that while he did not view Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an allegory for colonialism, "you know, people can interpret [it as such]—because of Caliban—and even in Kerala, somebody did it like that. Maya Thanberg [from Sweden]—there was like a postcolonialist Caliban, from India." Kerala hosts a regular International Theatre Festival, fostering the circulation of influences (and counter-influences) that fit naturally within Kerala's historic interculturalism. In fusing traditions to preserve their vitality and currency, thereby Keralan Shakespeares tap into a complex network of practices and ideas.

These networks constitute the circulation of both externalised, visible Keralan performance elements and less easily identifiable subtle theoretical influences. An example of the latter can be seen in the work of national award-winning actor Atul Kumar. Kumar starred in *Hamlet – The Clown Prince*, an Indian production that toured internationally and reflected a contemporary dystopian aesthetic. This *Hamlet* was performed by clowns, in English and gibberish, with apparently no Keralan theatre elements whatsoever. Yet the director cited his Keralan training as a continual performance inspiration, in discussing his *Piya Behrupiya* for the Company Theatre. This musical adaptation of *Twelfth Night* played at the 2012 Globe Festival, where Kumar declared in our pre-show interview that the training he had received in kathakali and kalarippayattu had underpinned his award-winning work in *Hamlet*. He claimed that after this training,

[R]hythms, gesture, bhava, navarasas, the space, makeup, little details—all sort of got assimilated inside me. Everyone kept saying, “You just spent three years in Kerala; we didn’t see anything [in your work] to do with kathakali or kalari?” [...] The essence of what I’d learned from my gurus had already gone into me; obviously the essence went into my ‘Hamlet as clown.’ It was a Western clown, yet there is hardly anything I as an actor will do that does not have kathakali or kalari in it. (n. pag.)

Atul Kumar’s perspective demonstrates that the transmission of Keralan performance cultures involves both the externalisation of tangible elements and the internalisation of a cultural outlook. Presumably, his application of this training to his Shakespeare performance resonated in India; on its 2009 debut, *Hamlet* swept the Mahindra Excellence Awards, the country’s most prestigious theatre honours. In an era of globalisation, Kumar’s Keralan philosophy of acting has reinscribed Shakespeare performance in Shakespeare’s own former cultural locations. *Hamlet* toured to Warwick Arts Centre in 2011, while Kumar’s own *Piya Behrupiya* played at the Globe in April 2012 before returning home to the Hamara Shakespeare Festival in November 2013. The recurrence of Shakespeares with Keralan elements at particular global locales is a further indication of the field’s rhizomatic interconnectivity. In illustrating this interconnectivity, this section has explored a range of intercultural and intracultural influences on the Abhinaya *Macbeth*. Accordingly, this third chapter next details the Abhinaya team’s perception of their production’s cultural background.

Keralan Shakespeares and “cosmo culture”

The cultural fusion of the *Abhinaya Macbeth* is rooted in Kerala’s intrinsic, progressive interculturalism. Jyotish terms this local outlook a “cosmo culture” that is simultaneously global and indigenous. Whereas Madhu compares Kerala’s cultural heritage to a modifiable knife, and Balakrishnan uses the metaphor of a moving river, Jyotish avers that Kerala’s “living culture also is changing.” In interview, Reghoothaman and Jyotish expanded on their view of Keralan culture. Jyotish declared: “We don’t have a, that kind of *strong* [rigid] culture, it’s a myth, you know [...] culture is not a rigid thing in [Kerala], it’s quite, it’s a kind of a cosmo culture.” Reghoothaman maintained that “in the postmodern world, era [...] it’s very difficult to, that identity, to [define] the cultural identity.” In using Shakespeare to redefine fluid intercultural parameters, the *Abhinaya Macbeth* fits Ric Knowles’ definition of intercultural theatre as a site for the continual renegotiation of cultural values and identities (4). Accordingly, in our interview, the *Abhinaya* team presented the process of directing and enacting *Macbeth* as an interaction with their evolving intercultural heritage, art, and audience.

Reghoothaman spoke of the subtle influence of Kerala’s intercultural heritage on their Malayalam-language production of *Macbeth*. The actor explained to me that even at the level of the language, these influences still linger in the subconscious: “Even the language also, we took so many English words from French, French also—that was during the influence of Arabic culture in Kerala—and the Dutch, also we, we found new names in Malayalam from them.” Reghoothaman presented this exchange as one closer to rhizomatic reciprocity than to postcolonial appropriation, explaining that “the English also took [words] from here.” The actor linked this linguistic exchange to interculturalism: “Likewise, it is a growing, living thing—the language, culture—it is not a stagnant thing. It keeps changing. So that when you—when we do

the production also, unconsciously, all these elements comes [sic].” Reghoothaman’s perspective suggests that he views Keralan Shakespeare as an inheritance of globalisation rather than a postcolonial imposition. Yet his observation elides the obvious fact that it is comparatively difficult for a non-native audience to understand, if not appreciate, an intercultural production that is entirely in the Malayalam language.

Reghoothaman argued, however, that Kerala’s “cultural fusion” rendered such cultural distinctions immaterial in an era of globalisation and immediate digital communication. He averred that “through [the] computer, you can see a lot of things [...], talk to anybody [...], some cosmopolitan cities are here, intercultural. This is immaterial now, to talk about cultures.” In preferring a paradigm of amalgamation, Reghoothaman locates intercultural hybridity as an outdated concept, maintaining that “there is, no, there was a lot of intercultural exploration during the modern era. So I don’t think that is relevant now.” He elaborated, “[Jerzy] Grotowski [...], [Eugenio] Barba, they are all, have been to Kerala to study kutiyattam, kalarippayattu— [Maria Christopher] Byrski, so many people. Richard Schechner...so this [interaction] has [effected] a synthesis [...] the rigidity of classicism and realism—people broke that.” In synthesising this intercultural inheritance, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* validates Bhabha’s aforementioned contention that culture has “no primordial unity or fixity” (*Location 37*). Yet the production outgrows Bhabha’s metaphor of hybridity in its fusion, no longer a straightforward graft or interweaving of two different cultural offshoots.

This fusion is not a deracination; the Malayalam *Macbeth* bears traces of Keralan culture beyond its language, much as Kumar locates his acting in subterranean Keralan roots. Reghoothaman explained to me that by sidestepping a precise historical, geographical or cultural location, the Abhinaya production ideally appealed to a global audience: “Where are

we going to perform? For which audience? Is a question. So [while] in some place[s] we do [it] just for Malayalis [...] it can be enjoyed by Kerala[n] audience[s], or Indian, or European.” Reghoothaman added that “We put it in an international setting” because “traditional theatre is like a museum piece for us.” This flexibility enables Jyotish’s experimental Malayalam theatre production to avoid the pressure faced by Madhu’s and Kannan’s *Macbeths*, which deal with tensions that arise in reinventing traditional cultural codes for postmillennial audiences.

In performing *Macbeth*, however, Reghoothaman faces an identical challenge to Madhu and Kannan in competing with digital entertainment for the attention of contemporary audiences. The postmillennial evolution of audience expectations presents theatre actors and directors with new challenges, whether the drama performed is Shakespeare or other. Keralan theatre audiences once attended productions where the performer spent hours expounding a single section of the plot. Kavalam Panikkar declared that in the twenty-first century, however, “Time is changing, [the audience’s] concept about time is also changing: [they focus for] one-and-a-half hours, per [the former] two-and-a-half to three hours” (interview n. pag.). Balakrishnan summarises an artist’s resultant dilemma, writing that “as we shorten the duration of performances for today’s attention deficient audiences, we must still maintain the power and intensity of the experience” (*Perspective* 94). His generalisation, however, presupposes a homogenous audience.

In discussing *Macbeth*, Jyotish depicted their typical theatre audience as heterogeneous, telling me: “It’s a mix, it’s a mix.” Here Jyotish expanded on the Keralan public, recounting that “most of the people know Shakespeare and everything. And there are people who don’t know about Shakespeare also.” Jyotish suggested that, for a typical Malayali audience member, the perception of Shakespeare differs according to one’s individual level of education:

“*Ellarkkum Shakespeareine arinnyonnamenn illa. Sadharana manushanyu ariyamo chothicchu avarude vishayamalla Shakespeare* [Not everyone is particularly familiar with Shakespeare. If you ask the average man on the street whether he knows of Shakespeare, it’s not his subject]. It’s a kind of academic tradition.” Despite Jyotish’s assertion, Shakespeare is interwoven in contemporary Keralan traditions of politics and entertainment. As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this thesis, theatre artist Sambasivan introduced thousands of Malayalis to Shakespeare’s plots through *kathaprasangam*. As aforementioned, among those who first encountered Shakespeare through Sambasivan’s recitals is Keralan filmmaker Jayaraj, who in turn has disseminated Shakespeare through his film trilogy (Mark Thornton Burnett, *World Cinema* 71). Therefore, the diffused rhizomatic intergrowth of Keralan Shakespeares complicates the idea of a typical Keralan audience.

In describing their audience for *Macbeth*, Jyotish pointed out that “this production is not [...] a commercial production, it’s a kind of experimental work, you know, [...] for theatre festivals.” Accordingly, Reghoothaman differentiated between those audience members “who know about Shakespeare,” and the “ordinary people who don’t know about Shakespeare [but who] will come [anyway], because Abhinaya is producing this play.” He added that for “*Macbeth*, of course there will be some [students], I mean, from college and schools.” Jyotish echoed this distinction between theatre-lovers, students, and the average person, suggesting that “literature students and the theatre students and the theatre goers, *they* know Shakespeare very well. But not the layman.” If a *Macbeth* in Malayalam is aimed at an audience beyond Malayalis, what might be the common denominator? As Jyotish admitted jokingly: “But we know the reality, and we can’t be a Scottish thing.” While neither Jyotish nor Reghoothaman indicated their target audience during our discussion, the director’s statement on the official Abhinaya

website maintains that his *Macbeth* holds a message for the “soulless mob on the run” (n. pag.). Presumably, the production is intended for a global audience.

By divesting their *Macbeth* of specific cultural signifiers, Jyotish’s and Reghoothaman’s claims raise questions regarding the locus of the production’s identity. Jyotish did clarify that the production was intended, “Not for anywhere [in particular].” Moreover, the director maintained that in his play, “the external things are just a sign; [...] the character [of Macbeth] is a psychological state, [...] self questioning self.” Despite his assertion, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* exists in a cultural fusion rather than a cultural vacuum. While the Abhinaya *Macbeth*’s three central characters represent the Freudian psyche, the production team’s surrounding cosmopolitan culture still represents a culture.

In effacing cultural signifiers, Jyotish purposefully replaced elements in *Macbeth* that might have aligned with the sacred Hindu arts in their tradition of ritual and magical possession. In transforming Macbeth from a “hell-hound” (5.10.5) who has served a dark “angel” (5.10.14), Jyotish renegotiated the character as an antihero and Everyman in a Marxist allegory against greed. Correspondingly, Jyotish emphasised the angels and demons of the conscience over those of the cosmos. Similarly, Laura Kolb sees *Macbeth* as an exemplar of supernatural “Shakespearean drama, [which] when it thinks with demons, locates them in the psychological and not the cosmological realm” (347-348). Accordingly, Jyotish substituted the Hindu circle of karmic morality for *Macbeth*’s “overtly medieval Catholic” binary of heaven and hell and its Fate or the Weird Sisters (Harold Bloom 518). The director’s apocalyptic vision echoes that of Indian critic R. A. Malagi, who sees *Macbeth* as “the great drama of spiritual disaster” (542). Yet Jyotish reinserted those very props of the morality play that “Shakespeare shuns,” such as “the good and the bad angels” (ibid.). Through this device, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* retained “the

old theme of the contest of Vice and Virtue for the soul of man” (Thomas Marc Parrott 21). The next section of this chapter investigates these themes further, looking in depth at the Abhinaya production and its underlying directorial choices.

