

An Inquiry into the Problems of Intercultural Adaptation:  
Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* (1989 Film) in  
Comparison with Indian TV Production (1988)

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Abstract

In his adaptation of *The Mahabharata* into a nine-hour stage play in 1985, Peter Brook intentionally universalizes the ancient Indian epic as a story of all humanity with an international cast, and only “suggests” the Indian context. In the release of 3-hour DVD in 1989, the film dramatization, its settings, and its actions are stylized like that of a theatrical performance in keeping with the nature of mythic stories, and the historical era is not specified. Brook’s intercultural translation has been hailed as “one of the theatrical events of this century.” However, the appropriation raised indignant criticisms from Indian scholars. Rustom Bharucha, a notable Indian writer, director, cultural critic: “Brook e has taken one of our most .significant texts and decontextualised it from its history in order to sell it to audiences in the west... Our *history* in all its detail and density was translated into “a fairy tale.” This paper intends to examine Brook’s intercultural translation in comparison with Indian versions, 1988 TV serial, to uncover what has been left out from Brook’s production, which are important for the foreign audiences to understand the core essence of Hindu culture. Lawrence Venuti’s concept of “foreignization” that “can deviate from domestic norms to signal the foreignness of the foreign text and create a readership that is more open to linguistic and cultural differences,” will be employed to re-consider the inevitable loss of some of the most cherished features of the original. Two key scenes, The Disrobing and *The Bhagavad-Gita*, will be analyzed in the context of two central emotional themes of the epic, *Rasa*, and *Bhakti*. The t renditions of TV adaptations will be compared and contrasted with Brook’s The paper tentatively concludes that any successfully communicative intercultural translation needs a third space “to foster a common understanding with and of the foreign culture.”

Key words: Intercultural adaptation, *The Mahabharata*, Foreignization, *Rasa*, *Bhata*

## I. Introduction

The *Mahabharata* is the world's longest epic poem, consisting of eighteen books, eight times as long as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together. Though the English call it an "epic," the *Mahabharata* is an "itihasa," a "historical fantasy," a history of the Bharata dynasty, the legendary kingdom of northern India from whom India takes its name, Bharat. The text in fact states that "what is in the Bharata is everywhere and what is not is nowhere." Intentionally universalize this ancient Indian epic as a story of all humanity with an international cast, Peter Brook made his adaptation firstly into a nine-hour stage play in 1985, touring around the world for four years, and then reduced the play into 6 hours for television, and lastly reduced to about 3 hours for DVD release in 1989. In keeping with the nature of mythic stories, the film dramatization, its settings, and its actions are stylized like that of a theatrical performance, and the historical era is not specified. Brook's intercultural production has been hailed as "one of the theatrical events of this century" (qtd. in Bharucha 1988: 9). However, the appropriation raised indignant criticisms from Indian scholars. Rustom Bharucha, a notable Indian writer, director, cultural critic, criticizes bitterly on Brook's production: "Brook has taken one of our most significant texts and decontextualised it from its history in order to sell it to audiences in the west" (1993: 230). He further protests that The *Mahabharata*, the fundamental source of Hindu religion and culture, "our *history* in all its detail and density was translated into a fairy tale" (Ibid.). This paper intends to uncover what have been left out from Brook's intercultural performance presented in the film adaptation, which are deemed important for the foreign audiences to understand the core essence of Hindu culture. A theoretical framework based on adaptation and translation will be employed to evaluate the lamentable loss moaned by Hindu viewers of Brook's intercultural

production, demonstrated in a comparison with Indian adaptation, B. R. Chopra's production of *Mahabharata* in TV serial (1988). Two scenes--Draupadi's disrobing and the *Bhagavad Gita*—will be examined as illustrations. Finally, the paper will suggest a third space can be created for more fruitful intercultural exchanges.

