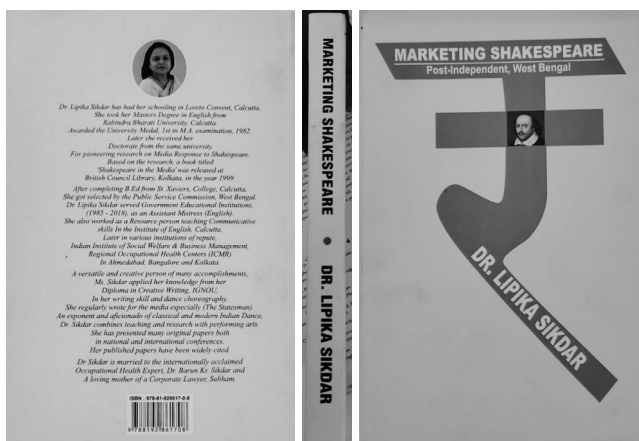


Book Review

by Subham Sikdar



Title: Marketing Shakespeare: Post-Independent, West Bengal

Author: Dr. Lipika Sikdar

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Marketing Shakespeare: Post-Independent, West Bengal is an ambitious and interdisciplinary study that interrogates a deceptively simple but intellectually rich question: “Is there a market for Shakespeare in post-independent West Bengal?” Dr. Lipika Sikdar approaches this enquiry not merely as a literary scholar but as a cultural historian, media

analyst, and sociologist of literature. The book situates Shakespeare not only as a canonical literary figure but as a **living cultural brand**, embedded in Bengal's academic institutions, performance traditions, print media, popular culture, and collective consciousness.

The work is positioned at the intersection of **Shakespeare studies, cultural economics, postcolonial reception, and media history**, making it distinctive within Indian Shakespeare scholarship. Rather than rehearsing familiar textual interpretations, the author shifts attention to **circulation, consumption, and commodification**, thereby reframing Shakespeare as an enduring economic and symbolic capital in Bengal.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The book is divided into seven chapters, supported by extensive notes, references, media excerpts, and visual appendices. Each chapter examines a different site of “marketing”:

1. Historical entry and colonial legacy
2. Print journalism and conference culture
3. Academic syllabi and book reviews
4. Theatre and stage performances
5. Cinema and visual media
6. Shakespeare societies and institutional networks
7. Concluding economic and cultural synthesis

This compartmentalized structure allows the author to demonstrate how Shakespeare's market presence operates **simultaneously across multiple domains**, reinforcing his longevity and adaptability.

CENTRAL ARGUMENT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The book's core argument is that **Shakespeare functions as a powerful cultural commodity in post-independent West Bengal**, sustained not by colonial coercion but by **voluntary cultural assimilation, intellectual admiration, and institutional reinforcement**. Dr. Sikdar provocatively uses the language of “marketing” and “lucrative

commodity,” while remaining sensitive to the ethical discomfort such terminology may evoke within literary studies.

Importantly, the author does not reduce Shakespeare to crude commercialism. Instead, she demonstrates that **economic viability and aesthetic reverence coexist**—a coexistence visible in book publishing, theatre festivals, academic conferences, tourism, audio-visual adaptations, and even pandemic-era digital discourse.

USE OF SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

One of the book’s most striking features is its **archival richness**. The author relies extensively on:

- Newspaper articles from *The Statesman*, *Desh*, and other Bengali and English dailies
- Conference proceedings and seminar presentations
- Book reviews spanning several decades
- Personal academic experiences and institutional affiliations
- Visual materials and performance documentation

This methodology foregrounds **reception history** rather than abstract theory. Shakespeare’s presence is traced through *responses*—reviews, debates, adaptations, controversies, syllabi, and performances—making the book an invaluable cultural chronicle.

KEY THEMES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Shakespeare as a Bengali Cultural Phenomenon

Dr. Sikdar convincingly shows how Shakespeare has entered the **Bengali intellectual bloodstream**, comparable to figures like Kalidasa and Tagore. Quotations from Bengali critics, politicians, teachers, doctors, and lawyers illustrate how Shakespeare permeates everyday intellectual life.

2. From Classroom to Boardroom

The book successfully charts Shakespeare's movement from **educational syllabi** to **professional discourse**, including law, medicine, occupational health, management, and public policy—thereby extending Shakespeare beyond literature departments.

3. Performance and Media Economy

The discussion of theatre, film, audio cassettes, televised performances, and folk traditions like *Jatra* highlights how Shakespeare adapts to indigenous performance idioms while retaining commercial viability.

4. Institutional Networks

The chapter on Shakespeare societies demonstrates how **organized cultural bodies** play a crucial role in sustaining scholarly interest, public engagement, and international collaboration—effectively functioning as marketing ecosystems.

5. Pandemic and Digital Afterlife

The Covid-19 sections are particularly insightful, showing how Shakespeare was mobilized as **psychological, ethical, and cultural support** during crisis—reinforcing his relevance even when physical theatres shut down.

STRENGTHS OF THE BOOK

- **Original perspective:** Treating Shakespeare explicitly as a “marketable brand” in postcolonial Bengal is both bold and innovative.
- **Extensive documentation:** The book functions as a repository of Shakespeare reception in Bengal across decades.
- **Interdisciplinary reach:** Literature, economics, media studies, cultural history, and sociology intersect seamlessly.
- **Cultural specificity:** The work is deeply rooted in Bengal's intellectual geography—College Street, Coffee House, theatres, universities.

- **Personal yet scholarly voice:** The author's lived engagement with Shakespeare studies enriches the narrative without undermining academic seriousness.

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

While the book's descriptive richness is a major strength, it occasionally comes at the cost of **theoretical synthesis**. Concepts from cultural economics, branding theory, or postcolonial market theory could have been more explicitly articulated. Additionally, tighter editorial refinement would improve linguistic clarity in places.

However, these limitations do not detract significantly from the book's value as a **foundational text** in Indian reception studies.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE

Marketing Shakespeare: Post-Independent, West Bengal is a **pioneering contribution** to Indian Shakespeare scholarship. It shifts the critical gaze from textual reverence to **cultural circulation**, demonstrating how Shakespeare survives not because of institutional inertia but because he continues to generate meaning, debate, profit, and pleasure.

The book will be of immense value to:

- Scholars of Shakespeare and comparative literature
- Researchers in postcolonial cultural studies
- Historians of print and performance culture
- Students examining literature's relationship with economy and media

Ultimately, Dr. Lipika Sikdar's work affirms that in Bengal, Shakespeare is not a relic of colonial pedagogy but a **dynamic cultural force**, whose market demand—intellectual, emotional, and economic—shows no sign of decline.