Unit: 36: Shakespeare in Indian Language Translation

Shakespeare is the biggest non-Indian literary influence on Indian languages. There were many reasons to translate Shakespeare into Indian languages. Colonial education, adaptation, and localisation guided the early Shakespeare translation in India. The purpose of translation and translator's ambivalence are some of the issues in Shakespeare translation are to be studied in detail. In this unit we will look at English education and Shakespeare translation, Approach to Shakespeare translation, Early translation attempts, and Translator's ambivalence.

English education and Shakespeare translation

It might sound ironic but it is true. English education has been the first and foremost reason for Shakespeare translation. When he was introduced into Indian education, the medium of education was English. The purpose of the colonial system of education was to produce clerks who could be recruited as workhorses to run the imperial machinery. An important part of the educational curriculum was the English language, and Shakespeare was a major part of the English curriculum.

Shakespeare's archaic language was not exactly the best means to teach the English language, and he was not used in England to teach English then. Even for the Englishmen of those days, Shakespeare was to be translated. The Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* which used modern language to translate Shakespeare stories was a remarkable success in England. The Bowdlers' *Family Shakespeare*, which was produced in the same year and retained Shakespeare's language, was not equally successful. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was introduced to Indian education.

Schools and universities first introduced him to English. It was the translations of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* into local Indian languages that helped Indian students to understand Shakespeare. That was why the Lamb's *Tales* became popular translation material in the early stages of English education in India and elsewhere. Even the translators, who were English educated people at the time, did not have enough mastery to translate Shakespeare's archaic language and command over literary expressions into local languages. But soon, he appeared in translations and adaptations in print and most of the early translations of Shakespeare were not faithful translations, but approximations.

There were many reasons for translating him into Indian languages. These translations were primarily meant for those Indians who could not read and appreciate him in English. He was meant to be the best of English literature and represented high literary excellence. It was also to introduce Shakespeare as a literary model to bridge the gap within the Indian literature and supplement the creative writings in Indian languages by introducing new genres.

When the British introduced western literature and especially Shakespeare into India, Indian literature was undergoing a crisis. It was literary and social modernization exercise. This helped Indian literary polysystem to invigorate itself. By then, it was considerably weakened under a very long foreign rule. It distanced itself from the Sanskrit mainstream through the long Persian rule by the time the British took over. The distancing from Sanskrit helped many minor traditions within India reinvent themselves

by the time the Europeans arrived. Translation of western literature, especially of Shakespeare, gave these minor literary traditions a new orientation.

The early translations were pedagogical exercises. Ever since English was taught in India, even before the introduction of the Indian Education Act of 1835 or the renewal of the charter of the East India Company in 1813, Shakespeare was a favourite teaching material. Even as early as 1809, a Bengali translation of *The Tempest* was produced by Claude Moncktonⁱ, a civil servant who has joined Fort William College on 30 July 1806 and left it on 18 February 1809. He graduated with an overall 18th rank and second class in Bengali and fourth class in Hindustani in the Eighth Annual Examination held in January 1808 (Roebuck, 1819, p. 173). This collegiate enterprise was praised in the report in 1809:

Mr. Monckton has undertaken and has been able to execute a translation into Bengalee of Shakespeare's tragedy of the Tempest. The difficulty of rendering a work of that peculiar stamp, into the language of the nation whose idiom and manners have so little affinity either to the genius of the author or to the times and people for which he wrote, maybe easily appreciated. That Mr. Monckton has triumphed over these obstacles and has achieved his singular labour, bears sufficient testimony both to his knowledge and command of a language which he has been able to bind to so arduous a purpose. (p. 186)

Mr. Monckton has attained a very distinguished degree of proficiency of Bengal, occupying the third place in that study, and yielding only to competitors as eminent as Mr. Sergeant and Mr. Forrester. I have already remarked with satisfaction, on the indisputable proof of Mr. Monckton's intimate knowledge of the Bengalee dialect, furnished by his successful execution of a task so difficult as a version into that language of the Tragedy of the Tempest. In this language, therefore, Mr. Monckton has attained, not merely the competent knowledge which would, in respect of that branch of his studies, entitle him to be released from college but he is distinguished by a high and remarkable proficiency. (p. 205)

This practice of translating Shakespeare continued even later as we find Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) translating *Macbeth* during his homeschooling when he was thirteen.

