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## **Intertextual Resonances and Dissonances in Bratya Basu's *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā***

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**Abstract:** The hallmark of any great text not only lies in its enduring popularity throughout ages, but also in other writers' interest in writing the text in a new way. Thus texts and textual materials have been recycled, replicated, and rewritten in a number of ways. This has spawned the germination of intertexts in recent and even earlier times. In this essay I would like to dwell on an intertext of *Hamlet* by an established contemporary Bengali dramatist: the Bengali play *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* by Bratya Basu. Broadly speaking, this essay intends to analyse Basu's *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* with the theoretical tools of intertextuality to identify the points of affinity with and departure from Shakespeare's tragedy on the Prince of Denmark.

**Keywords:** Hamlet, Hemlāt, intertextuality, Shakespeare, Bratya Basu

"Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intention of their authors". – Umberto Eco.

[“Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage.”]

Revisiting the past happens to be the intrinsic nostalgic desire of our subconscious, and at the conscious level it is manifested in a number of ways like recollection, narration of a past event, and even recycling the staple of an old tale and refashioning it into a new mould very much like dishing out old wine in new bottles. It was none other than T.S. Eliot who in his “Tradition and Individual Talent” stressed the import of every poet to be conversant with the tradition of his art. Thus a thorough awareness of the past plays a pivotal role in chiselling out the present of a poet who may or may not be haunted by what Harold Bloom called “anxiety of influence of a “father poet”. But rewriting a classic after a considerable temporal gap has not only become popular in contemporary times, but spawned a host of theoretical concepts in recent times: intertextuality, adaptation, appropriation, palimpsest, transtextuality, metatextuality, parody, mimicry, pastiche, forgery, travesty, transposition, etc. Whatever be

the theoretical underpinning and appellation, what none can deny is that the present is invariably shaped by the past, and that the present redefines the past. It is through the lens of the present that we need to look afresh at the past, and reconstruct it in the light of the present. Seen from another angle, although we tend to highlight the present, the past casts its lurid shadow onto the present. Thus this metaphorical dialogue between the past and the present is an ongoing process.

The hallmark of any great text not only lies in its enduring popularity throughout ages, but also in other writers' interest in writing the text in a new way. Thus texts and textual materials have been recycled, replicated, and rewritten in a number of ways. This has spawned the germination of intertexts in recent and even earlier times. To adduce an example from earlier times, one may say that Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is an intertextual rendering of *Electra*, written separately by Sophocles and Euripedes. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* the Classical characters reappear in a new setting with new names: General Ezra Mannon(Agamemnon), Christine( Clytemnestra) and Lavinia(Electra). In recent times there is a huge array of intertexts throughout the world: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*( an intertext of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*); Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*, Sue Roe's *Estella: Her Expectations*, Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations*, and Michael Noonan's *Magwitch* (intertexts of Dickens's *Great Expectations*); J.M.Coetzee's *Foe*( an intertext of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*); John Updike's "The Scarlet Letter Trilogy"<sup>1</sup>, Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*, Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, and Christopher Bigsby's *Hester: A Romance and Pearl*( intertexts of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*). Peter Ackroyd's *The Great Fire of London* attempts to rewrite Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, while Lin Haire-Sergeant's *Heathcliff: The Sequel to Wuthering Heights* is a conspicuous intertext of Emily Bronte's masterpiece. Emma Christina Tennant is particularly familiar with her readers for her repeated attempts to rewrite a few British classics<sup>2</sup>. Similarly Sashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a wonderful refashioning of the story of *The Mahabharata* in the context of contemporary Indian politics. While the examples could be multiplied, the basic fact remains the same: that every good text has the potential of being rewritten by subsequent writers.

Parody becomes a powerful tool of revisiting or rewriting an earlier text. Thus Henry Fielding's *Shamela*(1741) is a deliberate attempt to parody Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Similarly James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Yong Man* is parodied by Dylan Thomas in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Yong Dog*, and still later by Joseph Heller in *A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man*. Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote* is a postmodernist parody of Cervantes's

masterpiece. Parody often involves a conscious mocking at some earlier norms and traditions. For example John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which involves a parody of Victorian traditional and narrative devices. Peter Carey's *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* offers an explicit parody of Laurence Sterne's *The Adventures of Tristram Shandy*. William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* is engaged in an intertextual dialogue with R.L.Stevenson's *The Treasure Island* and R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*.