The Abhinaya Theatre *Macbeth*: visual metaphor and dark poetry

The third section of this chapter makes an in-depth study of the Abhinaya Theatre’s production of *Macbeth*. Sponsored by the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), this *Macbeth* toured India following its January 2009 premiere in Kerala’s capital city of Thiruvananthapuram. In undertaking a case study of this production, I refer to primary evidence including production photographs, the official website of the Abhinaya theatre collective, and my first-person interview with Jyotish and Reghoothaman. In this third section I also reference critical literature including monographs, articles, performance reviews, and the texts of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in the original English and in Malayalam translation. These sources are analysed against the qualitative data gained in interviewing these Abhinaya practitioners.

In studying the Abhinaya production, I investigate the strategies used by the director and actor to translate what they term *Macbeth*’s “dark poetry” into their “visual metaphor” of bloody men and black and white angels. Accordingly, this section interrogates the concurrent transformation of the protagonists into psychological entities. Through this transposition, *Macbeth*’s occult trio is replaced with the new shadowy, Freudian tripartite of the Id, Ego and Superego (Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and Banquo, respectively). Here I evaluate the choices made by director and actor in transforming the Shakespearean tragedy from the textual dimension into the realms of the corporeal, psychological, and metaphysical. Additionally, this third case study examines how the Abhinaya *Macbeth* fuses Shakespearean drama with

postmodern Malayalam theatre and Sanskrit performance traditions. Jyotish's directorial treatment thereby represents an alternate model to Madhu's subsumption of the Shakespearean text in cultural translation or Kannan's parallel rendering of *Macbeth* in textual collaboration. Accordingly, this third case study highlights a different model of interculturalism from those foregrounded in Chapters One and Two, thereby seeking to gain a more rounded view of postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares.

The performance of *Macbeth* detailed here took place on 11 February 2011 at Kalakshetra, Chennai, a very traditional classical setting for a postmodern theatre production. The setting for the Abhinaya *Macbeth* hints immediately at the incongruities inherent in hybrid, experimental postmodern Indian theatre. The performance profiled here took place at the same instalment of the Hamara Shakespeare festival that hosted Madhu's *Macbeth*. Unlike Madhu's outdoor performance, at Kalakshetra the Abhinaya *Macbeth* took place indoors on a proscenium stage. The two-hour performance of Jyotish's production was attended by a full audience of approximately one hundred people.⁶⁵ The Abhinaya *Macbeth*'s set foregrounded a bare stage, with a ramp stage right, two long stairs across the back, and several digital screens above the whole. These screens functioned to reinforce the textual imagery, translating Shakespearean metaphor into surreal and bloody visuals. The IFA website notes this "use of multimedia in live performance, which is uncommon on the modern Malayalam stage" ("Jyotish M. G."). Jyotish stated that his use of digital screens represented a brief period of creative experimentation: "Now[adays] I am not using that video—but in the beginning I used that. Because, you know, just I explore the contemporary theatre element[s]." In contrast to the screens in Ong Keng Sen's

⁶⁵ Unless otherwise specified, my description of the Abhinaya *Macbeth* is taken from the Prakriti Foundation's recording of the 11 February 2011 performance at Kalakshetra.

Desdemona, these digitals functioned to augment rather than dislocate the Shakespearean text, adding an enhanced dimension.



Figure 15: The set for *Macbeth*, photograph © The Abhinaya Theatre.

Here, *Macbeth*'s musical score fused a plaintive Indian drone with an electronic beat resembling that of a film thriller chase scene, evoking both a melancholic uncertainty and a martial urgency. In order to rise over this amplified resonance, the vocals and electronic harmonium keyboard sound effects required a microphone, a common feature of contemporary Keralan theatre productions. The Abhinaya *Macbeth* featured stark red-and-white lighting that alternately left the stage dim or in darkness. The set's primary visual elements included the use of a tricolour black-white-red palette, and the set foregrounded flat display surfaces such as mirrors and screens. The digital screens looped white, red, and black images, alternating a pair

of bloodshot eyes with a single prostrate man, a flock of doves taking wing, and a pair of bloody hands washing compulsively, in an endless and unavailing attempt to cleanse themselves.

The overall effect of surreal poetry was completed by four full-length mirrors that were held by invisible hands, which rotated the mirrors horizontally or vertically accordingly to reflect Macbeth as he stood or stretched out at full length on the floor. A largely silent chorus of angels consisted of ominous, hooded figures draped in white or black, alternating with bare-chested men wearing white or black angel wings and Y-fronts. These enigmatic characters crossed the stage with drooping heads, replacing the witches and hissing prophecies at *Macbeth* during moments of crucial decision. At sporadic intervals, three bare-chested men in tight red half-trousers marched across the stage choppily, often walking backwards like automatons. In a nod to Keralan performance forms, these phantom warriors alternated modern dance movements with kalarippayattu body rotations. Occasionally, these figures waved lit candelabra in circular ritual benedictions, lending the set a supernatural overtone.

In discussing *Macbeth*'s setting, Jyotish ascribed his inspiration to the influence of the original Shakespearean text, "What inspires me the most, the most, the inspiration is poetry [...] it's a kind of a dark poetry, you can call [it], *Macbeth*." To interpret this poetry, the director elaborated, he chose to change text into image and linguistic into visual metaphor: "You know, I am transferring the literature, the Shakespeare literature, into a visual language. Not in a narrative way, but in a very artistic way." Jyotish's production, unlike Madhu's and Kannan's *Macbeths*, employed a large portion of the Shakespearean text in Malayalam translation. While the production truncated *Macbeth*'s narrative, it featured scenes of the initial prophecy (1.3), Lady Macbeth's unsexing (1.5), and her incitement of Macbeth (1.5, 1.7); the dagger hallucination and the aftermath of Duncan's murder (2.1, 2.2); Macbeth's visions of Banquo's

ghost and royal progeny (3.4, 4.1); Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking (5.1); and Macbeth's disillusion and resignation (5.5). In its retention of a basic Shakespearean plot, Jyotish's production differs from Madhu's and Kannan's skeletal versions of *Macbeth*. Yet these artists' directorial visions align in their collective translation of the Shakespearean text into visual metaphor. Accordingly, Jyotish's methodology allowed the production not only to transcend linguistic distinctions for a "universal" audience, but also to showcase visual and dramatic performance elements.

Jyotish explained that his visual interpretation of *Macbeth*'s "dark poetry" began with their set, reflecting both physical and psychological darkness through surreal, mirrored imagery. He elaborated that his play "begins like, it's a very constructed kind of psychological reality, of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, floating...against [...] each other, [...] in a dark space, it's a very dark space, they are washing their hands, eh? like a mirror, they are sitting like a mirror [...], it's not a literal interpretation, but it's giving [the production] a surreal kind of imagery." Here, Jyotish used the mirror imagery primarily to provide a sense of extension rather than distortion. The mirrors worked to evoke an unnerving multiplicity and infinity, simultaneously of physical space and of inner consciousness.

In the *Abhinaya Macbeth*, these mirrors added a new dimension to both the stage and the main characters, providing extra contrast between dark and light and illuminating corners of the playing space and of the psyche. As Jyotish explained, "the mirror works like, kind of, you know, the self, and its contradictions." He elaborated, "So, the interpretation is like, it is a confusion, the human state is like Macbeth[']s state. So, he is in between his ego and superego. [...] So, I decided to do it in [...] a neutral, empty space, with a simple ramp, and a level. [...] It is a black-and-white space, basically." The director's use of mirror imagery was rooted in

Lacanian tradition, according to Jyotish: “It represents, like it’s a kind of a Lacanian thing—you know that, kind of a...it’s basically talking about the self. You know. These are, all that, is a reflection of the self. You know this Id, Id, Ego, and the Superego.” Although Jyotish cites his interpretation as deriving from Lacanian psychoanalysis, the theme of the universal reflecting the individual is common to Hindu philosophy as well (as can be seen, for example, in the cosmological structure of the kuttampalam described in Chapter One).

Thus, Jyotish’s metaphysical *Macbeth* reflected and extended the third space produced by its hybrid cultural origins. The production visuals displayed multiple potentialities that muddied its dynamic beyond a clear-cut, black-white/yin-yang dichotomy. Jyotish maintained that “When I am designing a play, it’s not just for the, Kerala, it’s for the universe, you know [...]. There’s a very strong visual language [that universally] can communicate.” Jyotish clarified that the set’s apparent binaric design hinted at the opposite, rather exploring the grey areas of morality by contrasting these against a photonegative fair/foul worldview. The director explained that the antitheses in the original Shakespearean text presented him with a hook into *Macbeth*’s themes of moral ambiguity and its shades of humanity.⁶⁶ Jyotish’s realisation of these concepts translated into a set design that represented not only a black-white colour scheme, but also the grey area in between light and dark. Accordingly, *Macbeth*’s poetry of ambiguity presented him with the recurrent visual metaphor of a slippery, overlapping miscibility: “*Punyamaya pakam / pakamaya punyam* [“Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.10)], this confusion—you know, what is fair, what is foul, mixing [...]. Throughout the play, it’s like

⁶⁶ Arguably, these shades are latent in Shakespeare’s own source text for *Macbeth*, based primarily on Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (Martin Wiggins, 287). Of Duncan and Macbeth respectively, Holinshed records that “the people wished the inclinations and maners of these two cousins to haue beene so tempered and interchangeable bestowed betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, and the other of crueltie, the meane vertue betwixt these two extremities might haue reigned by indifferent partition in them both” [sic] (*Volume V* 265).

a chant. So, we are transferring that spirit of the literature into a big visual feast.” His transference of textual to visual elements not only allowed Jyotish to create a transferable production but additionally enabled him to experiment creatively with the Shakespearean source while unhindered by preserving its textual integrity.

Reghoothaman and Jyotish cited other intercultural influences on their *Macbeth*, explaining that their set concept owed much to [Edward] Gordon Craig’s aesthetic ideals. Jyotish told me: “My biggest inspiration was Gordon Craig, Craig, Craig, you know, we call [him] the father of the modern theatre [...]. He put [forth] the concept of ‘total theatre.’” Here Jyotish elaborated on his use of Craig to illustrate *Macbeth*’s inherent ambiguity, averring that “for me, life is not just human beings—life is colours, levels, music, everything, you know [...] so life is total, it’s not just one. So this is my basic concept, you know, that we should accept, all life.” It is ironic that Craig inspired the design of a non-traditional programme that investigates the human psyche in accepting “all life.” Christopher Balme claims that Craig is among those designers who turned repeatedly to forms such as kathakali, in looking for models of “stylized, anti-naturalistic, and non-dialogic” theatre forms to act as “counter models” to European “psychologically focused drama” (16). Balme’s assertion is contradicted, however, in Vasudha Dalmia’s declaration that Craig “tended to regard Asiatic traditions as static and monolithic,” and “remained faithful to what he considered as setting forth European practice” (284). Perhaps Jyotish’s use of Craig represented an intentionally fragmented rhizomatic deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Indian theatre practice in the twenty-first century.

Reflecting the director’s vision of universality and complexity, the Abhinaya *Macbeth*’s costumes were intentionally hybrid in design, evoking an aesthetic both Western and Eastern. The director described this design as representing “a type of period costume. That’s the same

period like 15...the *Macbeth* period. It has some reference to it.”⁶⁷ Thus, the Abhinaya production’s set and costumes echoed *Macbeth*’s textual themes of dark and light as well as its historical setting. While evoking the dress of Jacobean England in its costume design, *Macbeth*’s aesthetic simultaneously represented Jyotish’s attempt to transcend the English text through transforming it into a universally intelligible visual language, including royal robes, loincloths, hoods, and angel wings. This mixed design aesthetic evokes other hybrid intercultural Keralan productions, such as the chavittu natakam dance drama based on the European mystery and miracle plays originally brought to Kerala by the Portuguese (as described in the introductory chapter of this thesis). In its fusion, Jyotish’s *Macbeth* possibly demonstrates thematic and scenic ideas inherited from such local intercultural encounters, reflecting the production’s mixed colonial and postmodern influences. Accordingly, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* transcends a postcolonial label in its complexity of cultural fusion. The next section investigates this complexity further, examining the production’s relocation of the supernatural to the realms of ritual and the psychological.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth*: black and white morality, red mortality

By reducing the characters in *Macbeth* to the components and perceptions of his psyche, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* relocated the supernatural primarily to the region of the psychological. Correspondingly, the production’s colour scheme suggested a directorial vision of Macbeth’s personal heaven and hell, where black and white represented evil and virtue, respectively. In this universe, the aforementioned apparitions of Macbeth’s conscience floated across the background wordlessly, wearing wings or draped in hooded garments resembling those of

⁶⁷ Jyotish here referred to the Shakespearean play, whose authorship Martin Wiggins dates to approximately 1606; in his *Chronicles*, Raphael Holinshed dates Macbeth’s death to 1057 (*Volume V*, page 277).