It seems that it was the Parsi theatre that popularized Shakespeare translations in India. The earliest record of a Shakespeare translation in Indian language is Dinshah Aredeshir Talyarkhan 1850 performance of a Marathi play *Nathari Firangiz Thekaneh Avi* ('A Bad European Woman Brought to Sense') which is an adaptation of The Taming of the Shrew at St. Andrews Library at Surat in 1852 (Mehta, 1964, p. 41). The known and available earliest translation of Shakespeare is languages is Harachandra Ghosh's *Bhanumotir Chittobilas* (1853), a translation of *The Merchant of Venice* in Bengali. Most of the translations during this time had Indianized titles, modified plots and characters suiting the Indian taste. Dwijendralal Ray's *Sahajahan* (1910) which adapted *King Lear, Hamlet* adaptations like Nagendra Chaudhry's *Hariraja* (1897) and *Chandragupta* (1911), Devendranath Basu *Othello* (1919) etc. are examples for successful and multiple stage productions which influenced other language productions.

Approach to Shakespeare Translations

Shakespeare is the biggest non-Indian literary and poetic influence on Indian languages. In 1964, the Indian National Library in Kolkata counted 670 Shakespeare translations and adaptations in different Indian languages. The list was not exhaustive as later studies show. Bengali led the list with 128 adaptations and was followed by Marathi (97), Tamil (83), Hindi (70), Kannada (66) and Telugu (62).

These included faithful translations, prose renderings, and free adaptations. While a few are a direct translation from Shakespeare, many of these came from Bowdlerized Shakespeare, other translations, and abridgements like *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*.

Parsi theatrical companies got Shakespeare plays translated for their performance. The leading translators included Radheshyam Kathawachak, Agaharsakashmiri, Tulsidas Shaida, and Narayan Prasad Betab ho even published a magazine *Shakespeare* for the translations of Shakespeare's plays. The orientation of these translations was towards staging, rather than reading the plays.

The Englishman Harold Littledale reported in 1880 that the Indian version of Cymbeline, staged as *Tara* at a royal wedding at Baroda had *sutradhar*, *nandi* and gods on stage. Many of the translation for stage followed Sanskrit conventions. Jayanthi Bhavanarayana's *Soundarya Satimani* which adapted *All's Well That Ends Well* (1904) differs from the original and follows the Sanskrit tradition. The Malayalam translation of *The Merchant of Venice* as *Venis Vanijacharitham* (1906) by CS Joseph Arthunkal. The Sanskrit theatre-modelled Telugu adaptations are those of *King Lear* as *Amruta Hrudaya* by Paramahamsa Vidyananda Swamy, *Twelfth Night* as *Kamala Kalyanamu* (1932) by Parthasarthi Rayalu, *As You Like It as Sri Sarojini* (1910) by Thuraga Venkatachalam, and as *Chaarumathi Parinayamu* (1917) by Raja Raobhadhur Rao.

Some translations were faithful to form also. Translations in prose, in verse and a mixture of both, were in plenty. most early popular translations like Vidyasagar's Bengali *Bharntivilas* (*Comedy of Errors*) in Bengali, Harishchandra's *Durlabh Bandhu* (*Merchant of Venice*) in Hindi, and P. Sambanda Mudaliar's five Tamil adaptations were in prose.

While most translators relied on faithful and simple prose, some have also tried to imitate his Blank Verse with equivalent local poetic metres. VV Sastri's *Seejaru Charitramu* which translated *Julius Caesar* (1876) in Telugu used *Tetageethi*, a Telugu metrical form used in quatrains. Agha Hashhar Kashmiri (1879-1935) used rhyming couplets to translate *The Winter's Tale* (1897), *Measure for Measure* (1902), *King Lear* (1907), *King John & Richard III* (1908), and *Macbeth* (1909) giving it a kind of musicality. A Govinda Pillai who translated *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* in both prose and verse into Malayalam tried to replace Blank Verse with *Upajati* metre. Harivansh Rai Bachchan's *Macbeth* and *Othello* (1959) translations in verse used unrhymed traditional *Rola* metre as Hindi does not have a corresponding metre. The metrical and linguistic experiments of KS Nissar Ahmad's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Kannada and Jaswant Thakar's *Macbeth* in Gujarati also attempt more than prose. The Malayalam poet Satchidanandan translated all the sonnets of Shakespeare into Malayalam generally used 16 lines instead of 14 as in the sonnets and used "a metre close to prose called *keka* in Malayalam" (Satchidanandan, 2009).