To do real justice to any classic would remain incomplete without a discussion on Shakespeare. Modern and postmodern dramatists and novelists have been consistently trying to recast Shakespearean plays into their contemporary socio-cultural contexts. Thus one may adduce Jane Smiley's rewriting of *King Lear* as *A Thousand Acres*. The rewritings of *The Tempest* like *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence and *Indigo* by Marina Warner are worth-considering. One may be reminded of Brecht's production of *Coriolanus* and Arnold Wesker's intertextual transformation of *The Merchant of Venice* as *The Merchant* in this context. In his attempt to rewrite *Hamlet*, Tom Stoppard in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* transforms Hamlet's fellow students, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as two prosaic common guys invested with typical twentieth-century sensibility. Two women novelists— Iris Murdoch in *The Black Prince* and Carole Corbeil in *In the Wings*— have also tried to rewrite *Hamlet* in their own contexts. The contemporary American novelist John Updike has tried to revisit *Hamlet* in his novel *Gertrude and Claudius*. But in this essay I would like to dwell on an intertext of *Hamlet* by an established contemporary Bengali dramatist: the Bengali play *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* by Bratya Basu. Basu who is otherwise known as an actor and director of films, and is also recognized as a politician, has already carved out a glorious niche for himself as a wonderful dramatist and good actor. I have chosen this play because it is overlooked by most scholars and critics, and particularly because it happens to be a brilliant intertext of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, politically interposed, as it were, in Basu's contemporary socio-political scenario. If Stoppard takes up the two inconsequential Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as his protagonists, and if Updike involves the king and queen of Denmark as his protagonists, it is Basu who takes a bolder step to portray the transformed version of the Prince of Denmark transposed as the Prince of Garahata as his protagonist. Suffice it to say, this very change of the focal point of the play makes a lot of difference.

In this small essay I wish to dwell on Bratya Basu's *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* and examine it as a successful intertext of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. My attempts in this essay will be to bring out the intertextual resonances and dissonances between Shakespeare's play

and Basu's intertext, and justify the cause of the transformation that has taken place in the course of these four centuries. Before I venture into my discussion I must clarify that this essay would like to substantiate Bratya Basu's play *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* as an intertext, and neither as an adaptation, nor as an appropriation. Nor does this paper deal with the performances of *Hamlet* to find its affinity with Basu's play. What this paper intends to do is quite clear: to analyse Basu's *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* with the theoretical tools of intertextuality to identify the points of affinity with and departure from Shakespeare's tragedy on the Prince of Denmark.

## II

The term "intertextuality" was popularized by Julia Kristeva in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. But the concept was anticipated by some earlier theorists, namely Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin and Roland Barthes. Unlike Ferdinand de Saussure who dwelled on abstract linguistics, Bakhtin emphasized the social aspect of human language. In fact, Kristeva's *Desire in Language* was an attempt to translate the concepts of Bakhtin to her French audience. Bakhtin's concept on language, as expressed in his books like *Method in Literary Scholarship: a Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1978) and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. According to Bakhtin no word is original in that a word used by a speaker had already been used by so many previous sets of speakers in so many different contexts. Thus any word becomes contaminated, as it were, inasmuch as it contains the trace of the previous speakers who had used it in different context. As Jeremy Hawthorn puts it so wittily:

... a word for Bakhtin is like a garment passed from individual to individual which cannot have the smell of previous owners washed out of it. (76)

And what is true for a word, is equally true for an utterance, and by an extension of the same logic, it is true for a text. Thus a text is likely to contain the traces of previous texts, as it were, and this precisely is the theoretical loop on which the aesthetics of intertextuality hinges.

In his seminal article "The Death of the Author" Roland Barthes not only relegated the role of the author to insignificance, but described the inherent intertextual nature of every text:

[...] a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and

clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.(Rice & Waugh 188)

According to Barthes, “a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” and the unity of a text “lies not in its origin but in its destination”(Rice and Waugh 189) . In fact, Barthes in his *Image-Music-Text* (1977) has used the very word “intertextual” In Barthes’s words, a text is “[w]oven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text”(160)(Emphasis added).