Benedictine monks or Ku Klux Klan figures. Jyotish articulated this conceptualisation: “And the witches [...] I conceived [of them] like, black and white. So there are angels, like, black and white angels are there.” In reifying the production’s emphasis on morality and prophecy, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* transformed the three witches into the bright and dark angels of the conscience, multiplying and externalising the proverbial angel and devil on one’s shoulders. In Jyotish’s vision, these angels functioned as embodied poles of foulness and fairness in a moral universe of absolutes.



Figure 16: White, hooded figures, *Macbeth*, photograph © The Abhinaya Theatre.

His production’s black and white figures, Jyotish clarified, represented the black-and-white attitude of contemporary religious society in its rigid interpretation of morality: “So, people used to conceive [of] life, like, black and white. Like there is ‘right,’ and there is ‘wrong.’ There is no other colour. [...] [their] religion is, always lies in between, or [in] living in between, right and wrong. But [...] we cannot limit life like that. Life is more than that. There are, in

between, a lot of colours, and there is, a lot of confusions are there.” In reconfiguring *Macbeth* as a humanist parable, effectively, Jyotish’s vision fuses Lacanian philosophy with figures from the morality play tradition to illustrate Macbeth’s inner chaos.

Jyotish’s physical depiction of the protagonist’s inner struggle echoes Madhu’s and Kannan’s emphasis on externalising Macbeth’s tortured internal monologue. Such an externalisation offers these artists the opportunity to elaborate on the character’s bhavas and evoke rasa. In communicating his directorial vision of Macbeth’s psychological struggle, Jyotish conveyed his own philosophy of life’s moral complexity:

So religion—if a, basically, it’s a, it is a struggle between the black and white—he [Macbeth] is in between them. In between them. So, there are also a lot of other images, like they [the Macbeths] are also washing their hands. And that, angels [are] also washing their hands. This, black and white angels, this kind of—these mirrors, these black and white angels, and it’s in between—these confusions are happening.

Thus, in Jyotish’s *Macbeth* these straggling black and white angels functioned as external manifestations of the moral perplexity of a protagonist ultimately misled by the “illusion of the diuell [devil]” (Raphael Holinshed 277). Consequently, despite his emphasis on the play’s shades of greyness, Jyotish averred that *Macbeth* was a play in which darkness dominated:

So the colour of the, *Macbeth*, so, when we read the play, what is the colour of the play? That is a very big question [...] how we interpret [it]. Not as a

statement, but [in] a very subtle way, how can we add colour and thing[s]? So, [our chosen] basic colour was black. Like the...dark, dark black. So, white is there, but black—it is dominated by black.

Clearly, this dominant tone of darkness functioned as a reflection of the blackness that dominated Macbeth's soul.

In addition to its focus on black and white, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* utilised carmine as a third, central colour.⁶⁸ Jyotish stated that he employed the colour red to attract the audience's attention and provoke an emotional response, stating, "So that is a *provoking*, the most provoking colour [sic]." In Jyotish's *Macbeth*, the colour red functioned to typify the play's "bloody business" (2.1.48). In physicalising this business, Jyotish's artistic strategy recalls Madhu's animation of Duncan's vengeful blood-drops, dramatising the Shakespearean imagery the better to highlight the pricks of Macbeth's conscience. Here, Jyotish's reimagining animated *Macbeth*'s bloodstains through modern dance choreography: "here are three other choreographing [sic] pieces, piece[s] of blood, dancing of the blood, something like that." Similarly, Jyotish used red to accentuate Lady Macbeth's guilt, cloaking her in the colour: "Lady Macbeth is wearing blood [...] [in] my imagination, the costume would [be] like blood." In this connection, Reghoothaman pointed out that the bloody visuals on the screen, such as the bloody hands attempting vainly to wash themselves, reiterated the visual metaphor of Lady Macbeth's costume: "And, the hands are always like that, and she is wearing [that colour]." By fusing the textual narrative with visual metaphor and physical language, Jyotish expanded

⁶⁸ Arguably, this colour combination is common to postmillennial reimaginings of *Macbeth*, as evidenced by the red-white-black cover design of Justin Kurzel's 2015 titular film adaptation and the similar colour scheme of the official website for Jayaraj's forthcoming filmic version, *Veeram*.

Shakespeare's Scottish Play into a postmodern parable for "the soulless mob" (*Abhinaya* n. pag.). Evoking a sense of pervasive, collective guilt, the production manifested and reinforced the Macbeths' bloody consciences, externalising and universalising the inner eyewitness.

While Jyotish emphasised visualising the Shakespearean "dark poetry" through the use of digital media, production design, and choreography, the director exploited the music of the Shakespearean poetry equally in Malayalam translation. Jyotish declared that his version of *Macbeth* was not faithful to the Shakespearean plot, which the director claimed he "changed completely." Jyotish explained that his reworked plot "revolves around three characters—like, Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, Banquo," and he stated "I took out most of the dialogue—the[ir] monologues were [retained]." Jyotish's strategy thus directly contrasts with Kannan's, who deliberately avoided including entire soliloquies in his *Macbeth*, focusing instead on the imagery. Despite Jyotish's declaration, his production excised several of these monologues, while omitting entire characters such as Macduff and Malcolm.

These alterations refocused *Macbeth*'s narrative on the titular character by creating a triangle of his closest relationships, functioning as multiple selves. The production note on the IFA website underlines this intention, stating: "the adaptation will explore facets of the psyche of Macbeth, his internal conflicts, multiple personalities, fears, anguish, and greed for power. The psychological complexities of the central characters will also be explored through the monologues of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Banquo" ("Jyotish M. G."). In setting the play's monologues, Jyotish's selection was also driven by the extent of the director's familiarity with the English text. Jyotish stated, "I've read the monologues in English—not the whole play, but I read more [of it in] Malayalam...But I—I have read certain monologues...like the, 'Fair is foul and foul is fair' like that... 'If it were done...then 'twere best / It were done quickly' [sic]"

(1.1.10; 1.7.1-2).⁶⁹ This dialogue was uttered dramatically, in a poetic and semi-formal translation that appeared largely faithful to the text, even if the lines were chopped, rearranged, and occasionally reattributed. This fragmentation was ironic in a production that was positioned as an experimental fusion. While the director declared he had aimed the production at international audiences, its Malayalam script represents an inherent contradiction, hinting at a regional insularity of outlook that complicates the production's interculturalism.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth*'s juxtaposition of translated text with intermedial visual metaphor was not inherently incongruous in its experimental fusion. However, Jyotish fragmented the Shakespearean script in realigning it with Macbeth's disintegrating, splintering psyche. Accordingly, Jyotish's directorial deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of *Macbeth*'s text disjointed the play's narrative trajectory, rendering it potentially additionally confusing for one unfamiliar with the Malayalam language. Conversely, Jyotish appropriated a Shakespearean play that is comparatively familiar to a Keralan audience, freeing the director to experiment with a well-known story. As Jyotish explained: "It is a story that the audience already knows, and you don't have to follow the original narrative. It gives you the freedom to go deep into the elements that interests you more [sic]. You could express your experience of reading the play and this re-interpretation could be interesting." His perception of the audience's familiarity with *Macbeth* possibly encouraged the director to foreground the artistic elaboration of the play's emotional narrative over the exposition of its plot. As described on the IFA website, the Abhinaya *Macbeth*

⁶⁹ Here Jyotish referred to the witches' chant (1.1.10), rather than Macbeth's "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.36).

will not be concerned with the gradual buildup of the text nor the narration of the story of the tragic hero but with creating “stage poetry” to express the deep desires and thoughts on the plight of human existence explored in the original text. It will not deliver on the moral of Macbeth’s story, but [...] [it] intends to provoke the spectators’ deep emotions. (“Jyotish M. G.”)

The same directorial focus on eliciting *rasa* through performativity can be seen in the Keralan *Macbeths* highlighted in the preceding two case studies, indicating a latent intracultural connection between these three different productions. Despite Jyotish’s declared intent to avoid delivering a moral, his production foregrounds the ethical concerns of the conscience, echoing the central preoccupation of the *kutiyattam* and *kathakali Macbeths*.

The directors of these three Keralan Shakespeares privilege similar aspects of *Macbeth*. In staging the play’s bloody business, these directors physicalise its preoccupation with the concept of murderous intent, contingent on shifts of conscience. Accordingly, the *Abhinaya Macbeth* “puts aside the sociopolitical perspective of Macbeth, and observes the chemical play of [the] fundamental human nature of concerns, deep desires and greed that don on [sic] the stage of [the] conscious and subconscious mind of human beings” (*Abhinaya* n. pag.). To illustrate these human concerns, Jyotish attempts to fuse symbols from multiple cultures into universal visual codes. By using a comparatively familiar international work such as *Macbeth* as a medium, Jyotish’s production disseminates these codes across wider rhizomatic networks of intercultural intelligibility. To illustrate Jyotish’s dramatisation of the concerns of the human conscious and subconscious, the next section considers his transposition of *Macbeth*’s physical figures to psychological constructs.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth*: Freudian and Marxist influences

Jyotish's reconstitution of the Shakespearean narrative altered not only the details of *Macbeth*'s plot but also its central character dynamics. In replacing the play's supernatural triad with a new power triangle, underpinned by Freudian psychology, this directorial interpretation relocated fate and evil from the cosmos to the conscience. In Jyotish's vision, the "play progresses through the conspiracies of the characters" (ibid.). Accordingly, Jyotish termed his conceptualisation "a kind of a Freudian way of looking at lives, you know. Like Id, Ego and Superego. [...] Superego is, like Banquo. It's a kind of a social consciousness. About—and Id is like Lady Macbeth, and Macbeth is in between them." Similarly, the Abhinaya website states that the company's production is concerned primarily "with the pshychological [sic] realms of the central character, Macbeth" (n. pag.). In this reimagining, the central characters are "Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Banquo, these in tern [sic] being mere reflection[s] of Macbeth himself" (ibid.). Here, Macbeth functioned as the Ego, while his wife represented Sigmund Freud's "psychical id, unknown and unconscious, upon whose surface rests the ego" (17). Similarly, Banquo became the Superego, one who was not a king but who remained equally royal in his own right.

Jyotish's framing of Macbeth's inner struggle echoes Freud's depiction of the human psyche. Freud writes: "Helpless in both directions, the ego defends itself vainly, alike against the instigations of the murderous id and against the reproaches of the punishing conscience" (54). Concurrently, Jyotish's vision differs from that of Terry Eagleton, who posits that in *Macbeth*, "the witches feature as the 'unconscious' of the play, that which must be exiled and repressed as dangerous but which always returns with a vengeance" (2). Consequently, in Jyotish's version *Macbeth*'s central trinity was no longer formed of three witches but constituted

a psychological tripartite of competing desires: base ambition, impartial rationality, and higher morality. The director's Freudian concept physicalised Macbeth's inner demons, evocative of Ewan Fernie's suggestion that "even as he attempted to demystify the mind, Freud couldn't help himself from finding demons that lurked there" (*Demonic* 239). However, Jyotish's view departed from Freud's statement that "we see this same ego as a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego" (56). Instead, here all three of Macbeth's dangers came from his inner world, with the third threat represented by his own ego.