## II. Adaptation and Translation

Firstly, I will briefly summarize the Peter Brook's Intercultural project controversy. "The *Mahabharata* provoked considerable harsh criticisms in the late 1980s. It was denounced as 'only orientalism' (Wirth 288), 'cultural piracy' (Zarrilli 98), or 'worse, cultural rape' (Chaudhuri 193). On the other hand, it was celebrated as 'a theatre event of such epic proportions that it will change the Mahabharata-as-world-text-forever' (Mishra 201)" (John Hellweg). William Henry III praised the theatrical event as "a spellbinding journey through myth and fable, blessed with an unflinching sense of wonder" (1987). The completely opposite evaluation of the production illustrates the central problem of cross-culture adaptation, which is succinctly pointed out by Linda Hutcheon in her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*: "Adapters of traveling stories exert power over what they adapt. ... Adapters across cultures probably cannot avoid thinking about power. ... A different power differential between colonized and colonizer, however, often plays a role in the adapting process" (150, 152). Lawrence Venuti's clarification of the nature of the translation practice further explains the problematic intercultural interaction: "Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences, basically domestic, drawn from the receiving language and culture to enable the foreign to be received there. The foreign text, then, is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and

interests” (2004: 482). Indeed, even the adaptor and playwright of the *Mahabharata*, Jean-Claude Carriere, acknowledged the “possibility of unconscious colonization by way of vocabulary, since the action of translating Indian words translates our relationship to an entire civilization” (qtd. in Hutcheon 152). From this perspective, we can understand the difficult situation Brook and Carriere were in and hard decisions they had to make under various kinds of restraints.

### III. Adaptation and Translation of *The Mahabharata*

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptations as “deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works” (xiv). In undertaking such a “monumental” intercultural adaptation from the source material of a 100,000 stanza poem, Brook and Carrière had to develop strategies to translate and adapt the *Mahabharata* so that it would be meaningfully received by international audiences. What they did was to maximize accessibility and identification by widening the focus of the story itself, expanding its frame of reference from its being the poetical history of India to its being the “poetical history of all mankind”. India is the source and setting of the story. According to Carrière, “In order to adapt *The Mahabharata*, to transform an immense epic poem into a play, or three plays, we had to draw new scenes from our imaginations, bring together characters who never meet in the poem itself. All this within the context of deep respect for the shape and scene of the story” (*The Mahabharata*, xi).

Furthermore, they deliberately employed “a simple, precise, restrained language. ... This careful choice of language led us to a problem which would be repeated again in other areas: one might call it ‘the Indian-ness’” (Ibid., xii). As a director, Brook adopts the strategy to represent the Hindu culture by suggesting the Indian context, not imitating: “In the music, in the costume, in the movements, we have tried to suggest the flavor of India without pretending to be what we are not. On

the contrary, the many nationalities who have gathered together are trying to reflect *The Mahabharata* by bringing to it something of their own. In this way, we are trying to celebrate a work which only India could have created but which echoes for all mankind” (Ibid., xvi). According to John Hellweg, Brook’s choice of a very selective evocation of India was essential to maximize contact and a sense of intimacy between the audience and the performers (197).

#### IV. Rustom Bharucha’s Critique

Even though both Brook and Carrière expressed their respectful attitudes towards the source text, “We were touched by the love that Indians bring to *The Mahabharata*, and this filled us both with respect and awe at the task we had assumed” (xv), Brook's *The Mahabharata* was still bitterly attacked by Rustom Bharucha, one of the most detailed and most scathing critiques of the production. In his article, "A View from India" the Brook/Carrière version was seen as excluding and trivializing Indian culture. "It exemplifies a particular kind of western representation that negates the non-western context of its borrowing" (1988). Bharucha's repudiation of *The Mahabharata* included several points, such as decontextualization, simplification of characterization and plot, the attenuation of a Hindu world view, a five minute encapsulation of the Bhagavad Gita, etc. Among these issues, the last caused the strongest reaction from the critics; “the literary, philosophical and theological epicenter of the epic, the *Bhagava Gita*, was seemingly passed over in Brook’s production” (1988). For Brook, an extensive presentation of a religious discourse is simply inconsistent with the dynamics of theatre: "theatre is not a lecture, theatre is not a religious ritual; theatre is not a sermon. It is a rich area of concentrated meaning between many, many diverse elements" (qtd. in Hellweg 197). Thus, for the purposes of more effective dramatization in accordance with the theatrical language, Brook cut

and reshaped the materials of *Gita* into a very short episode, only 3 pages in the script and about 6 minutes on film. At the same time, he peeled away the Hindu historical and religious identifications in order that he could tell a universal story of mankind: “[W]e are not attempting a reconstruction of Dravidian and Aryan India of three thousand years ago. We are not presuming to present the symbolism of Hindu philosophy” (*The Mahabharata*, xvi). As a result, the Hindu viewers of Brook’s film that bears the title of their great epic but without their distinctive cultural look feel naturally wounded; their disappointed feelings are still lingering on.<sup>1</sup>