But the most authentic proponent of the term intertextuality is indubitably Julia Kristeva who in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* clarifies the nature of the term . In her chapter “Word, Dialogue and Novel” Kristeva argues that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double”(66). Similarly in another seminal chapter entitled “The Bounded Text” Kristeva further clarifies the aesthetics of intertextuality:

[...] the text is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a productivity, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another (36)(Emphasis added).

In this context one may also consider the notion of Michael Riffaterre<sup>3</sup> who refers to what he terms “referential fallacy” and argues that “the text refers not to objects outside of itself, but to an inter-text. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts” (228)(Emphasis added). What is tellingly significant about Riffaterre’s concept of intertextuality is that he emphasizes not only the points of resonances, but also those of dissonances, both the similarities and differences in an intertext. In his essay “Intertextual Representation : On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse” Riffaterre suggests that an intertext

“is a corpus of texts, textual fragments, or text-like segments of the sociolect that shares a lexicon and, to a lesser extent, a syntax with the text we are reading (directly or indirectly) in the form of synonyms, or even conversely, in the form of antonyms”(142)(Emphasis added). Little wonder then, in an intertextual study the points of departure from a previous text are as significant as the points of resemblance.

### III

Basu’s *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* opens with the evocation of death as the scene is at the *Nimtalā* crematorium, with visible dead bodies put on the pyre. The focus shifts from the crematorium to two night guards, Bimal and Pankaj— Basu’s alternative for Shakespeare’s sentinels, Barnardo and Marcellus in *Hamlet*— from the snatches of whose discussion we come to know about the death of an insane vagabond. Any perceptive reader does not fail to notice how Basu introduces one major staple of *Hamlet*— madness— into the texture of *Hemlāt*. Readers do not fail to remember how Shakespeare refers to the strategic madness of *Hamlet*. Reacting to *Hamlet*’s so-called madness, Polonius rightly comments in an aside:

Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t

( II, ii, 201)

Pankaj retorts that their locality in north Kolkata is infested with mad people(Scene-i).

In the opening scene Bimal and Pankaj get the creeps when a find a shadowy figure emerging from the cactus bush covered with smoke. They are chilled to the marrow when the figure resembles *Sādhan*, the deceased father of *Hemlāt*. The wonderful stage direction deserves especial attention, and testifies to Basu’s artistic finesse: at the backstage the light dims; the entire place is enveloped in smoke, and *Hemlāt*’s father *Sādhan* is seen standing, as if, in a goods train with some bust tickets in his left hand and refreshment in his right. Like the ghost of *Hamlet*’s father, *Sādhan*’s ghost is an objective reality<sup>4</sup>, and is visible to all. Furthermore, like the Ghost of the King of Denmark, *Sādhan*’s ghost is attributed with some speech the staple of which comprises incoherent insane mutterings about socio-political malaise, and snatches of popular film songs. While the Ghost of *Hamlet*’s father speaks only to his son, the speeches of the ghost of *Sādhan* are not directed and addressed to any particular individual. From the sporadic dialogues he mutters from some popular Hindi movies, we come to get a succinct account of the rampant corruption of his contemporary society, and his rebellious desire to put an end to it. The angst of the Ghost of *Hamlet*’s father lies in his similar embarrassment induced by the crime of his murderous brother who had killed him. He therefore provoked *Hamlet* to avenge his murder. Thus while in Shakespeare

the Ghost was perturbed with a personal grievance against his bother, Basu widens the purview of grievance in Sādhan's ghost who becomes, as it were, a supernatural antenna to capture and reflect the angst of socio-political aberrations and delinquencies prevailing in his contemporary society. Thus while Shakespeare's Ghost was just an agent of provocation, unveiling an insidious murder and instigating his son to retaliate it, Basu's ghost becomes both an agent of provocation and a commentator of social ills. If intertextuality according to Kristeva is "an absorption and transformation" of another text into a new textual corpus, what is tellingly significant about Basu's intertextual "transformation" is his ingenuity of conflating the Zeitgeist of his contemporary times with popular culture, or to put it more precisely popular commercial film dialogue and song. Any perceptive reader also does not fail to notice how the ghost of Sādhan creates an intertextual hotchpotch— or what Kristeva had termed "a mosaic of quotations" and Barthes had called "a tissue of quotations" — in the snatches of the popular film songs he tries to reproduce at random. One also notices that the popular dialogues he utters in a chaotic way veer around one basic preoccupation of Shakespeare's Hamlet. One may consider, for instance, the following dialogue of Sādhan's apparition:

Ei shālā— mārbo ekhāne lash porbe shashāne.