In Jyotish's reimagining, hybridising Freudian psychology with a Marxist worldview, Macbeth became a totem character, an Everyman of the universal psyche. In acting Macbeth, Reghoothaman added that overall, he considered the protagonist not a tyrant but "a human being." Jyotish clarified that Macbeth's plight represented: "the human situation. He is confused. We are, I think, the human beings are in this middle, you know. The Id is there, and the Superego is there; we, we are in between [them]." While reorienting Shakespeare towards the morality play tradition that lingers in *Macbeth's* original script, Jyotish's cultural fusion replaced mankind with a collective psyche. Jyotish's concept recalls John Wayne's view of Macbeth as "swallowing and absorbing" others' attitudes and motivations, establishing a "sort of Freudian identification" with the play's other characters (84). For Wayne, these characters are the witches; for Jyotish, these others are Lady Macbeth and Banquo. Alternatively, Wayne considers that Macbeth's "profoundly disturbed psyche" may manifest these characters, symbolic of the "murky, unexplored regions of the human mind" (*ibid.*). Arguably, Jyotish's *Macbeth* represents both of these possibilities simultaneously.

In interview, the lead actor Reghoothaman elaborated on his interpretation of Macbeth's motivation, stating: "I am approaching this character psychologically." Reghoothaman continued, "you know, when you analyse the character, there are three ways of analysing, three levels: [the] [...] sociological analysis of the character; psychological analysis of the character, and physiological [analysis of the] character, how he, his body should be, how he moves." Reghoothaman explained that he rooted Macbeth's physicality in his conception of the Shakespearean protagonist as a "warrior [...] not a schoolteacher." However, Reghoothaman sought outside the Shakespearean text for his psychological analysis.

In aligning Macbeth's motivation with Freudian psychology, Reghoothaman conceived of his character as one whose "ambition is to become a king, and, maybe instigated by his wife; [...] critical [here], you know, the Id, his wife. [...] Maybe [she is] his alter ego, Id." Similarly, Reghoothaman imagined that Macbeth's marriage was rooted in ambition rather than seduction, a desire to better his social status: "Maybe in the [Shakespearean] text this may not be not there [...]. [Lady Macbeth] may be upper-class, she is [from] an aristocratic family. And Macbeth have a, ambition to come on power [sic]. [...] So it's from his marriage also, [he] got married to Lady Macbeth so that, it is a first stepping stone to [be] consider[ed] as a[n] aristocrat, though he is an army man." Thus, Reghoothaman located Macbeth's ambition for power in a desire that is both conscious and unconscious; the actor combined Freudian and Marxist philosophy in framing Macbeth's ambition against a class struggle. Reghoothaman's perspective indicates the hybrid eclecticism of his own contemporary postmillennial Keralan culture.

In portraying Macbeth's desire to kill Duncan, Reghoothaman correlated the character's ambition for the crown with the ambition for social mobility seen in his own Keralan countrymen. The actor explained that Macbeth: "wants power and you know, a lot of people

[would] like to be a, IAS officer, or [get] a, big post. And, they just, they just want that office only. To be, I mean, prime minister's private secretary, or, become a prime minister, whatever. But they don't...for that, they may not be... [ready] to kill somebody, or, to obtain that. But that ambition is that." In equating the ambition found in Keralan society with that of Macbeth, the actor's perspective highlights Macbeth's human plight rather than his aristocratic tyranny. Such a reading angles Macbeth towards victimhood rather than villainy. In Reghoothaman's presentist reconception, *Macbeth* becomes a means of illustrating the contemporary human condition, and acts as a warning of the tyranny and devilry of the psyche.

Thus, the Abhinaya production of *Macbeth* transfigured Shakespeare across several dimensions, foregrounding a postmodernist vision that equates to a Marxist humanism. The production relocated *Macbeth*'s demons and angels from the cosmos to the conscience, adding daggers to the mind (2.1.38). This *Macbeth* spattered the blood of kings across the physical stage and onto the digital screen. Transcending Bhabha's metaphorical third space of the stairwell in its complex fusion of ideas and media, Jyotish's postmillennial *Macbeth* opens a third eye. This new perspective provides a window on Shakespeare and functions as a portal to a metaphysical dimension beyond the heaven-earth-hell cosmology.

In this *Macbeth* of imagination, the metaphysical power struggle took place between Nature and the Otherworld, or Macbeth and his Lady as alter egos. These divisions of the protagonist's worse and better human natures fought each other for survival. In dramatising the Ego's slow psychological surrender to the Id, Jyotish attributed his creative inspiration to the original Shakespearean poetry. In particular, the director quoted the lines in 5.5.25-26, stating that for stating that for Macbeth, life "is a tale / Told by an idiot.' [...] Because for him, you know 'life is a tale' [pre-written fate], because you know, because we can't control our life,

most of the times, you know, the, nature itself.” Here, Jyotish paralleled nature with human nature, opining that “Nature is the most powerful thing, yes it is actually—because you know, it [the tale of *Macbeth*] is a fight between the, nature also, you know, nature is [fighting] itself.” Jyotish’s description of nature was evocative of an ungovernable force that could be embraced and abhorred alternately. The director’s exposition of nature recalled the supernatural occurrences in *Macbeth*: “Nature has some laws; we can’t escape from that. Because these are, these are big spirits—there are black spirits! And, you know, the biggest black magicians can control that [force] also, you know; it’s not like, [nature is] very good. Nature is not like that. Once, you enter into the, that area. Then only you can know the, evil...” In Jyotish’s production, the forces of nature were often amoral and inherently mutable. This shadowing of nature functioned to mitigate rather than enhance Macbeth’s own evil nature, positioning him as victim rather than villain.

The depiction of Macbeth as a victim of ambition is not unique to Keralan productions, hinting at rhizomatic intracultural connections between adaptations of *Macbeth* for neighbouring performance forms. In B. V. Karanth’s 1979 Hindi production of *Macbeth* for the Karnataka folk art of yakshagana, Shakespeare’s title was changed to *Barnam Vana* [*Birnam Wood*] for, as the director saw it, the play was about the “the labyrinthine jungle of ambition that snares and destroys Macbeth” in its tangled web of illusion, or “*maya-jaal*” (Poonam Trivedi, “Folk Shakespeare” 184). Similarly, Reghoothaman’s portrayal of Macbeth remained unusually sympathetic, albeit a reconception that was less drastic than Madhu’s inverted depiction of the protagonist as a “very nice man.” Reghoothaman stated of Macbeth that “he was, I mean, apt, like all human beings, he wants power in order to live as an individual, [so that people] should consider him as a hero. So, hero[ic status] is what he lacks most in the

narrative.” Reghoothaman clarified that in portraying Macbeth as an average man, the actor mirrored not only his own contemporary Keralan society but also his personal intercultural reality:

So, for each character, they’ve got to have a very realistic... But [...] my realism and your, may not be your realism; [...] my realism is connected with my environment. So I have to start from my reality, and explore, what is happening all over the, Europe, when I travel in France [...], I will take [all this] into account, when I analyse the character.

By incorporating experiences from his own European travels, including his residency with Footsbarn Theatre, Reghoothaman’s portrayal of Macbeth exploited rhizomatic intercultural networks through which creative ideas circulate. In gathering inspiration from Europe, revisiting Shakespeare’s original geographical region, and adding his own experience of contemporary Keralan society, Reghoothaman’s representation of Macbeth amalgamated a wide variety of cultural influences.

By repositioning Macbeth as the common man, and privileging an imperfect, human confusion over unrealistic, black-and-white standards of religious morality, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* displayed a directorial preoccupation with Marxist philosophy. Jyotish declared that in a contemporary capitalist society predicated on economics, money became the standard that dictated one’s decisions: “Right and wrong, these things, those are decided by [...] If you take— [Marxism], actually, the moral concept decides, deciding the politics. [...] If we took [away] the money, you know, there is some other system will come, naturally. Now, the money is

deciding everything. You know, morality, everything is deciding, by money [sic].” In differentiating Marxism from postcolonial theory, Subir Sinha and Rashmi Varma argue that the former “provides an overarching analysis of capitalist society” while the latter focuses “on deconstructing what it considers to be the overarching power of Western capitalism, imperialism and ‘modernity’” (3). Accordingly, Jyotish’s production represents a reaction against capitalist society rather than modernity. His declaration notwithstanding, the director averred that his *Macbeth* represented a creative rather than political production.

Despite Jyotish’s admission of the political view underlying his artistic conception, the director insisted that his production avoided leaving the audience with a moral that closed it to alternative interpretations. Jyotish elaborated that “these are [multiple] interpretations [but] [...] people can watch [the play] as a, *Macbeth*. It’s not a forced one, it’s not a statement—it’s not a direct statement [sic].” The Abhinaya *Macbeth*, however, represents a very overt indirect statement; although the site explicitly claims that the production “will not deliver on the moral of Macbeth’s story” its message was evident to a spectator (“Jyotish M. G.” n. pag.). The website states that “This play is structured more as a ritual, a psychological saga [...]. This surreal poetry on stage intends to provoke the spectator to touch the deep image [within].” The website leaves it to the reader’s imagination as to the constitution of this image. However, in the Abhinaya production the lead actor and director unpacked their unambiguous vision of *Macbeth*—featuring the protagonist’s ambition to gain social status at the cost of his soul—as a Marxist moral for humanity. In realigning religious morality with the human conscience, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* represents a larger movement in postmillennial Indian theatre, transitioning from Hinduism to humanism. In analysing this transition, the next section examines the directorial reversal of the Shakespearean plot, in keeping Macbeth alive.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth*: rewriting Shakespearean tragedy

In experimenting with *Macbeth*, Jyotish rewrote the Shakespearean plot, presumably to enhance any perceived parallels with Freudian psychology. Jyotish's strategy paralleled Madhu's and Kannan's approaches, in beginning *Macbeth* in the middle of the Shakespearean narrative and ending the action before Macbeth's death. However, while the kutiyattam version recapitulated *Macbeth*'s narrative arc, and *Macbeth Chollyattam* retained a segment of the Shakespearean plot intact, Jyotish's postmodern production followed a disjointed narrative trajectory. All three of these Keralan versions concluded with Macbeth's collapse, rather than dramatising his death. Yet in the *Abhinaya Macbeth*, his collapse was precipitated neither by guilt nor by fear, but by the awareness of his impending psychological isolation. Jyotish echoed Madhu's emphasis on Macbeth's psychological destruction after the loss of his better half, with Jyotish declaring of his production that "The play ends with the death of Lady Macbeth." Correspondingly, in the *Abhinaya* version, Macbeth descended into madness upon losing his wife and co-conspirator, who had retained her command of his psyche until her suicide.

The *Abhinaya Macbeth* opened immediately after Duncan's murder, foregrounding the moment of the Macbeths' moral fall and highlighting their collective guilty psyche. In foreshadowing Lady Macbeth's guilt-ridden suicide, the double screen juxtaposed the image of bloody hands washing vainly with the refrain of laments repeated by Macbeth and his wife as they lay in darkness, mirroring each other. This refrain consisted of fragments of the Shakespearean text, collated into a continuum of guilt. To a recorded score of ominous drums and brooding strings, Macbeth lamented, "*Ah kaazhcha*" ("This is a sorry sight") (2.2.18) while his wife bemoaned her perpetually bloodstained hands (5.1.41). As the pair of figures gradually became discernible, a white, barefoot angel crisscrossed the stage with its head and wings

drooping, as if lamenting the fall of man (and woman). Simultaneously, three warriors jerked and pivoted their way across the stage in a choreographed, disjointed modern dance. These dancers' synchronised kalarippayattu rotations, along with the rising score, lent the scene an unnerving sense of ritual incantation.

The atmospheric drum crescendo hinted at the conscious manifestation of metaphysical forces, as Lady Macbeth exited and Banquo and four figures in white hooded robes appeared upstage. Macbeth rose to a seated position as the play's action jumped to the prophecy scene of 1.3, and the apparitions hissed bits of *Macbeth's* text in Malayalam translation: "*Praname; swagatham*" ("Hail; greetings") and "*Swagatham, Banquo, swagatham*" ("Greetings, Banquo, welcome") (1.3.66).⁷⁰ Having delivered their revelation to Macbeth and Banquo, which remained faithful in translation to the Shakespearean text, the hooded figures raised their hands in apparent benediction and disappeared offstage. Banquo departed the scene, leaving Macbeth musing on his vision of the "*pretam*" (apparition). Muttering "*Athra nallathavan kazhiyunnilla*" ("Cannot be ill, cannot be good") (1.3.130), Macbeth slipped back into a slumber of unconsciousness, spotlit in silence, until the drums began again. Upstage, a wall of mirrors appeared, held by invisible hands. This wall parted to reveal Lady Macbeth, who proceeded to complain about Macbeth's insufficient ambition (1.5.15-24), before rousing her husband to discuss Duncan's advent and murder (1.5.53-72).