Apart from pedagogic and academic exercises, some others have used translation to showcase their merit, and some used it to be used as textbooks. Translation of Shakespeare was a means to prove their mettle before the English colonial government, and indirectly a self-certification of competence for government employment. The case of P Velayudhan who translated Shakespeare proving his competence for a government job as he applied for a job in Travancore government is an example.

Many others wanted to enrich regional language and literature by translating Shakespeare. The early translation of Shakespeare in Malayalam Aalmaraataam which adapted the *Comedy of Errors* states it intended to improve Malayalam language and literature. The stated intention of Swami Vipulananda

who made twelve Tamil adaptations of Shakespeare wanted to illustrate the Tamil aesthetic theory of *Meypadu* using it.

Shakespeare has also influenced authors and movements in Indian literature. Kannada playwright Girish Karnad admitted Shakespeare as the one his major influences. His *Tughlaq* recalls Shakespeare's History Plays. Other Kannada writers like K Sreenivasa Rao and Ramachandra Deva have also admitted Shakespeare's remarkable influence on them and how he helped them develop their characters. The Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's epigraphs in the chapters of his novels are from Shakespeare. Marathi playwrights like KP Khadilkar, NC Kelkar and SM Paranjape; Telugu writers like D Krishnamacharya, P Srinivasacharya have also admitted their debt to Shakespeare.

In these translation s, one can see different types of localisations. These include localisation of names and images; localisation of characters and themes; relocation at specific places and points in history; retelling; addition and deletion of elements; interpolations; and use of local narrative forms.

The influence of Shakespeare's heroines on Indian imagination is evident in many Indian writings. Some Shakespeare translations into Indian languages were named after his heroines as Haran Chandra Rakshit's translations titles *Hermione* (*WT*), *Katherine* (*Shr.*), *Miranda* (*Tmp.*) etc. show. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the author of India's first English novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) also wrote an influential essay in Bengali "*Shakuntala, Miranda ebong Desdemona*" comparing the heroines of Shakespeare and Kalidasa.

It is significant to note the change in the attitude towards Shakespeare for political reasons. With the assent of the nationalist movement and independence struggle, which was a fight against the English, the number of Shakespeare translations from English significantly in India. For example, the number of translations in Hindi, Marathi and Tamil dwindled as follows:

Hindi:	14 (1880-1900), 23 (1900-1930), 01 (1932-1956);
Marathi:	65 (1867-1915), 02 (1916-1955);
Tamil :	29 (1870-1920), 19 (1921-1945).

Early translation attempts

Indian translators of Shakespeare were trying to present a specimen of Shakespeare's works which are attributed high literary excellence to Indians who are not proficient in English. They attempted to introduce a literary model to bridge the gap within the Indian literature, supplement the literary efforts in Indian languages, and modernize the Indian society by presenting modern ideas through them. Translation as such is connected with Indian modernity.

Historically the first Indian translation of a Shakespeare work was not done by an Indian. The English travelling actors who performed in British India since 1770, were performing Shakespeare only in English. The first Shakespeare translation was into Bengali and was done by C Monkton, an Englishman who worked for the British East India Company while undergoing language training at Fort William College. He translated *The Tempest* (1809) into the Bengali language. Probably, it was from the Lambs' version which was published in the same year.

Monkton's manuscript has not survived. The same was the plight of the reported early translations like Gurudas Hajra's *Romeo evam Julietra* (Hindi, 1848), Jogendra Chandra Gupta's translation of *Hamlet* as *Kirtibilas* (Bengali, 1852), and Harachandra Ghosh's translation of *The Merchant of Venice* as *Bhanumotir Chittobilas* (Bengali, 1853). 1853 was the year of the first staging of the *Merchant of Venice* in the US also

(Dickson 219). *The Taming of the Shrew* was staged even earlier in a Gujarati translation as *Nathari Firangiz Thekani Avi (A Bad European Woman Brought to Sense)* in 1852 at Anderson's Library in Surat. It also has not survived. *Bhrantibilas* (Bengali, 1856), a translation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar is the first surviving Indian literary translation of Shakespeare.