(You rogue! I shall cudgel you so violently that your corpse

will be found in the crematorium!) (Basu 80)(Translation mine).

The ghost of Sādhan vanishes leaving the scared Bimal senseless. The scene ends with a team of band party with slogans against cultural degradation.

Hemlāt's mother Monoramā — Basu's alternative for Gertrude— informs Hemlāt of Bimal and Pankaj having seen his father's ghost at the Kashi Mittir crematorium. While the word "Gertrude" etymologically means "spear of strength", Basu's appellation "Monorama" bespeaks an intertextual inversion, for it means "exquisitely beautiful". Unlike her Shakespearean counterpart, this Monoramā is mild, soft, pliant and rather submissive. Hemlāt contends that his father's restless soul being a witness to every evil cannot rest in peace. When Horatio and others reported Hamlet of his father's putative ghost, a similar leery scepticism crept into Hamlet's mind:

My father's spirit— in arms! All is not well;

I doubt some foul play....

(I, ii)

Without having seen his father's ghost, and without being present there, Hemlāt blurts out the verbatim words spoken by Sādhan's apparition:

Pāp se dharti phāti-phāti. Adharma se āsmān.

(The earth is cleft by sin; the sky is rent

with vice.)

(Basu 81)(Translation mine).

At the theoretical level this linguistic repetition prescribes to an intertext being “a mosaic of quotations”, to borrow Kristeva’s phrase; at the aesthetic level it a deep elective affinity between the deceased father Sāadhan and his son Hemlāt. Significantly, Shakespeare does not create any such affinity<sup>5</sup> between Denmark’s deceased King and his son Hamlet. One does not fail to notice how both Hemlāt and Sadhan’s apparition are racked by the iniquities, injustices and delinquencies of the contemporary times.

Both Hamlet and Hemlāt are singularly critical of their respective mothers. Hamlet cannot come to terms with his mother’s marriage to Claudius almost immediately after his father’s murder:

She married. O most wicked speed! To post

With such dexterity to incestuous sheets,

It is not, nor it cannot come to good;

(I, ii, 156-158.)

Similarly, Hemlāt is strongly averse to his mother’s proximity to his uncle Kadukaka. Basu’s choice of the name Kadu bears sonic resemblance to Shakespeare’s Claudius. But as to go through the play we realize that the resemblance is more than linguistic: both Claudius and Kadu are equally notorious and incestuous. Hemlāt enters into a heated altercation with his mother and accuses her of conniving with his delinquent uncle to sell their ancestral house. Hemlāt takes strong exception to Kadu’s sinister design to confiscate their entire ancestral property by selling it to a promoter. On his mother’s departure Hemlāt brings out an old sword from beneath his bed and utters to himself with histrionic theatricality that one day he is going to kill his uncle Kadu with this sword, inasmuch as he is Hemlāt, the Prince of Garānhāta. The irony lies in the fact that far from being a prince, Hemlāt happens to be a prosaic, sordid, young guy of 30-32, from a lower middle-class family trying to eke out a bare survival. Basu’s “transformation”— in consistence with Kristeva’s formula— of Shakespeare’s gorgeous Prince of Denmark into an inconsequential lower middle-class guy entrapped into a humdrum, platitudinous, monotonous existence, serves to accentuate the irony by the grimness of its contrast.

The advent of Hemlāt’s friend Harish reinforces the intertextual knot. Basu’s appellation of Harish cannot but impel us to interpret it as a variant of Horatio with whom his



name shares sonic similarity. But as in Claudius's transformation into Kadu, Horatio's alternative Harish bears more than sonic affinity. When Harish tries to dismiss the story of Bimal and Pankaj having seen the ghost of Hemlāt's father Sadhan as untenable and fake, Hemlāt philosophically reflects:

My dear Harish. *Prithibiteerakam anek kichu ghate jā tomār āmar buddhisuddhir bāire.*(My dear Harish. So many things happen in this world which transcend the intelligence and logic of yours and mine).

(Basu 82)(Translation mine).

Any perceptive reader does not fail to notice that it is but an intertextual resonance of Hamlet's famous comment to Horatio:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

(I, v, 165-166).