In describing the opening action, Jyotish expanded on his Freudian interpretation of the play. The director recalled that when Lady Macbeth enters, Macbeth is supine and

⁷⁰ Jyotish and Reghoothaman did not specify which Malayalam translation of *Macbeth* they had used, recalling only that in preparing the playtext they had referenced an out-of-print work by a translator surnamed "Nair." An examination of P. K. Venukkuttan Nair's literary translation (2012) reveals critical differences to the Abhinaya playtext in the latter's comparatively casual syntax and vocabulary. These differences suggest that the edition used by the Abhinaya team is P. K. R. Nair's 2000 out-of-print *Macbeth*.

channelling his subconscious: “When that, that reflection comes, he is laying in a particularly, he is, laying in a[n], infinite space. Suddenly, the Id comes out and through that, Lady Macbeth is [sic] came, came out from the mirror [...] it’s a company of self.” Demonstrating Jyotish’s preoccupation with projecting a company of self, here *Macbeth*’s mirrors functioned primarily to reflect not the multiple generations of Banquo’s lineage, but the multiple aspects of Macbeth’s inner self (see Figure 17). In this production, Lady Macbeth functioned almost as a Freudian Dark Lady to Banquo’s (platonic) Fair Youth; Macbeth was caught between his better and worse angels, the competing aspects of his inner psyche.



Figure 17: Lady Macbeth/Id emerges from Macbeth/Ego, photograph © Ajay Sekher.

Here, Jyotish inverted the order of the Shakespearean scenes, enhancing the production’s Freudian overtones. By inciting Macbeth/Ego to murder, Lady Macbeth/Id

functioned as Thanatos. Having convinced Macbeth to dispatch Duncan, Lady Macbeth sent her husband to sleep again. She twirled in frenzy, muttering about her bloodstained conscience and demanding her own unsexing, appealing to the kalarippayattu warriors who ran past her with lit torches, and the black, hooded figures who lurked in the background. On his wife's departure, Macbeth shook violently as if possessed, and began to crawl in a trance, arguing with himself as to whether to murder Duncan. In manifesting those "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts," (1.5.39-40), Jyotish's postmodern ritual evoked the summoning of the demons of one's own psyche. Arguably, Lady Macbeth's subsequent unsexing stripped the Id of Eros, while realigning the character with metaphysical forces, strengthening the play's emphasis on the slow disintegration of the psyche.

The Abhinaya *Macbeth* maintained its focus on the three central Freudian characters of Macbeth/Ego, Lady Macbeth/Id, and Banquo/Superego, as the central section of the ninety-minute production proceeded quickly. In so doing, the play remained largely faithful to the heavily abridged original Shakespearean narrative in Malayalam translation. Accordingly, the action proceeded through the scenes of Duncan's visit, his election of Malcolm, Lady Macbeth's admonition of Macbeth, the dagger hallucination, and Duncan's (offstage) murder. As in the kutiyattam and kathakali *Macbeths*, here the comic scene of the porter was omitted, effectively heightening the play's dominant rasa of bhayanaka (fear or horror). Adding to this effect, the production echoed the protagonist's growing madness by dislocating the play's temporality. Macbeth interjected asides such as "*ende bhranti*" ('my madness'—perhaps referencing Caithness' description, "Some say he's mad" in 5.2.13), or moaned extracts from his later monologue "*Kevalamaya...*" ("Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player") (5.5.23). At regular intervals, his lady muttered, "*Narakatthil iruttanu*" ("Hell is murky") (5.1.34). Throughout

these disconnected scenes, the play's silent chorus of warriors, angels, and apparitions straggled across the stage, evoking the unravelling of Macbeth's guilty mind.

In its later scenes, however, Jyotish's *Macbeth* diverged sharply from the Shakespearean source, cutting and reordering the narrative to foreground scenes featuring the three central Freudian characters. Following their coronation, here the royal couple planned Banquo's murder together, a rewriting that inscribed the character of Lady Macbeth with additional agency. The Abhinaya Lady Macbeth did not remain "innocent of the knowledge" (3.2.46) of Banquo's murder, nor did she display horror at the idea of additional violence; conversely, she continued to incite Macbeth's bloodlust as she shared his psyche. Underlining this hijacking of Macbeth's mind, the Abhinaya production gave Lady Macbeth lines that the Shakespearean source attributes to Macbeth. For example, Macbeth's later speech, "I am in blood / Stepped in so far" (3.4.135-36) here was translated to begin with "We are." Effectively, therefore, the Id spoke for the Ego. This twinning of the guilty Freudian conscience was reflected in the play's choreography. Lady Macbeth attempted to wipe invisible bloodstains from Macbeth's hands as well as her own; having planned the next murder, the couple proceeded to dance an interpretive trance-tango, mirroring their collective guilt.

In this conjoining of purpose, the Ego and Id cemented their coupling, obviating the need for the Superego. Reghoothaman narrated, "Macbeth...it is, surrenders to the Id [...] surrenders, and he leaves Banquo." However, Reghoothaman revealed, "In this play, Banquo isn't killed." While Banquo disappeared at the appropriate moment in the narrative, Reghoothaman maintained that "It is not a physical death [...] [the] Superego *orikkalum pokilla* [will never depart from one]." The actor related that in the Abhinaya version, Banquo "says 'I know you're going to kill me—let it be. *Mangalamayi bhavikkatte* [Let it be so, splendid]!' And

Banquo comes back in his...” Here, Jyotish interjected: “that banquet scene.” Reghoothaman explained that Macbeth “is totally under the influence of this Id. [...] So everything, he is surrendering to Lady Macbeth, Id.” Hitherto, Macbeth had existed “in between” Banquo and Lady Macbeth, Reghoothaman clarified, and “towards the end, he surrenders [to the Id].” Here, the banquet scene represented the critical juncture at which, having so far been torn between them, the Ego ultimately merged with the Id and discarded the Superego.

In this Keralan banquet scene, Banquo/Superego appeared once the several guests were comfortably seated on the floor with their goblets. The apparition knocked off Macbeth’s crown, baiting Macbeth with it before placing it on his own head and vanishing again. Here, Reghoothaman clarified that “Banquo comes back in his [Macbeth’s] dream. Like that. So the Superego comes as a dream.” In this dream sequence, Banquo reappeared to knock the goblet from Lady Macbeth’s hand, symbolically robbing the couple of both their wealth and dignity. Finally, Banquo was surrounded in a huddle by the guests, who each re-emerged holding a mask of Banquo’s head. This directorial innovation enhanced the Superego’s visibility as the play’s social conscience.

As Banquo disappeared with the crowd, Lady Macbeth followed him, screaming his name, suggesting the fraught disintegration of the Freudian tripartite. Simultaneously, the scene segued into that of the final prophecy, evocative of its invocation of “black spirits and white” (4.1.44). Hooded figures in white appeared and revealed that “none of woman born” (4.1.96) could harm Macbeth, even as Banquo returned, conjoined with his progeny in an elongated white robe, all wearing crowns and holding mirrors. These mirrors reflected and multiplied Macbeth’s increasing desperation. Here, Jyotish elaborated that once Macbeth/Ego surrenders to the Id, “from there, he is not in his control, you know? Superego is going, Id, going, he is

completely...All three [having separated]—he is mad [sic].” In conflating Shakespeare’s scenes of prophecy (4.1) and sleepwalking (5.1), the production juxtaposed Banquo’s rise against Lady Macbeth’s fall, representing a double loss for Macbeth. Accordingly, Lady Macbeth alternated with Banquo and his retinue in crossing the stage before a bewildered Macbeth. ‘Washing’ her hands, the former warned Macbeth that he had murdered sleep forever (2.2.34), while the collective Superego chorused the original prophecy, maintaining that they remained “much happier” than Macbeth (1.3.63-64).

In the Abhinaya production, Macbeth’s end followed Lady Macbeth’s fatal fall, precipitating his madness and ultimate surrender to his unconscious. However, here Lady Macbeth/Id survived until the finale. Following an offstage scream, she entered supine, borne by black angels on a stretcher and placed upstage left, weakly still attempting to wash her hands. Concurrently, unable to withstand his isolation, Macbeth recited a disjointed, frantic Malayalam version of “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” (5.5.18). Stumbling across the stage between moving mirrors that fragmented his own misery, Macbeth shouted in Malayalam, “Life! A poor player! A shadow! Life! Nothing!” (5.5.23-27).⁷¹ Eventually, becoming hoarse and faint, Macbeth surrendered to the inevitable and slumped centre backstage to a swelling musical theme. A white angel came to stand over him, washing its hands, as the stage faded into blackness.

In this final tableau the Abhinaya *Macbeth* evoked a confusing multiplicity of references, with an ambiguity that was perhaps intentional. While the white angel appeared to be grieving, and washing its own hands in prayer for Macbeth’s soul rather than its own absolution, the scenario also troubled the production’s black/white oppositional morality.

⁷¹ All in-performance quotes are taken from the Prakriti Foundation’s recording of the 11th February production.

Presumably the figure's angelic whiteness indicated its continued moral purity amid Macbeth's collapse, evocative of Malcolm's assurance that even after Lucifer's fall, "Angels are bright still" (4.3.23). However, this leave-taking was equally evocative of Macbeth's farewell to the dark "angel whom thou still hast served" (5.10.14). This final ambiguity effectively brought the play full circle to Jyotish's concept of *Macbeth's* underlying refrain: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.10).

In recasting Macbeth's end as his psychological surrender and ending the play before the protagonist's death, Jyotish's directorial strategy is consistent with that of the productions highlighted in the previous two case studies. This consistency is indicative of the rhizomatic relationships between these three Keralan *Macbeths*, suggesting a circulation of ideas and approaches informed by a shared sense of regional culture. In Madhu's kutiyattam version, Macbeth's psychological destruction occurs once he loses his wife and sees Birnam Wood approach; in Kannan's cholliyattam version, his collapse occurs after he commits murder; here, Macbeth loses his sanity when his subconscious triumphs over his conscious. In comparison with other experimental Keralan Shakespeares, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* is the most innovative in theme and approach, splitting and fusing aspects of Shakespeare's play into a new avatar. Jyotish's experiment aligns with postmillennial Keralan theatre productions such as Panikkar's *Tempest*, experimental theatre that applies an intercultural pick-and-mix methodology to advance its sociopolitical and/or creative agenda. In hybridising theoretical and digital elements with Hindu and Christian ritual symbolism and an eclectic design, *Macbeth's* director fuses performance elements into an independent vision of postmodern Keralan Shakespeares. Accordingly, the concluding section examines the implications of Jyotish's vision for postmillennial intercultural Shakespeares.

Conclusions: the Abhinaya *Macbeth* and implications for intercultural Shakespeares

This concluding section examines the Abhinaya *Macbeth*'s potential to provide new paradigms for intercultural Shakespeares, in demonstrating a third and different model of interculturalism from those highlighted in the preceding two case studies. While Madhu's and Kannan's productions subsume Shakespeare in cultural translation and parallel Shakespeare in cultural collaboration, respectively, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* presents a model of cultural fusion. As I have done in the preceding two chapters, while questioning the implications of this case study for contemporary Keralan Shakespeares, I problematise the idea of the studied production as representative of its genre. Instead, I argue that the Abhinaya *Macbeth* is merely illustrative of postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares. As aforementioned, the relationship between Keralan and global Shakespeares has become multidirectional, requiring new theoretical models to handle its complexity.