## V. Domestication and Foreignization

In talking about the major cultural debates in the contemporary world—the relation between different cultures—Amartya Sen in his book, *The Argumentative Indian*, points out: “There is the more basic issue of the individuality of each culture, and questions about whether and how this individuality can be respected and valued” (2005: 122). There is the great need for intercultural communication but the difficulties of achieving successful intercourse are also immense. In the recent development of the field of translation, theories are formulated to achieve better communication between distinctively different cultures. Venuti presents two types of translation in the academic field, domestication and foreignization, the latter of which will give a heterogeneous culture faithful and respectful representation. Venuti bemoans the phenomenon of domestication since “it involves an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to [Anglo-American] target-language cultural values. This entails translating in a transparent, fluent, ‘invisible’ style in order to minimize

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gita* episode is put on the website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4Z1PB97KY>. The commentaries mostly focus on the representation of Krishna, criticizing that Krishna is not presented in the divine form as he should be. Some other episodes, such as Dharma questions Yudhishtira, Death of Abhimanyu Scene, are also put on the youtube, and the commentaries are not that angry. Krishna’s image presented in Brook’s film is a disappointment for them.

the foreignness of the Target Text. It leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author toward him” (1995: 20). From this perspective, we can say that Brook’s way of doing this monumental intercultural adaptation is similar to the strategy of domestication so that the production can “maximize the communicative effectiveness of the subsequent rendering, even at the expense of some of the most cherished features of the original” (Hellweg 197). Could such a rendering of *The Mahabharata* which was decontextualized be meaningful? Yes, the Brook’s production is still significant because this production has stimulated more intercultural activities in the West. “One aspect of the ‘after life’ of the *Mahabharata* is to be found in the myriad ways that this epic has stimulated performance and cultural activity in pan-India, pan-Asia and now in the west” (Ibid.). However, the communication of the foreign text is still not satisfactory, if we agree that the intercultural translation is “to foster a common understanding with and of the foreign culture, an understanding that in part restores the historical context of the foreign text—although for domestic readers” (Venuti, 2004: 487-8). To achieve this goal, the concept of foreignization can help intercultural translators design strategies that “the translator leaves the writer in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader toward [the writer]” (Venuti, 1995: 20). The foreignizing method adopted will be ‘an ethnodeviant pressure on [target-language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad’ (Ibid.)<sup>2</sup>

## VI. The Analysis: the Disrobing Scene and *The Gita*

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<sup>2</sup> In *Constructing Cultures*, Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere Clevedon regards the Schleiermacher model as the suitable model to construct culture, which emphasizes the importance of ‘foreignising’ translation. The privileged position of the receiving language or culture is denied, and the alterity of the source text needs to be preserved.

Brook's universalized version of *The Mahabharata* creates a space for experiment of retelling an ancient Hindu story; however, as it often happens with experiments, the result is not always in accordance with the experimenter's vision. In this context, the concept "the textual grid" presented in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, can help us understand the weakness of this experimental intercultural performance. "More important is the existence of what can be called a 'grid' of text, the textual grid that a culture makes use of, the collection of acceptable ways in which things can be said. ... [T]hey have been interiorized by human beings to such an extent that they have become totally transparent for them, that they appear 'natural.' ... [They exist] not explicitly, but as a pattern of expectations that is felt, has been interiorized by members of a culture" (1998: 5). The weakness of Brook's production lies in the problem of how to harmonize the actors from different nationalities, each with their unique cultural background and performance training. How did these actors interact emotionally and harmoniously as members of the same cultural community, and which social behavior code should they follow, in order that they can perform together to represent a universal story of humanity? For the director, Peter Brook, there is such a universal textual grid that has been his goal to discover it through various intercultural projects in his International Centre for Theatre Research based in Paris, to "articulate a universal art which transcends limited nationalism in an attempt to reach the human essence" (Brook, 1987: 20). But is the single "textual code" successfully created? In his book, *Our film, Their Films*, Satyajit Ray, the great Indian film-maker, cogently observes that "there are certain basic similarities in human behavior all over the world", but "even they can exhibit minute local variations which can only puzzle and perturb—and consequently warp the judgement of – the uninitiated foreigner" (1993: 154). His keen observation pinpoints precisely the difficulty in creating such a universal story. It is this subtlety and nuances of



human behavior that fails to receive the dramatic treatment the theater goes and film audience expect to see in the climax scene of Draupadi's disrobing. The following analysis of the disrobing scene in Indian TV version and Brook's adaptation will show the incompatibility between actors from different cultural backgrounds with different performance styles.