In this conversation between Hemlāt and Harish the former ruefully segues into the pervasive existence of sin, corruption, deception, hypocrisy and avarice in his contemporary society. The dichotomy between gorgeous appearance and grim reality— a recurrent motif in Shakespeare— saddens Hemlāt:

*Mukhe bhālo bhālo kathā bolche ār keu nijer bhai k mārche, keu bācchake, keu bouke, keu bondhuke, keu pāsher barir lokke, keu niजेके mārche. Mere dicche. Merei choleche. Kārone mārche. Akārone mārche.* (Uttering golden words and someone killing one's brother, someone killing one's child; someone killing his wife; someone his friends, his neighbour, and even himself! Killing! Continual rampant killing! Killing for reason! Killing without reason!)(Basu 83-84)(Translation mine).

This discrepancy between golden words and murderous action, between suavity of appearance and ferocity of deeds also concerns Hamlet who, with the acuity of his vision, can rumble through the true nature behind the seeming appearances, and can therefore aphoristically reflect, "That one may smile and smile and be a villain"(I, v, 108). Steeped in the socio-political degeneration of his contemporary times, Hemlāt's sensibility is anguished at the unfortunate malaise prevailing in his contemporary Kolkata, and West Bengal. He laments the fact that during his school days there was neither spoken English, nor Computer— a political dig at the fallacies of the Left-Front regime in West Bengal.

Basu follows in Shakespeare's toes, and creates Kadu into a deceptive, crafty acquisitive man. Besides running a catering business, Kadu has a host of other businesses. When the journalist Rajat wants to take an interview of Kadu regarding the supposed appearance of his elder brother Sadhan's Ghost, Kadu gets infuriated. This anger smacks of his connivance in his brother's murder almost like that of Claudius's involvement in murdering his brother, the King of Denmark. Just as Hamlet was away from Denmark during the murder of his father, Hemlāt was in Chennai when his father Sadhan was supposedly murdered by his brother Kadu. Kadu's consolation to his bereaved nephew Hemlāt is worth-considering:

*Sabāi tār bāpke ākḍin nā ākḍin hārāi. Tomār bāpou hāriyechilo. Tār bāpou. Tār jonyo shoke ketre thākle cholbe?*(Everyone loses his father one day or other. Your father lost his father. His father followed suit. But does it mean to be encompassed by grief?)

(Basu 88)(Translation mine).

Any perceptive reader may find the exact intertextual resonance of it in a similar situation in Claudius's attempt to console Hamlet after his father's death:

But you must know your father lost a father,  
That father lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow; but to preserve  
In obstinate condolence is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, ...

(I, ii, 89-94)

In addition to situational resonances, and similarity of character and situation, Basu also includes thematic resonances in his intertextual design. One of the recurrent thematic aspects of *Hamlet* is insanity. A crazy guy named Pukkuli, when referred to as being mad, acquiesces in his alleged madness and confesses that he is crazy. This strikes intertextual resonances with Hamlet's strategic madness to avenge his father's murder, and Captain Yossarian's deliberate craziness so as to be released from war in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*.

Hemlāt adoringly calls his beloved (Sephāli) "Sephālia", a name which, because of its rhyming affinity, may remind any perceptive reader of an intertextual variant of Ophelia. If Ophelia's intertextual counterpart is Sephāli, Ophelia's father Polonius is reduced to an unassuming Pol in Basu's intertext. The counterpart of Laertes in Basu's play is Lācchu. If

Shakespeare's hero is caught in the shackles of his machinating murderous uncle and unfaithful mother, Basu's protagonist is immured in the morass of his hard times, his crafty uncle, his adulterous mother, and the worthless Pol's drunkenness.

The sixth scene begins with an inclement weather with the raging of storm interspersed with thunderclaps. The external unruly Nature becomes an objective correlative to the internal storm raging in Hemlāt's mind agog with the impatience to meet his father's ghost. This correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm was symptomatic of Elizabethan age, and may be found in many Shakespearean plays<sup>6</sup>. It is in this scene that Hemlāt meets his father's apparition. The Ghost of Sadhan reports Hemlāt that he was poisoned to death, though he does not tell him the name of his murderer, as we find in the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

We come to know from Monoramā that Hemlāt has been suffering from severe fever since the day he went out in the inclement weather to encounter the putative apparition of his father Sadhan. We also come to know that the erstwhile reluctant Hemlāt has consented to sell their ancestral house. Hemlāt's sudden change of mind in this regard strikes wonder and suspicion in Kadu. One may intertextually connect it to the fact that Claudius was sceptical of Hamlet's motives, and did not trust him. Claudius goes to the extent of engaging Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to know the whereabouts of Hamlet.