Alongside Madhu's and Kannan's innovative work, Jyotish's experimental theatre straddles an increasingly porous cultural boundary, one that is no longer linear or defined by temple walls and caste barriers. In a rapidly globalising culture and economy, Jyotish's collective theatre faces similar financial challenges to those affecting Madhu's and Kannan's art forms. Abhinaya, as with other Keralan arts centres, is located in a secular democracy and based in a state with a Communist ideology. Accordingly, these institutions must accept students across demarcations of gender, religion, geography and society. Where pockets of Keralan traditionalism were once maintained by Hindu caste hierarchies and geographical inaccessibility, these boundaries are erased increasingly in a postmodern, global India. In postmillennial Kerala, Shakespeare is now mediated through a multiplicity of countries and cultures as his works enter and re-enter the region. The evolving hybridity of Keralan

Shakespeare now aligns productions not only with local and national traditions, but with theatres of ideas unconstrained by geography. In tapping into these horizontally diffused, rhizomatic intercultural networks, Jyotish emulates other directors of Keralan Shakespeares, such as the two *Macbeths* highlighted in the previous chapters.

Jyotish's vision for the Abhinaya production complicates the typical binary of intercultural hybridity, by involving more than two cultural strands and fusing rather than interweaving these. In contrast to Madhu's and Kannan's *Macbeths*, Jyotish's production integrated the *Natyasastra* concepts of *rasa*, *bhava*, and *natyadharmi* with Western elements beyond the Shakespearean text, incorporating theoretical influences from artists such as Stanislavski or Craig. Correspondingly, the Abhinaya production employed a wider range of textual, physical, and digital elements to transform *Macbeth's* imagery into visual metaphor. Concurrently, Jyotish's production added an extra dimension to the third space of intercultural hybridisation. Indicative of Kerala's increasing globalisation, Jyotish's cultural fusion has thus outgrown former binaric postcolonial templates for interculturalism.

In describing his experimental *Macbeth* as a cultural fusion, Jyotish's terminology suggests a metaphorical atomic reaction. In such a nuclear change, an entirely new substance is created, producing energy in the process. This scientific metaphor is apt, here and in comparing models of interculturalism across the three Keralan *Macbeths*. Correspondingly, Madhu's cultural translation could be said to represent a physical change, where one substance is subsumed into another. Equally, Kannan's cultural collaboration compares to a chemical change, in which both substances undergo a mutual transformation in combination. The resulting *Macbeths* are each very different, all privileging an individualistic interpretation to resolve any intercultural tensions. In fusing Shakespeare with a secular theatre form to create a

postmodern ritual, it was comparatively easier for the Abhinaya *Macbeth* to evade an intercultural confrontation between Hindu traditionalism and humanism. Such tensions can be seen to recur in these postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares more frequently than tensions from any remaining vestiges of postcolonialism.

Arguably, directing *Macbeth* as a postmodern ritual gave Jyotish an excuse to fuse overtly ritualistic imagery from both Hindu and Christian liturgy, thereby providing satisfying moral insights while addressing his multireligious demographic of twenty-first-century audiences strategically. Despite the production's intended neutrality, the Abhinaya *Macbeth* confronted religious morality directly, contravening its rigid absolutes. Jyotish's work reconfigures *Macbeth* as a postmodern morality play, in a vision resembling that of post-Independence Marxist playwright Utpal Dutt, whom I mentioned in the thesis introduction. For Dutt *Macbeth* was both a "tragic hero" and "a living epitome of sin" (Naina Dey 195). Accordingly, Dutt "regarded *Macbeth* not just as a play of unbridled ambition of one man, but as one in which ambition becomes a universal vice" (ibid.). Jyotish's fusion of spiritual and psychological elements into a postmodern anti-capitalist parable is one that evokes Roland Barthes' dissection of the nature of the human greed for money, by presenting the triad of "three moralisms which are set in opposition to it: Marxist, Christian, and Freudian" (46). To these moralisms, Jyotish adds Hindu philosophy, fusing his own regional culture with a more global interculturalism to better convey his vision of the human psyche via Shakespeare.

Conversely, Reghoothaman argued that Shakespeare's creative teleology illustrates the development of an authorial humanism that transcends religious distinctions. The actor declares, "When you take his plays from beginning—the first play till to end, this is the journey of, even for Shakespeare also, I think this is a spiritual journey—not a religious journey—he is thinking

of what human being[s] are.” The actor posited that in particular, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* focuses on the inner human identity: “*Macbeth* is different. He is telling about—conflict, everything is there but in this play, he was trying to explore that area [of the inner being] also.” Stephen Greenblatt contends that *Macbeth* reveals this inner aspect through reflecting the real-life supernatural: “For Shakespeare to identify the theatrical with witchcraft was to invent the fantasmatic as the site of the psychological—that is, to invent the staged discourse of interiority” (42). Instead of foregrounding contemporary Keralan black magic elements, however, Jyotish’s hybrid Hindu-Christian fable subverts this dynamic, locating its black and white angels and witches within human psychology. The central themes of witchcraft and prophecy are elided into the mysteries of the subconscious; magic is stripped away, leaving us with the mystery of performance.

In relocating *Macbeth*’s angels and witches to the human psyche, and incorporating ritual circular fire homage, Jyotish’s production updates and renews Kerala’s ritual arts tradition. In Keralan Hindu ritual theatres of imagination, for example, a traditional theyyam temple fire-dancer can transcend his low-caste body during possession by the divine spirit; in a trance, his mind functions as a conduit to spiritual realms beyond physicality and the mortal-god dichotomy. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, with its emphasis on bridging the temporal and immortal worlds through rituals of illusion and possession, is a natural choice for an experimental Keralan Shakespeare production that privileges psychological and ritual elements. While there is no immortal redemption for Shakespeare’s unrepentant Macbeth, in the Abhinaya version Macbeth is portrayed sympathetically as the victim of his own psychology and he remains alive, an outcome typically reserved for a heroic Keralan protagonist. Alternatively, this Macbeth’s fate could be considered a punishment, having murdered his own eternal rest.

The chapter draws the conclusion that the Abhinaya *Macbeth* multiplies hybridity along rhizomatic networks by generating multiple offshoots. Postmodern Keralan Shakespeare has evolved through a generation where one's introduction to Shakespeare can derive equally from a parent's bookshelf, one's classroom, or a Japanese film. In reshaping *Macbeth* according to their artistic decisions, Reghoothaman and Jyotish's national award-winning work also makes use of the intracultural cross-fertility among Kerala art forms and the inevitable interrelationship among Keralan Shakespeares. In fusing *Natyasastra* ritual and rasa with their Lacanian reading of Macbeth's Freudian psychology, the Abhinaya collective's *Macbeth* reaches out further into the postmillennial audience, using international concepts to convey the interiority of the human heart and mind. What do these conclusions mean for other intercultural Shakespeares? This chapter partly answers the research questions by taking a snapshot of relevant artistic perspectives, but these are more illustrative than representative in belonging to a country of over a billion viewpoints, with inherent contradictions. Yet these findings are important to the research area as they shed light on the organic and rhizomatic development of Keralan Shakespeares. By illuminating several different prototypical models of this development, this thesis suggests the multiple, idiosyncratic perspectives from which Shakespeare is produced and the many different methodologies and rationales behind these productions. An awareness of the richness and variety of these perspectives contributes to our understanding of trends in intercultural Shakespeares as well as the different challenges involved in creating and recreating Keralan Shakespeares.

Overall, this chapter completes the trio of case studies, illuminating the ongoing influence of Shakespeare on Keralan performance culture in shedding light on an underexplored corner of the global discipline. In covering multiple perspectives, Chapter Three provides a

snapshot from a different angle to triangulate the illustration of Keralan Shakespeares in the twenty-first century. In postmillennial Kerala, Shakespeare functions as a touchstone for creativity; the Abhinaya *Macbeth* serves Kerala's reinvention as "cosmo culture," as Reghoothaman put it. In lieu of an erasure of local roots, the Abhinaya production extends *Natyasastra* theory, transmuting it into experimental Keralan theatre for a global audience. Chapter Three ends, like Chapters One and Two, in questioning whether Keralan Shakespeares inform global intercultural Shakespeares, or vice versa, or, whether these act in symbiosis for a shared audience. For this chapter concludes that Keralan Shakespeares function in the service of an assertion of an independent cultural identity, while advancing the regional sociopolitical agenda to modernise local arts and attitudes in keeping with a wider global human egalitarianism.

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare knew every mystery of the [ubiquitous Indian] ration shop. [...] We live in continual mystery. In fact, I ask you, John, my friend (sharpening his knife on the table), when one commits murder in a dream, is that murder or not?

Keralan narrator Govindan Nair, in Raja Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare* (81-82)

Let Shakespeare keep India and Britain united.

Letter received by Geoffrey Kendal from the Keralan "Forward Bloc" theatre group, Trivandrum, reproduced in Geoffrey Kendal's *The Shakespeare Wallah* (89)

This thesis has examined the twenty-first-century intercultural performance of William Shakespeare's works in Kerala, India, through undertaking illustrative case studies of three local productions of *Macbeth* in kutiyattam, kathakali, and Malayalam-language postmodern theatre. My narrowness of focus has enabled me to highlight individual local artists' strategies in producing and performing *Macbeth*. Through gleaning these artists' perspectives in first-person interviews, I have demonstrated the insufficiency of current critical postcolonial paradigms to account for the variety of Keralan artists' approaches to Shakespeare. Over this conclusion, having summarised my thesis chapters and their case studies of Madhu's, Kannan's, and Jyotish's Keralan *Macbeths*, I will turn to a final theoretical discussion of these productions' overlapping spiritual and political elements, and their implications for intercultural Shakespeares.

In exploring the metamorphosis of Keralan Shakespeares from the postcolonial to the postmillennial era, I have examined these three *Macbeth* productions' models of cultural translation, cultural collaboration, and cultural fusion. These postmillennial productions demonstrate an ideological hypermobility that explodes Patrice Pavis' formerly applicable

hourglass model of a ‘source’ and ‘target’ culture, “in light of the mix-and-match nature of global culture engineered by instantaneous communication and information systems” (Dennis Kennedy and Yong Li Lan 12). Furthermore, Keralan Shakespeares represent an atypical blend of intercultural elements. Accordingly, a juxtaposition of these three *Macbeth* artists’ particular methodologies has allowed me to demonstrate that a more flexible rhizomatic theoretical model better accommodates these productions in their individualistic plurality. Such a model facilitates the multidirectional and symbiotic artistic dialogues that take place during their deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Shakespeare (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 194). I have demonstrated that this reordering takes place along practical, theoretical, and spiritual dimensions.

Concurrently, focusing upon a single Shakespearean play has enabled me to contrast these three *Macbeths*, highlighting their artists’ differing modes of hybridising local, national, and global influences to reinvigorate their own performance traditions. Aptly, Emily Linnemann suggests that local-global tensions bear a continued influence on the intercultural performance of Shakespeare, and that in the twenty-first century it is vital to deal with such contrasts “as part of a dialectic rather than a dichotomy” (15). This increasingly interrelated complexity suggests scope for further research as the field of intercultural Shakespeares matures and diversifies beyond limited conceptualisations of historical and geographical loci. Presently, my thesis is the only study of this length to interrogate intercultural postmillennial Keralan Shakespeare productions as an area of individual study within intercultural Shakespeares.

Accordingly, the thesis introduction established my contention that Keralan Shakespeares is an underrepresented and valuable area of research in the field of intercultural Shakespeares. In employing a flexible research methodology that draws on subjective first-hand

local artist-director perspectives, I have sought to centre the discussion on an experiential basis. This experience is located in the immediate moment of artistic improvisation, which is difficult to quantify, even through the interview method. Yet such primary evidence is vital in expanding current critical paradigms to allow space for both authoritative and subaltern voices.

After locating twenty-first-century Keralan Shakespeares in their local theoretical, sociopolitical, and religious contexts, over the course of the three central thesis chapters I focused on the three aforementioned Keralan *Macbeths*. Each chapter used first-person artist interviews and live or archival performances as primary evidence of Keralan artists' strategies in adapting, directing, and performing Shakespeare. Chapter One looked at Margi Madhu's cultural translation of *Macbeth* for the ancient Keralan temple art of kutiyattam, with reference to his 12 February 2011 performance at the Hamara Shakespeare Festival. I probed Madhu's use of Shakespeare to bridge tensions between his ancient sacred Sanskrit performance tradition and its modern-day performance in a secular democracy. Furthermore, I highlighted the rhizomatic nature of Keralan Shakespeares, examining intra-Asian performance influences on Madhu's *Macbeth* through his participation in Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona* (2000). Additionally, I examined intracultural influences on Madhu's sympathetic allegorical portrayal of Macbeth as both a demon king and a fellow "very nice man." Finally, I discussed Madhu's use of Shakespeare to explore new directions of kutiyattam performance as a means to navigate his society's move from Hindu feudalism to capitalism, with the continued necessity to interest a newly diverse range of students and audiences.