The first surviving adaptation of Shakespeare is also in Bengali. *The Merchant of Venice* was translated into Bengali as *Bhanumotir Chittobilas* by Harachandra Ghosh (1853). It had had multiple adaptations in Bengali: *Suralata* by Pyarilal Mukhopadhyay (1877), and *Saudagar* by Bhupendra Bandopadhya (1915). Some other well-known early Bengali translations of Shakespeare are Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's *Bhranti Bilas* (1869) which adapted *The Comedy of Errors*.

Till 1990, more than 50 **Hindi** translations of Shakespeare including seven of *Hamlet*, were available. The major adaptations were Ratnachandra's adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* as *Bhramajalaka* (1879), *The Merchant of Venice* adaptations like Harishchandra's Du*rlabh Badhu* (1880), Gokulchandra Sharma's *Venice ka Byapari* (1888), Macbeth adaptation of MP Choudhury as *Sahasendra Sahas* (1893), JP Chaturvedi's adaptation of *The Tempest* as *Toofan* (1897), Gopinath's adaptations of *As You Like It* as *Manavaran* (1897) and *Romeo and Juliet* as *Premlila* (1898), Gadadhar Sinha's *Othello* (1894), the Hindi poet and literature professor Harivanshrai Bachchan's adaptations of *Macbeth* (1957) and *King Lear* (1972) are well known.

At least six translations of Shakespeare have appeared in **Sanskrit**: Krishnamacharya's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as *Vasantika Swapnam* (1892), Ananta Tripathi Sharma's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* as *Venisa Sarthavahah* (1969) and *As You Like It* as *Yatha the Rochate* (1969), Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay's adaptation of Hamlet as *Dinarkarajakumara Hemalekham* (1971), Devaprasad Dvivedi's adaptation of Romeo and Juliet as *Uthika* (1978), and SD Joshi & Pt. Vighnahari Deo's adaptation of Hamlet as *Candrasenah Durgadesasya Yuvarajah* (1980). Krishnamacharya in his Preface to his *Vasantika Swapnam* says that

It has been my long-cherished wish, to render into Sanskrit some of the plays of Shakespeare. But a translation in the form of a Sanskrit drama is attended with difficulties. A Sanskrit drama, even if it should be a translation, has to conform to a string of hard and fast rules. Failing in this respect, the work, no matter however good, is sure to offend the taste of Sanskrit Pandits and work like mine written in the first instance to give our Pandits, a taste of Western poetry will have no reason for its existence. (sanskritebooks.org)

Kannada staged at least 15 Shakespeare plays by 1929. The Shakespeare translations in Kannada begins with Chennabasappa's translation of *The Comedy of Errors* as *Nagadavarannu Nagisuva Naataka* (1871) reveal how Kannada approaches Shakespeare. Kannada also translated Shakespeare indirectly from other languages like Telugu, Bengali, and Marathi. From Telugu Somanathayya translated All's Well that Ends Well as *Satimani Vijaya*, Srikantha Sastry translated Othello as *Padmini (Oth.)*, Mamjuvani translated *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Gayyaliyannu Sadhumaduvik*. From Bengali, Venkatacharya translated *The Comedy of Errors* as *Bhrantivilasa* and *The Merchant of Venice* as *Venïsu-nagarada-vartaka*. From Marati Honnapuramath translated *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Tratikanaataka*. The titles of comedies normally ended with the words *vijaya* (victory), *vilasa* (romance) and *parinaya* (marriage). Prof. Satyanath argues that the titles like *Raghavendrarav-naataka* (Othello) *Ramavarma-Lilavati Charitre* and *Kamalaksa-padmagam Dhiyara-kathe* (*Romeo and Juliet*), *Hemacamdraraja-vilasa* (*King Lear*) etc. show the nature of Kannada reception of Shakespeare in terms of indigenous genres like *naataka* (play) *charite* (history), and *kathe* (story) etc. Around 1920s the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* as *Ramavarma-Lilavati*