That Basu's text engages itself in a sort of intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare's Hamlet becomes conspicuous when Pankaj, Bimal, BitelDa, Pukkali and Harish meet Hemlāt who was supposed to rehearse Shakespeare's Hamlet in Bengali translation, and perform it. Thus, Basu tries to explore yet another material from Shakespeare's play—the play-within-play episode—so as to reinforce his intertextual affiliation with Hamlet. And yet, this is possibly the weakest point in Basu's plot, inasmuch as a good intertext will never make any direct reference to the original text which it tries to recreate. An intertext according to Julia Kristeva is "the absorption and transformation" of another text into an altogether new one. Thus while there will be echoes, resonances, similarities with and drastic departure from the original text, the writer himself will only suggest, and never conspicuously state his/her allegiance to the previous text. The authenticity of this play as a pure intertext could possibly have been maintained in a well-organized way, had Basu avoided this direct reference to Hamlet. In other words, by making his affiliation explicit, Basu, as it were, guides and compels (rather than impels) his readers to read this play as an intertext. Along with the publication of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" and along with the advent of the multiple Reader Response theories, the role of the reader has been prioritized over the author. The play-

within-play episode— a Bengali translation of Hamlet— is enacted during Dol Purnima. Harish announces that their translation is however a translation of ideas rather than a verbatim one, and that some snatches from contemporary society have been interspersed within it. Harish relates the background for Hamlet's motive for such a performance: to detect the real murderer of his father. Bitelda adds how Hamlet comes to know from the ghost of his father that he was murdered by his brother Claudius who also married his wife Gertrude, and how Hamlet becomes lachrymose after the knowledge of this terrible truth.

One particular technique that attests to the cachet of Basu's genius is his ingenious conflation of popular film songs which perfectly dovetail into the pensive situation of Hamlet. For example, when Hamlet( played by Pankaj) is engulfed by the overwhelming grief induced by his father's unnatural death, and when he feels alienated from his mother Gertrude who marries his father's murderer Claudius, Hamlet sings a line from a popular film<sup>7</sup> the theme of which chimes in with the loneliness and melancholia of the protagonist. In Bitelda's translated version of Hamlet one also finds an introduction of a Chorus. As Hamlet and Gertrude(here played by Pukkuli disguised as a woman) engage in a heated altercation, Kadu reacts vehemently and interrupts. This strikes intertextual resonance with Claudius's reaction after witnessing the mock play directed by Hamlet and enacted by a few players. But unlike Claudius who never confesses his sin, Kadu admits that he has killed his brother, and threatens Hemlat to kill him if he continues the mock play. The two roguish political guy, Sukhen and Jhantu, force them to stop the play at the provocation of Kadu. Hemlat's final comment at the end of the ninth scene is his attempt to translate Hamlet's comment to his mother<sup>8</sup> in Act III, scene iv.

Shakespeare's Prince of Denmark is seen to be rocked and racked by the lashes of self-laceration and self-derogation as long as he fails to avenge his father's murder. In a heart-rending soliloquy he says:

Am I a coward?

.....

But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall

To make oppression bitter...

.....

Why, what an ass am I:

(II, ii, 506-517)

Basu's Prince of Garahata is seen to be lacerated by similar self-abomination and self-chastisement at his inability to protest and wreak vengeance on his father's putative murderer Kadu:

*Āmi hijre hoye gechi bābā. Napansuk. Āmi āmar somoye  
Dānriye ār pratisodh nite pārbo nā.*

(I have become a eunuch, father. Eunuch. Standing in my time I cannot take revenge). (Basu 112)(Translation mine)

At the end of Basu's play Hemlāt, delirious with high fever, gets some vision from his childhood days, and the penultimate scene see-saws between his past childhood and present manhood. The scene ends with a pensive note with Hemlāt succumbing to his fever. The eleventh and final scene may be taken as an Epilogue spoken by Hemlāt at the backdrop of the burning ghat with his deceased father Sādhān standing behind Hemlāt dwells on his futile existence and his failure, but also wishes that his unfulfilled task will be done by his next generation. Thus while Shakespeare's Prince of Denmark dies with the grandeur of a true tragic hero, fighting with Laertes, Basu's Prince of Garanhata has a pathetic death through illness.