Addressing similar issues, Chapter Two examined Ettumanoor P. Kannan's production of *Macbeth Cholliyattam*, which he termed a "cultural collaboration" between the Shakespearean text and the performance grammar of kathakali. I analysed Kannan's strategy in

supplementing a limited kathakali performance canon with Shakespeare through a stripped-down rehearsal form to attract new audiences, in an age of competing multimedia entertainment and loss of traditional patronage. Moreover, my second chapter demonstrated that, like Madhu's *Macbeth*, Kannan's production testifies to the uneasy transferability of genre between Shakespearean tragedy and traditional Keralan theatre, in creating an anti-heroic *Everyman*-type allegory for the new millennium. Furthermore, my second chapter differentiated Kannan's collaborative intercultural model from that of the Keli Company's Western-oriented kathakali *King Lear* or Arjun Raina's anti-colonial khelkali *Magic Hour*. Finally, I investigated Kannan's 19 November 2013 performance of *Macbeth* in relation to its former 2001 version, to illustrate the ongoing evolution of Keralan Shakespeares towards both internationalism and individualism.

In examining a third model of Keralan Shakespeare performance, or cultural fusion, Chapter Three studied The Abhinaya Theatre's Malayalam-language production of *Macbeth* with reference to their 11 February 2011 Chennai performance. Through interviewing lead actor D. Reghoothaman and director Jyotish M. G., I explored their production's fusion of Christian and Hindu symbolism with Lacanian psychology. While I acknowledged the production's incorporation of diverse cultural influences from Gordon Craig to Sigmund Freud, in particular, I emphasised its debt to Marxism, viewing the Abhinaya *Macbeth* as emblematic of postmodern experimental Keralan theatres of anti-capitalist protest. Consequently, I argued that, like Madhu's and Kannan's *Macbeths*, the Abhinaya production foregrounded Macbeth's psychological journey, framing it as a modern-day parable for contemporary capitalist society. Subsequently, in this third chapter I situated the Abhinaya *Macbeth* in relation to the ongoing rhizomatic circulation of influences among local postmodern theatre productions and

movements, including Footsbarn Theatre's 2013 *Indian Tempest* and Kavalam Narayana Panikkar's fusion of Shakespeare, *Natyasastra* theory, and Keralan performance forms in a twenty-first-century 'theatre of roots.' As in the first and second chapters, in this third chapter I preferred to modify rather than destabilise extant theories, to overcome inconsistencies in the fit between postcolonial theoretical models and postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares.

In extending postcolonial theory to treat this topic as postmillennial, I have opened up new avenues for understanding both Keralan and intercultural Shakespeares from a performance-oriented viewpoint. My thesis topic has not previously been addressed in conjunction with cultural theory beyond the remit of postcolonial Shakespeares. Concurrently, I have built on related work on Keralan Shakespeares by directors, translators, and critics including Panikkar, Poonam Trivedi, Ania Loomba, Diane Daugherty, Jayasree Nair, and Maurizio Calbi. It is worth noting that this literature is extrinsic to the vast body of regional Indian-language primary sources, including monographs, manuscripts, treatises, and performance manuals that are yet to be documented or translated by the English-language academy. Accordingly, my introductory chapter examined a few of these literary and performance translations to contextualise the evolution of Keralan Shakespeares through phases of Hinduism, colonialism, and Marxism.

Throughout, in framing my research with established performance and adaptation theories, the thesis has drawn on the more broadly applicable theoretical approaches of critics including Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Rustom Bharucha, Loomba, and Ric Knowles. I have also referenced Kerala-specific research by performance specialists including Phillip Zarrilli, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski, Daugherty, John Russell Brown, and Richard Schechner. Yet I differentiate my work from theirs, primarily in my application of intercultural

theory to illustrate my conception that contemporary Keralan Shakespeare performance constitutes a network of rhizomatic interrelationships rather than a binaric framework containing interstices.

This view establishes Keralan Shakespeares as a field that is situated along multiple intracultural and local-global axes rather than one subsumed under narrowing concentric circles of geographies or binaries of East versus West. In elaborating on their rhizome theory, Deleuze and Guattari recommend a “middle” perspective that inverts the typical “perceptual semiotics” of beginning/end by starting at a decentralised spot in a full growth, effectively mid-circle (25). These authors posit that this interrelatedness erases distinctions: “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel” (ibid.). Correspondingly, in Keralan Shakespeares, ideas now circulate along a network of currents that often bypass the East-West postcolonial binary and the author-actor-audience trinity. In their evolution beyond these fixed models to those of fluid plurality, postmillennial Keralan Shakespeares approximate the complexity of three-dimensional chess. In this model, a nearly infinite combination of moves by multiple players can now be played across an interlinked multiplicity of boards, directions, and time zones.

Simultaneously, in Keralan Shakespeares such as these *Macbeths*, the multiplicity of perspectives can complicate the subjective/objective nature of reality and relativity. In discussing *Macbeth*, Stephen Greenblatt compares theatre to witchcraft in their liminality, with both forms “constructed on the boundary between fantasy and reality, the border or membrane where the imagination and the corporeal world, figure and actuality, psychic disturbance and

objective truth meet” (32). Similarly, K. Ayyappa Paniker describes the boundary of Shakespearean theatre as one that shifts with the viewer. He posits that the “reflection in a mirror is never the same as what is reflected, never the same as the source of the reflection; and when the mirror itself keeps reminding us that what we see is only a mirror image, we ought to take cognizance of the distancing effect as well as the distortion involved” (“Evil” 364). For Keralan Shakespeares, these multiple, subjective viewpoints are particularly important in transcending residual, binaric colonialist and Orientalist distinctions. Edward Said explains his concept that Orientalism is “an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of interests: which [...] it not only creates but also maintains [...] in an uneven exchange” (*Orientalism* 12). Said declares that as such, Orientalism “has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (ibid.). Thus, for Keralan Shakespeares such these three *Macbeths*, it is important to highlight subjective viewpoints, in attempting to establish the (particular or collective) interests and concepts of the world reflected in their theatre.

Furthermore, in attempting to establish whether these productions demonstrate a worldview, it is vital to trace the interconnections between these Keralan artists’ perspectives. Accordingly, while my three central thesis chapters treated these three *Macbeths* largely as separate entities, in this conclusion I explore these productions’ interrelationships further, mapping themes across and between chapters. While the three *Macbeth* productions at the centre of the thesis demonstrate multiple interpretations, their artists utilise Shakespeare with a common purpose: to perpetuate their art forms in continuing to attract and enlighten audiences, while facilitating creative self-expression.

Consequently, I contend that in subsuming the play's supernatural and religious themes under those of a Marxist humanism, these *Macbeths* highlight instead the ethical, spiritual, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions. Astutely, Harold Bloom suggests that Macbeth's tragedy is "so universal that a strictly Christian context is inadequate" to describe its transgression of "every vision of the sacred and moral that human chronicle has known" (521). Similarly, these three *Macbeths* each display an artistic concern with relocating heaven and hell to the temple of the mind rather than the Lord, in their redefinition of the play as a moral for the modern-day materialist "soulless mob" (*Abhinaya* n. pag.). In pushing the boundaries of their art forms outside religiously sanctioned hierarchies of caste and creed, as highlighted across the thesis chapters, these artists demonstrate Raymond Williams' theory that culture is "at once the secularization and the liberalization of earlier metaphysical forms" (15). Thus, the artists behind the kutiyattam, kathakali and Abhinaya *Macbeths* gain individual agency in renegotiating both Shakespeare and their own cultural traditions in the context of secular, democratic India, for twenty-first-century global audiences.

Accordingly, I examine these Keralan artists' collective preoccupation with intertwining the spirituality of Hinduism and the aestheticism of *rasa* with the idealism of Marxism. Arguably, the 'Other' demonised in these three *Macbeths* is not the postcolonial West, but twenty-first-century global capitalism. "Kerala is characterized by a unique and paradoxical blend of Marxism and Hinduism," notes Poonam Trivedi in *Remaking Shakespeare* (68). Similarly, in this conclusion I juxtapose these two normally distinct religious and political paradigms to consider how these three Keralan *Macbeths* reconcile the exigencies of artistic creativity and economic survival in the new millennium. Consequently, while Chapter Three highlighted Marxist Keralan theatres of protest, and the introductory chapter set out the Hindu

Natyasastra treatise, I look here across the thesis at their combined theoretical influence on Keralan Shakespeares. Such interlinking allows me to explore influences not only *on* but also *between* these three *Macbeths* and their rhizomatic relationships to other Keralan Shakespeares.

In analysing these three Keralan productions' presentations of *Macbeth* as a spiritual and political allegory, I trace their transformation of the Shakespearean tragedy in three areas. I examine their reduction of Macbeth's political, moral, and physical decline to his psychological deterioration; their realignment of the royal protagonist with the common man; and their reinvention of his personal tragedy as a universal karmic parable. Correspondingly, I trace these Keralan directors and performers' use of Shakespeare as an instrument through which to demonstrate their artistry in externalising Macbeth's inner journey; to exorcise their art forms of the demons of capitalist and Hindu elitism; and to destabilise the traditional narrational neatness of karmic order by inserting the randomness of tragedy.

These three Keralan *Macbeths* foreground the terrors of the human psyche over those of the supernatural. This interpretation is not a novel one. A. C. Bradley remarks of *Macbeth* that "psychologically it is perhaps the most remarkable exhibition of the development of a character to be found in Shakespeare's tragedies" (330). Correspondingly, Jan Kott declares: "In its psychology, *Macbeth* is, perhaps, the deepest of Shakespeare's tragedies" (93). Furthermore, Bloom avers that "we are Macbeth; our our identity with him is involuntary but inescapable" and that the character "terrifies us partly because that [murderous] aspect of our own imagination is so frightening" (517). Conversely, Greenblatt attributes this terror to the unknown, arguing that "the phantasmagorical horror of witchcraft [...] is redistributed by Shakespeare across the field of the play, shaping the representation [...] above all, of the psyche" (34). However, these three Keralan *Macbeths* heighten our identification with both

Macbeth and his demons through incorporating the horrors of the demonic *into* the imagination, whether retelling the story solely through Macbeth's perspective or reducing the supernatural to aspects of the Freudian psyche.

These three *Macbeths* all foreground character development over the narration of plot, enabling the artists to illustrate the protagonists' psychological journey through showcasing their own expertise in evoking *rasa*. The repositioning of Shakespeare's titular hero materially affects *Macbeth's* underlying *rasa*, allowing these artists to present an individual interpretation and elaboration. Accordingly, these three *Macbeths* each transform the underlying 'bhayanaka' (fear) *rasa* of Shakespeare's bloody tyrant into the *rasa* of *veeram* (valour), as in the title of Jayaraj's forthcoming *Macbeth* film adaptation. Concurrently, these *Macbeths* evade generic categorisation. For example, Chapter One demonstrated how Madhu upholds the prohibition of killing the *kutiyattam* hero onstage, presenting his psychological collapse instead. However, in order to foreground his interpretation of Macbeth's moral dilemma and ensuing emotion, Madhu breaks with tradition to show the onstage slaying of an innocent. I showed how Madhu's cultural translation not only deterritorialises Shakespeare's play by foregrounding Duncan's death onstage, but it also reterritorialises the play's ultimate characterisation of Macbeth as a butcher. Instead of transforming morally from white to black, Madhu's Macbeth retains shades of grey through his use of the ambiguous makeup scheme for the semi-demonic character of Ravana. Yet in borrowing *kathakali* semiotics for the dagger scene, the performer aligns his would-be-murderer with the humanity displayed by a legendarily virtuous royal protagonist, King Rukmangada, enhancing his production's tonal ambiguity.