#### A. The Disrobing Scene

We are watered with *Mahabharata* as our popular heroes and heroines and as popular music, as our bed time stories, as our morality, values, the trip of success in *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, it's difficult to understand the western content, religion is something go to church to practice”

Malika Sarabhai<sup>3</sup>

In Indian tradition, Draupadi has been recognized as a tough image of femininity with her unbending will and viewed as an embodiment of *shakti* power who positions superiorly as national mother in Indian culture. Her strong devotional power in demonstrating *bhakti* which brings her closer to the gods is also impressive and highly-praised in Indian culture. Therefore, the performer acting the role of Draupadi in traditional performance displays magnificently her strength when confronting wickedness and has never hidden her true nature to adapt herself to masculine world. Till today, Draupadi is still recognized as the symbol of feminine power which is highly valued in Indian society.

Draupadi, played by the actress *Roopa Ganguly* in B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata*,

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<sup>3</sup> Oostra, Roel. Interview with Sarabhai, Mailika. “*Mahabharata*” *Myths of Mankind*. England: CTC/Cresset Communications B.V, 2001.

the Indian TV serials in 1988, gives such an interpretation of traditional Draupadi displaying her *shakti* power as a model of national mother in India throughout the serial. She defends herself from the dishonor of disrobing in terms of a series of accusations in names of woman's honor, family reputations as well as her respect for the elders who do not give her protection. She uses excessively emotional expressions, such as anger, thrill, frightening, sorrow and disappointment to display her extreme misery and utter humiliation, which strengthen the force of her accusations. Along with the gradual rising of all these subtle emotional nuances, other actors perform the proper responses; such as Bishma's angry protests and the elders' various gestures of pacification, and the five husbands' shocking facial expressions and body movements. Their harmonious performance creates such highly emotional charged scene that the audience is deeply involved in their sympathy for Draupadi and anger with the evil brothers. Because of the effective dramatic impact achieved, the cultural values of India are strongly established and reinforced. In the scene of Draupadi's argument with Bishmas impresses the audience through Draupadi's toughness in her challenge of Bishma's authority which guides the viewers to focus on the emotional intensity of the scene:

Draupadi. It is not Draupadi alone who asks this question. It is woman kind itself! Our eternal Mother Earth asks this question. The nation's future is asking this question, the nation which Emperor Bharat built. Guide me, Grandsire.

Bishma. My daughter.

Draupadi. [shout loudly to break his words] I am not talking of relationships. I am talking of humiliation!

Draupadi's shouting actually shows her disobedience towards Bishma, which is not proper behavior, but is deliberately employed to accumulate strength increasingly

until the sublimation of emotions transformed into the *rasa* experience, which is the goal of any Indian performance. In the climax scene of Draupadi's disrobing, a close-up shot of her suffering image as a martyr with beads of sweat on her forehead and tears on her cheeks successfully pushes emotion into the height. Furthermore, while Krishna's miracle is descending onto her in her concentrated *bhakti* devotional practice, the *rasa* is therefore achieved. *Roopa Ganguly's* demonstration of Draupadi on excessive emotion is in particular emphasized because of the basis on the *rasa* theory in Indian aesthetic tradition.

According to the aesthetic theory of Indian theater, strong emotion is the most important base to arise *rasa* experience, namely, the enlightenment sent by performers to audiences. *Rasa*, usually translated in "essence" or "flavor" literarily, is an aesthetic experience of intuition of wholeness. *Rasa* normally is performed in nine sentiments<sup>4</sup>: it starts from *sringara* strong love feeling and finally ends in *santa* the tranquility. The experiences of various feeling with strong devotion finally lead performers as well as spectators to ultimate bliss through this aesthetic delight.