CONCLUSION: What puts Shakespeare and Basu within the same intertextual web is also their verisimilitude to their respective times. Both have dwelled on the maladies of their socio-cultural scenarios in their respective milieu. Significantly, Basu's intertext is written and situated almost after a gap of four centuries. Besides, there is also a spatial and cultural gap. The sneers and snares of the courtly world of Denmark steeped in the lure and craze of power-politics are replaced by Basu by the sordidness, seediness, sleaziness, steaminess and wretchedness of West Bengal caught in the tangle of almost similar power-politics and delinquency. Similarly the splendour and grandeur, the pomp and voluptuousness of the courtly world are supplanted by the drabness and dreariness of the impoverished lower middle-class society. The young generation represented by Lacchu, Harish, Bimal, Pankaj, Hemlāt among others, are immured in the morass of a jobless world where crafty politicians, have-and-holders, and wily businessmen suck the country dry at the cost of moral values. The erosion of values affect Hamlet and Polonius in the same way as it does to their counterparts in Basu's play, Hemlāt and Pol. Pol philosophically reflects on the malaise of his contemporary times in which none but the babies and the insane people are truly well(Scene-x). Harish detects another disease of his awfully selfish society: the imperviousness and indifference of others. Both Hamlet and his literary inheritor Hemlāt become victims of familial and social disease. Both are lashed by self-laceration at their helpless, hapless and

hopeless situation. Finally both become power antennas to reflect the zeitgeist of their respective ages. In the ultimate analysis, it goes without saying that Bratya Basu's *Hemlāt the Prince of Garānhātā* is indisputably a fine and successful intertext of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

### Works Cited

Since no English translation of Bratya Basu's canon is available, and given that translation of non-English portions is admissible in research, in this essay I have used the exact Bengali quotation from Bratya Basu's play orthographically, and have translated those relevant quotations for the sake of intelligibility, though I don't have a formal published translation of the entire text.

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<sup>1</sup> Updike's "The Scarlet Letter Trilogy", also known as his "Hawthorne Novels" comprise *A Month of Sundays*(1975), *Roger's Version*(1986), and *S.*(1988).

<sup>2</sup> Tennant's *Tess*(1993) is an explicit rewriting of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Tennant's *Pemberley; or, Pride and Prejudice Continued*(1993) is supposed to be a sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Her *An Unequal Marriage; or, Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later*(1994) is an attempt to resuscitate Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in her contemporary society. Her *Emma in Love: Jane Austen's Emma Continued* is a similar attempt to sustain the spirit of Austen's *Emma*. Her *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and*

*Mrs Hyde* is a conspicuous intertext of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Her *The French Dancer's Bastard* dwells on the life of Adèle, the daughter of Mr Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Tennant's *Elinor and Marianne*(1996) is supposed to be a sequel to Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Riffaterre, "Interpretation and Undecidability" in *New Literary History* 12(2) : 227-42.

<sup>4</sup> In stark contrast to the Ghost of Hamlet's deceased father, one may note that the Ghost of Banquo in *Macbeth* is a subjective reality inasmuch as it is visible only to the guilt-ridden Macbeth., and not to others.

<sup>5</sup> One however finds a strange elective affinity between Macbeth and the witches when Macbeth, nescient of the previous enigmatic speech of the witches("Fair is foul and foul is fair")(I, i, 13), virtually echoes the same("So foul and fair a day I have not seen") in I,iii, 36.

<sup>6</sup> For example the night when Duncan was murdered in *Macbeth* the weather was unruly and unnatural. The external storm in *King Lear* is a prelude to the internal storm raging in his mind.

<sup>7</sup> The film is the Hindi version of the famous Bengali film *Amānush* acted by Uttam Kumar and Sharmila Tagore. The song is "*Dil aisā kisi ne merā torā*" ("Someone has broken my heart")(translated by me), sung by Kishore Kumar in the lips of Uttam Kumar.

<sup>8</sup> See Hamlet's entire comment: It is not madness/....leave to do him good"( III, iv, 139-153).