Similarly, Chapter Two illustrated the inherently ambiguous possibilities in *kathakali*, demonstrating how Kannan exploits the art's narrative flexibility in avoiding Macbeth's death

while retaining the potential for an elaboration of ‘bhayanaka’ rasa. While Kannan’s hero merely undergoes a psychological collapse, Kannan intentionally deviates from both Shakespearean and *Natyasastra* convention to show the play’s innocent deaths onstage, portraying the psychological horrors of slaying both fatherly elder and newborn infant through dramatising the deaths of both Duncan and of Lady Macbeth’s baby. Here, Kannan aligns his Macbeth with the demonic through his association of the heroine (as seen through Macbeth’s eyes) with the attempted child-murdering demoness Poothana. Yet this second chapter further demonstrated that Kannan portrays the consequences of murder as the death of the soul, rather than that of the body, in retribution that is spiritual and karmic rather than physical.

Kannan’s emphasis on the psyche over the flesh echoes Jyotish’s similar interpretation of *Macbeth*, illustrated in Chapter Three. The Abhinaya *Macbeth* aligns Macbeth with the Freudian Ego. Accordingly, I argued that it realigns fate with karma, relocating the witches and supernatural to the angels and demons of the conscience. If the Abhinaya production’s Banquo/Superego or the social consciousness remains unslain, one could argue that Macbeth’s surrender to his fate represents both the triumph of the proletariat and of the collective experience of rasa.

This physicalisation of social consciousness suggests the typical Keralan preoccupation with Communism, where the only tolerable rule was the egalitarian utopia of the mythical demon king Mahabali, a time when ‘*ellarum oru pole*’ (everyone was equal).⁷² By paralleling the protagonist with demon-kings that are redeemed even as they are slain, and setting up Macbeth as a sympathetic anti-hero, these three productions each use Shakespeare to realign their protagonist with the common man rather than a god or a royal tyrant. This view echoes Bloom’s contention that “Macbeth is all too human” (534). Equally, these three Keralan

⁷² At the time of writing, Kerala has just re-elected a Communist government.

productions reimagine Macbeth as more victim than villain, reordering the narrative in moralising on the soul-destroying dangers of greed over and above the emphasis on prohibited murder. Concurrently, these plays reinscribe *Macbeth's* Christian moral against killing, transforming it from a feudal warning against regicide to a Marxist allegory warning against the soul-destroying dangers of greedy capitalist ambition.

Furthermore, these three *Macbeths* retain the Keralan tradition of theatre as an art form that represents both social commentary and spiritual edification. In these three postmillennial reconceptions, *Macbeth's* artists expand their oeuvre without renegotiating their spiritual core, the sacred *Natyasastra* theory of achieving unity with the divine through shared experience. Arguably, in these productions Macbeth's ultimate survival owes more to the spiritual rather than the practical tradition of the *Natyasastra*. In the typical Hindu worldview, physical death is not the final word; spiritual death is more to be feared, as it can be for Shakespeare's Christian characters—witness Isabella's emphasis on saving her immortal soul over her brother's physical life in *Measure for Measure* (2.4.55-56; 3.1.103). As Sukumari Bhattacharji writes: "In Indian [Hindu] thought neither heaven nor hell is eternal" (6). In Hindu philosophy, one is simply reborn on the wheel of caste until, "by means of meritorious deeds," one escapes the cycle of rebirths through spiritual enlightenment and merges with the universal consciousness, achieving *Moksa* (Absolution)" (R. K. Yajnik 22). Jyotish's Macbeth experiences a similar spiritual death, as described in Chapter Three, merging with his subconscious rather than the universal soul.

Accordingly, in these three *Macbeths*, the protagonist undergoes a spiritual tragedy. However, Yajnik avers that in Indian mythology, if heroes "swoon, they always recover. Thus there was no question of a tragic *denouement*" (23). Correspondingly, he writes that "in the West death overshadows everything, whereas the Indian artist, while not denying decay, sees in

it a condition of renewal” (ibid.). Darius Swann describes this as a cyclical “Hindu view of time” that is “essentially optimistic,” where through rebirth there “is a way up and out of *samsara* [the sorrows of human birth]” (115). Similarly, Yajnik explains this as the “characteristic Hindu attitude to life” in which “the doctrines of *Karma* (Action or Deeds) [sic] and of ‘rebirth’ go hand in hand” (22). Significantly, Bharucha contrasts “the Christian universe” that “continues to assume that there is a definite beginning and end to life, a Heaven and a Hell” with the “scheme of rebirth, which pervades the universe of the *Mahabharata* and which puts beginnings and ends in quite another context” (*World* 100). Thus, according to the typical Hindu worldview demonstrated in these three Keralan *Macbeths*, the torment of Hell is not eternal, nor is Macbeth’s condemnation perpetual.

These Keralan *Macbeths*’ conceit of the impermanence of damnation is significant, given Kerala’s nearly quarter-Christian population and the use of Christian imagery in Madhu’s and Jyotish’s productions. Instead, these three *Macbeths* all prefer to maintain a *Natyasastra*-inspired avoidance of killing the protagonist, even while they represent Macbeth as an anti-heroic character that deserves such a punishment. Moreover, in their varied methods of intercultural translation, collaboration, and fusion, these Keralan *Macbeths* all counter Ramachandra’s suggestion that the “essential Greek view of tragedy, namely, “Sin brings suffering and suffering brings wisdom” must be nearer the Indian view than the Anglo-Saxon, born of enthronement of, or over-attention to, the self” (671). Conversely, these Keralan *Macbeths* combine these perspectives, demonstrating that Macbeth’s selfish actions create a personal hell, yet his continued suffering suggests an agency that renders his soul redeemable.

Concurrently, these productions’ intercultural readings displace the typical Keralan fate for an anti-hero, or the cycle of sin, retribution, and redemption at the hands of avenging

divinity. Their ambiguous endings complicate G. Muliyl's suggestion that "the Karmic [sic] view of life excludes tragedy because it [...] has cut and dried solutions to the problem of evil and suffering" (8). In these three allegories of karmic retribution, Macbeth's losses of his friend, wife, and sense of self still represent a tragedy.

As Jyotish suggests, his Macbeth becomes the arbiter of his own destiny, stuck "in the middle" of his better and worse angels rather than seduced by a fated, externalised desire displaced onto the witches. In the absence of a devil-porter in these Keralan Shakespeares, Macbeth becomes the gatekeeper to his own mental hell. As Greenblatt writes, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare "achieves the remarkable effect of a nebulous infection, a bleeding of the demonic into the secular and the secular into the demonic" (33). As Macbeth's infected imagination bleeds across the boundaries of healthy possibility, in Jyotish's play his "Who dares do more is none" (1.7.47) becomes an alternate to Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" (3.1.57) as a meditation on self-negation, mortality, and morality. Similarly, Madhu's and Kannan's Macbeths are undecided as to whether to kill or not to kill, in effect risking their own souls and chance at immortality. In mental agony, Kannan's Macbeth demands of us, "*Nidhikkyazham kuzhikkyanee / Vatavriksham chheddikkyayo* (To dig deep for treasure, [beneath] this / Holy banyan tree, am I severing its roots?)." Equally, Terry Eagleton suggests that in "killing Duncan, symbol of the body politic, Macbeth is [...] striking at the physical root of his own life" (7). Yet in killing Duncan, and uprooting himself, furthermore Macbeth kills his own humanity, a spiritual suicide evoking Eagleton's metaphor of the act as one of "self-cancelling liberty" (4). This Keralan preoccupation with Macbeth as Everyman delves into the light in the darkness—it goes to the depths of human hell in seeking exorcism of the demonic within and absolution and spiritual resurrection, through slaying the Ego rather than the Other.

In reducing Macbeth to the psyche of the common man in a universal karmic parable, these three productions hold implications for our understanding of *Macbeth* through a different cultural lens. Parity to these productions' spiritual dilemma of whether to slay Ego or Other can be found in D. H. Lawrence's view of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Christian mythical tradition. Here, Lawrence views the divided hero as representing "the supreme I [...] the deepest impulse in man [...] the desire to be immortal, or infinite" (62). The author compares Hamlet's death to self-sacrifice, "the (physical) self dying so the spirit should rise," an idea which Lawrence traces back to an historic shift in thinking as "the Christian infinity of self-abnegation replaced the pagan infinity where the self embraced the universe" (62-63). This infinity is evocative of Hinduism's ideal of self-realisation, achieved via ascetic self-abnegation. In the Hindu tradition it is also possible for a sinner to find absolution through meeting one's death at the hands of God, as with King Ravana, achieving a divine release from the karmic cycle.

Given these possibilities, while Madhu's Macbeth wears the mask of the demon king Ravana, it is telling that he associates Macbeth's indecision with that of the virtuous king Rukmangada. Madhu's avoidance of the more obvious choice of Prince Arjuna (as I described in Chapter One) creates further moral ambiguity. The existential crisis of Arjuna, Hamlet-like in his hesitation over killing his royal relatives, occurs as he faces his family across the *Mahabharata* battlefield. Here, Lord Krishna resolves Arjuna's dilemma by disclosing the mysteries of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu tenets regarding the philosophy of karma, or selfless action. Comparing Arjuna to Hamlet, Fernie posits that Hamlet's "spiritual confidence in rashness [of action] resonates more powerfully" with the Hindu philosophy of the *Gita* ("The Last Act" 199-200). However, while Arjuna's indecision over his correct *dharma* or duty echoes that of Rukmangada, the former war hero's hesitation over shedding his royal relatives' blood

in equal combat is less relevant here to a cultural translation of *Macbeth*. Madhu's comparison allows a more appropriate reflection on familial royal homicide, paralleling the equally horrifying nature of Macbeth's and Rukmangada's respective dilemmas regarding the killing of a vulnerable, fatherly elderly king or a vulnerable young heir apparent. Moreover, Madhu's association of *Macbeth* with Rukmangada enables a comparison of the latter's apparently wicked instigator, the divine temptress Mohini, with the unsexed Lady Macbeth, both unnaturally masculine in their non-nurturing cruelty.

This paralleling of Macbeth with Rukmangada further hints at the divergent bent of their sins and redemption. The latter is driven by an open desire to uphold his kingly *dharma* (duty) to protect truth, while the former is motivated by a secretive personal ambition for the "golden round" (1.5.27). While Rukmangada's actions result in his ascent to heaven, led by God, Macbeth's own dark angel drags him to an inner hell beyond the distinctions of worldly hierarchies. In discussing *Macbeth*, Ewan Fernie suggests that the Christian deity is entirely absent (*Demonic* 67). Accordingly, in sinning without hope of redemption, through gathering all the blackest desires of humanity, Macbeth becomes a surrogate "spiritual hero" (ibid. 51). Yet these Keralan productions extend this metaphor so that *Macbeth* represents the temporary failure of spirituality bewitched by materiality, in an anti-heroic prototype for redeemable humanity. Thus, representing the "visible god, money alienates the human subject from him/herself" (Jonathan Gil Harris 148). If Arjuna's spiritual battlefield is symbolically titled the Kurukshetra, literally the 'world created by mankind,' Macbeth's split conscience substitutes as the battleground for his warring inner impulses of devilry and divinity.

In retelling *The Tragedy of Macbeth* across practical, theoretical, and spiritual dimensions, Madhu, Kannan, and Jyotish demonstrate that the failure of both internal and

external dialogue results in repetition in the cycle of misery, the murder of *both* Self and Other. Accordingly, they highlight the vital importance of the dialecticism that Linnemann foregrounds over dichotomy (15). If globalisation has fostered increasingly complex intercultural conversations, relationships, and networks that no longer respect geographical boundaries, these Keralan productions flatten the hierarchy of society and the heaven/hell dichotomy to argue for a cyclical view of human birth, error, and redemption. In this interconnected hybridity of self, *je suis* Macbeth, as well as Duncan and the baby. Ultimately, through their individual methodologies, these three Keralan *Macbeths* each rewrite both Shakespeare's Scottish history and their own sacred *Natyasastra* treatise into a new secular, humanist parable for our shared, global, postmillennial humanity.

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