*Rasa* is reflected by application of *Bhava* (emotion), the natural human emotions their mutual relationship. *Bhava*, in *Sanskrit* usage means: a state of being, becoming, a way of feeling or thinking, sentiment, purport or intention. Performers create *rasa* through *bhava*, and spectators experiences *rasa*. The final goal of any performances is always *rasa*, without *rasa* but only *bhava*, the art is not complete. Therefore, *sringara* strong love is a form of *bhakti* devotion, is most important core--the *raison d'être*—in Indian performance which achieve audience as well as performers "an impersonal state of heightened awareness, building toward the

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<sup>4</sup> *sringara* (the erotic love), *hasya* (the humorous), *karuna* (the compassionate), *raudra* (the fierce), *vira* (the heroic), *bhayanaka* (the fearful), *bibasta* (the disgusted), *adbhuta* (the wondrous), and *santa* (the peaceful).

ultimate goal of transformation<sup>5</sup>” (Schwartz 19).

In Peter Brook’s intercultural theater, Draupadi is de-codified that even Indian classical performer Malika Sarabhai could not recognize. Sarabhai’s frustration came from the director’s forbidding her to bring in the traditional image of the woman with *shakti* shower. She was required to represent Draupadi as “a wimp”<sup>6</sup>. In her writing<sup>7</sup>, Sarabhai recalled the experience, “My first shock, and first battle [in working with Brook], came because of the interpretation of Draupadi; here was my favorite Shakti woman being reduced to a wimp”. Perhaps Sarabhai’s suffering of maladjustment in the international group and tense conflict with the director made her miserable and estranged her from Indian cultural values. She constantly found herself in conflicting with Brook’s idea of Draupadi, which in a way paralleled the humiliation situation with Draupadi who suffers from the disrespect she receives from the men around her:

Many others followed, often met by Brook’s stony look or warmth-less smile. once, at the end of my tether at his apparent lack of approval in spite of all my thespian attempts, lonely and miserable in Paris, disliking the angst prone environment and the politics of rehearsals, I requested a private audience. I burst out in tears, and all my emotions came tumbling out. He listened hands together, fingers touching each other. At the end of a fifteen- minute outburst, anguished and asking for understanding, some warmth, he said, “Ah”. Another time, after yet another discussion on the interpretation of a scene, he turned to me and said,

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<sup>5</sup> Susan L. Schwartz take examples as the notion of transformation in rasa as: rasa as “ of the seven essence that maintain the integrity of the organism”, the transformation of rasa is as “digestive pricess further ‘cooks’ food, producing a more refined form of rasa that can then nourish the body” (Rasa: Performance the Divine in India 8)

<sup>6</sup> “Mallika Writes: View from the Bridge, Decisive Moments” Malika Sarabhai. Ed. Malika Sarahai. 2008.

<http://www.mallikasarabhai.com/vftb1.html>.

<sup>7</sup> ditto.

“Mallika, working with you is like working with Princess Margaret<sup>8</sup>”.

Surrounded by characters with different nationalities, she seemed uprooted because no one was able to respond to emotion or to offer any support because of lacking of understanding about Indian ways of performance and the deeper meaning of the story. Her repressed emotion finally exploded in the scene of disrobing Draupadi, which offered the catalyst that resulted in the chemical transformation expected to realize in the traditional Indian theater.

At the beginning of Sarabhai’s performance, when Draupadi is informed with the bad news that she has been lost, she acts according to Brook’s direction in the style of calmness, and she speaks with a low and restrained tone. After she is dragged into the dice room and thrown in front of all other characters for her forthcoming public humiliation, her inner Draupadi awakens to give a full display to her strong emotion. Sarabhai’s *shakti* power is released not for the injustice that Draupadi suffers, but for the loss of her dignity as the Indian classical performer unappreciated during the rehearsal process. Her various *bhava* emotions are accumulated through her exaggerated acting like anger, thrill, fear, disappointment, sorrow as well as the *santa* peace in demonstrating her devotion to Lord Krishna her god. Sarabhai’s personal suffering meets Draupadi’s misery combining into a seamless whole. In other words, Sarabhai-Draupadi represents a new display of *shakti* power of traditional Draupadi in a new modern form. Her steady and peaceful chanting is derived from her deeply-cultivated Indian aesthetic skills, *rasa* devotion practice, leading her to transcend through these cultural limitations.

