

# Globalization, Nationalism and the Text of Kichaka-Vadha: The First English Translation of the Marathi Anticolonial Classic, with a Historical Analysis of Theatre in.

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 ***Globalization, Nationalism and the Text of Kichaka-Vadha: The First English Translation of the Marathi Anticolonial Classic, with a Historical Analysis of Theatre in British India. Rakesh Solomon (review)***

Kedar A. Kulkarni

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by

*Kedar A. Kulkarni*

**GLOBALIZATION, NATIONALISM AND THE TEXT OF KICHAKA-VADHA: THE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE MARATHI ANTICOLONIAL CLASSIC, WITH A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THEATRE IN BRITISH INDIA.** Translated and introduced by Rakesh Solomon.  
London: Anthem Press, 2014. xi + 166 pp., 20 photographs. Hardcover, \$99.00 (£60.00).

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The “golden age” of drama in Marathi lasted for a period of approximately forty years, from 1880 to 1920, when playwrights, intellectuals, and often nationalist politicians worked closely to produce a flowering of Marathi drama. Some collaborated to assert themselves against a brutally oppressive British colonial regime. One such playwright, Krishna Prabhakar Khadilkar (1872–1948), had a parallel career as a journalist and newspaper editor, and closely liaised with Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), India’s firebrand nationalist politician who had articulated the need for independence from Britain. During Khadilkar’s theatrical career, he penned fifteen plays, out of which six were prose-plays and nine were music-dramas. Nearly all are steeped in a deep social or political awareness. Solomon’s translation of *Kichaka-Vadha* (1907; *The Slaying of Kichaka*) is the first translation of any Marathi-language play from this period, and is a great resource for pedagogical purposes. His introduction also adds to the growing body of English-language scholarship on Marathi and Indian drama more broadly from the late colonial and modern periods, but is only a qualified success.

According to Solomon, *Kichaka-Vadha* is based on an episode from the epic *Mahabharata*, when five brothers, the Pandavas, and their wife, Draupadi, are in exile incognito at the court of King Virata. During this time, a powerful general at Virata’s court, Kichaka, begins to harass Draupadi, known as Sairandhri in the play. In the hands of Khadilkar, this episode is transformed into a larger political allegory for the early twentieth century. As Solomon explains in the introduction to his volume and in a previous essay (Solomon 1994), the disagreement between

Kankabhata (Yudhishira) and [End Page 698] Ballabha (Bhima) over how to deal with Kichaka is designed to remind audiences of the conflicts between the liberal and extremist wings of the Indian National Congress Party (est. 1885), the primary organization opposing British rule.

In Khadilkar's allegory, Kankabhata, with his concerns over justice and placating Kichaka, most closely resembles the liberal wing of the Congress party, headed by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who "advocated working within British colonial law, i.e., using exclusively constitutional and peaceful means" (p. 31). By contrast, Kankabhata's immediately younger brother, Ballabha, is quicker to anger and voices the need for action; he resembles the Extremists, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh, who "insisted on using all available means, including unconstitutional and direct or violent action" (p. 31). Meanwhile, Kichaka represents the hated viceroy of India, Lord Curzon (in office 1899–1905). Thus, *The Slaying of Kichaka* becomes a complex allegory about the indecisiveness of and infighting within the Congress Party, the abuse of India at the hands of Lord Curzon, and the need for violent rebellion. As a result of the layered epic and allegorical tropes, this play, like many others, was more or less "illegible" to the British censors at first and therefore difficult to proscribe. First performed in 1907, *Kichaka-Vadha* was not proscribed until 1910, during which time audiences were well aware of its political message as colonial administrators clamored to find a satisfying resolution to the tumult it had caused.

In Solomon's volume, the translation closely approximates the Marathi original, and it is faithful to the Marathi Text. The introduction, however, misses many opportunities. Despite the vibrant theatrical scene that produced the "golden age" of Marathi theatre, this period remains inaccessible to non-Marathi speakers. Solomon's translation provides an entry into that world; it includes photographs that enable us to visualize the performances and begin to understand the radical power of epic, religion, myth, and allegory during the "golden age." For these reasons, the translation, on its own, is a valuable and welcome one, true to the Marathi original. The large field of golden age Marathi drama has now

In her conclusion Purkayastha sees all five artists as making important advances from the “proto feministic” Tagore (p. 167) through the feminized body of Uday Shankar on his international tours, which the author links to his colonial subject position, through the efforts of Bardhan to choreograph empowered female bodies in an equalized socialist perspective, to criticism of patriarchy in the work of the Sircars. The book articulately presents a transnational picture of the dancer, showing ties to British, continental, and Soviet movements in the arts. The author situates each artist in the sociopolitical frame in which he or she worked. These artists expressed a sensibility that is both authentically Indian and fully modern.

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**GLOBALIZATION, NATIONALISM AND THE TEXT OF *KICHAKA-VADHA*: THE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE MARATHI ANTICOLONIAL CLASSIC, WITH A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THEATRE IN BRITISH INDIA.** Translated and introduced by Rakesh Solomon. London: Anthem Press, 2014. xi + 166 pp., 20 photographs. Hardcover, \$99.00 (£60.00).

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