Ironically, her five western husbands seem to have no idea what she is doing and show little concern in her chanting. When being disrobed, Sarabhai-Draupadi just mutters in low voice to pray to Krishna displaying her *bhakti* devotion. *Bhakti rasa*

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<sup>8</sup> ditto

(devotion in bliss), the central element in Indian representation of epic stories, is being performed in an inner declaration by Sarabhai, which differs completely from excessive emotional outbursts of Draupadi's crying in TV version. Her skillful use of *rasa* performance in devotion evokes her Lord Krishna to endow a miracle onto her. With the release of traditional Draupadi, Sarabhai-Draupadi breaks through the difficulties of adjusting herself in a foreign land. As Sarabhai said, "Month after month of frustration that nothing I seemed to do was any good. Then a breakthrough-not through him [Peter Brook] or from him but from audiences at the previews"<sup>9</sup>. In other words, finally she found the third space beyond the binary oppositions in intercultural theater through the traditional *rasa* experience, namely, devotion toward audience.

While she is connected with her Indian-ness in terms of understated *rasa* devotion, other international performers respond differently. First, her five husbands seem to have no idea and feeling what she is doing, totally isolated from her spiritual practice. What they are doing is watching her indifferently and waiting for the end of ritual, so that they can go on to the next. As for Bishma, the African actor, as well as Drona and Gandhari, two Asian performers, they are shocked at witnessing the transcendental power descending on to her. Their emotional response to Sarabhai-Draupadi's display of the transcendental empowerment contrasts with the husbands' indifference, which suggests the difference between Western and Eastern attitudes toward the *shakti*'s display. The most interesting response comes from the western Krishna played by Bruce Myers. Although Krishna interacts with Sarabhai-Draupadi in a very calm manner throughout the performance, he ends his rescue mission at a dancer pose like finishing a Waltz smoothly. In other words, regardless of limitations of theatrical structure, Malika Sarabhai successfully creates

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<sup>9</sup> ditto.

*rasa*, the alchemical transformation with the ultimate bliss by penetrating *rasa* in intercultural theatrical environment. Even Peter Brook cannot deny her success by saying that, “Yes, you are very good<sup>10</sup>”. As Malika Sarabhai recalled the difficult experience, “It took over three years before a truce of grudgingly mutual respect for each other and for our differences was reached<sup>11</sup>”.

## B. *The Bhagavad Gita*

When we examine Brook’s problematic representation of *The Bhagavad Gita* in a five minute encapsulation on screen from the angle of foreignization, it does not much in helping the foreign audience to achieve a better understanding of the Hindu culture. On the contrary, according to Haven O’More, it has done great damage in delivering the core message of the epic; “The *Mahabharata*, the Fifth Veda, does not permit this tearing the *Bhagavad Gita* away from its great sacred body, for it refuses to render up and make clear its innermost treasures: as a brain does not function independent of the human body in which it grew and has its roots, so with the the *Bhagavad Gita* rooted in its body, the *Mahabharata*” (qtd. in Hellweg). The metaphor of brain/body illustrates precisely the importance of the *Gita* and its inseparability with the *Mahabharata*. Furthermore, Indian viewers of the youtube screening of the episode expressed their feelings of anger and disappointment. “This ... is an offence to the great Mahabhart; They dressed them like Vikings! ... They have no idea of how elevated the culture was at that time in Bharata Varsha! This puts Krisna Bhagavan on the level of a common man. They could have at least put a little gold and some crowns. Very disappointing. Looking like beggars, not like kings!” The complaint indicates the difference between the two presentation styles. Brook’s style keeps the

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<sup>10</sup> ditto

<sup>11</sup> ditto

costumes simple and plain for those kingly figures; even Krishna dresses like an ordinary man, a totally subversive image of the divine figure. In the traditional Hindu representation of Krishna, as exemplified in TV series, the role is always performed by a very young and handsome performer with golden and glittering costume to show the glorification of the divine power, which attracts the admiration and respect of the ordinary people. Moreover, the visual presentation of Krishna's Divine Form in a gigantic stance with 7 heads exhibiting the cosmic forces of destruction, rebirth, fire, water, air, leaves a memorable impression on Arjuna's mind as well as the viewers' minds. Therefore, after Arjuna witnesses the divine manifestation, he is stimulated by Krishna's teachings and expresses his strengthened faith and picks up his Gandiva to fight. This strengthening of the faith in Krishna achieves the intended impact that the *Gita* wants to evoke— *Bhakti rasa* pure devotion—in the populace. “Hari Krishna! ... I have become someone whose religion has evolved and now Krishna is the most important person in my life and although I respect all faiths, it is with him that I have really learned good and useful spiritual technology and its application to my life,” as one viewer gave his response after watching the episode in TV series.

In contrast, Brook's presentation of the divine manifestation is purely in words, without any visual impact shown in the Indian version. The ambiguous image of Krishna is deliberated because Brook and Carriere wanted to “keep the two faces of Krishna that are in the original poem, and to emphasize their opposite and paradoxical nature” (*The Mahabharata*, xi). The paradoxical truth of Krishna is what Brook intends to present, which is more human than divine. Also, because the length of time is so short, it's very hard to see the development of Arjuna's gradual change from doubt and hesitation into the confirmation and acceptance of Krishna as his only faith. Arjuna's changing process in TV has received a very detailed treatment. We can see Indian Arjuna's vivid facial expressions, showing agonizing and conscientious



torment when looking at his elders in front of him on the battlefield. Krishna's teachings are lengthy, but beautiful and philosophical, just like the devotional poetry as *The Gita* intends to be read. Because of the modern technology, Krishna's majesty could be made into such a special effect so that the audience could witness the miraculous expansion of the height and feel the awe for the unfathomable depth of the Divine. Thinking of Hamlet who is also tormented from the question to-be-or-not-to-be, I am wondering if Brook could lengthen the time of *The Gita* the session of questioning and answering more contemplating and reflective, with Ajuna all anguish tortured by the question to-kill-or-not-to-kill, like those of Hamlet's famous long, complex and philosophical soliloquies, then what the dramatic truth might he have achieved? Probably Brook could not accept the truth in *The Gita* as affirmative, but only as paradoxical, which has been his belief from the beginning of his career to the end. "I have never believed in a single truth. Neither my own, nor those of others" (1994: 3). Of course, this is my speculation. Finally, Brook chose to treat *The Gita* as peripheral but not the central and the most important part of *The Mahabharata*. As a result, the gap between the faithful believers and a constantly doubting artist seems impossible to bridge, a virtual deadlock of opposing claims about Brook's the *Mahabharata*.

## VII. Conclusion

From what I have discussed in the above, I would like to conclude tentatively this problematic intercultural encounter more than 20 years ago. Looking back at the scene from the advantageous point in 2010, I would say the encounter has provoked many conflicting opinions and ideas about the ways how intercultural adaptations are perceived by viewers of different cultures. A review of the critical scholarship enables the reader to ponder once again over the many questions and problems that cultural study has been trying to disentangle problematic cultural relations through years of

debates and movements. Amidst all the passions spent through years of struggling in the era of post-colonialism, the key word—heterogeneity—serves as the bedrock upon which the different cultural communities strive for the authentic representation of cultural identity. “Considered to be one of the most subversive post-colonial critics”, G. C. Spivak makes it as the guiding principle, “to relocate non-Western discourses in totally new spaces where heterogeneity is the norm and a new ‘worlding of the world’ is created” (*Introducing Cultural Studies*, 2004: 117). Under this principle, we cannot say that Brook’s production of *The Mahabharata* is an untruthful representation, perhaps untruthful historically and culturally but truthfully artistically. However, I would like to quote from Amartya Sen’s evaluation of Satyajit Ray, another great film-maker of the twentieth century, to show another way, perhaps the better way, to communicate interculturally and successfully, the third space which can offer the right channel for cultural interactions. “Ray did not want to aim his movies at a foreign audience, and Ray fans abroad rush to see his films know ... that his films are ... the work of an Indian – and Bengali – director made for a local audience, and the attempt to understand what is going on is a decision to engage in a self-consciously ‘receptive’ activity. In this sense, Ray has triumphed – on his own terms – and this vindication, despite all the barriers, tells us something about possible communication and understanding across cultural boundaries. ... [T]he eagerness with which viewers with much experience of Western cinema flock to see Ray’s films ... indicates what is possible when there is a willingness to go beyond the bounds of one’s own culture (2005: 125-6).

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