was so popular that it was simultaneously performed in Mysore city in three different theatres by three different companies using the scripts of three writers: Varadachar (Ratnavali Theatres), Jayarajacharya (Chamarajendra Theatres) and Ananadarao (Rajadhani Theatres). These productions cleverly adapted *Romeo and Juliet* to suit Indian taste which does not normally appreciate tragedy on stage. In the final act the Friar Lawrence-like character invokes Lord Vishnu who appears and brings the dead lovers back to life, appreciating the hero's love and the heroine's virtues.

In the British State of Madras, where **Tamil** was the dominant language, the first known Shakespeare production was that of *The Merchant of Venice* (1870). Since then 30 different productions of Shakespeare plays were performed in more than 100 places by 1900. Tamil musicals were popular in Kerala also.

In **Telugu**, the early adaptation of Shakespeare was Gurajada Sri Rama Murthy's adaptation of *Merchant of Venice* as *Venis Vanijya Naatakam* (1880) which used prose, verse and mixed rhyme schemes. Rao Bhadhur Kandukuri Veeresha Lingam adapted *Comedy of Errors* as *Chamatkaara Ratnavali* (1890) in prose using Indian proper names. The names he gives to the sixteen tales he translated from *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* show how they are adapted to local culture: *The Comedy of Errors* (*Chamatkara Ratnavali*), *The Merchant of Venice (Kurangeswara Vartaka Charitramu), Cymbeline (Kalavati Parinayamu), The Taming of Shrew (Gayyalini Saadhu Cheyuta), The Winter's Tale (Sumitra Charitramu), Timon of Athens (Daanakesari Vilaasamu), Pericles (Raghudeva Rajeeyamu), King Lear (Chitraketu Caritramu), All's Well that Ends Well (Satimani vijyamau), As You Like It (Vaidarbhi Vilaasamu), Much Ado About Nothing (Banumati Kalyanamu), Twelfth Night (Sarasa Jana Manobhiraamamu), The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Kumara Dwaya Vilasamu), Measure for Measure (Dharma Kavachopakyanamu), Othello (Padmini Prabhakaramu), and Romeo and Juliet (Maalathi Madhukaramu).*

The most frequent translated Shakespeare plays are *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet* which have more than 50 translations each in Hindi itself. It is followed by *The Comedy of Errors, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar*, etc. closely. Not many History Plays of Shakespeare are translated into Indian languages. *Richard III* and *Henry V* were the preferred History Plays translated into Indian languages.

Translator's Ambivalence

Any discussion of the Indian translations of Shakespeare needs to consider the two centuries of uninterrupted history of Shakespeare translation since Monckton's time, India's familiarity with him since the 1770s, and his special status in India. Translations are also to be seen concerning the growth of regional languages, literature especially dramatic literature, the performance of drama, and political and cultural consciousness behind the translation process.

Unlike the European Shakespeare translators who were not obliged to present Shakespeare as great, colonial Indian translators were conditioned to reverentially approach him as the greatest literary figure. European translators were not controlled by foreign governments or by acculturation programs as the Indians were in colonial India.

In the rest of the non-English-speaking world, Shakespeare's reputation rests on his translations by competent bilinguals. But in India, it rests primarily on the opinion of the English-educated natives who read him in the original and read the translations coloured with received ideas. Their received notions of 'pure' Shakespeare make them zealously guard Shakespeare against translation. They act as gatekeepers to the introduction of Shakespeare into native literary and artistic codes. Critical of native literary polysystems, they tend to legitimize their preference for Western models in the literature. Nirad

C Chaudhari's translation of the comments found in Bankim Chandra's *Rajani* (1877) on Shakespeare Gallery throws light into this elitist attitude:

he opened the picture of Desdemona and observed: "you get her patience, sweetness and modesty; but where is her courage with the patience, and her pride of constancy with the modesty?" He pointed to the illustration of Juliet and said: "you have here the figure of a beauty in the first flush of youth, but you miss the youth's impressible restlessness." (Chaudhari 190)

In India, translations were made for those who were not able to read and appreciate Shakespeare in English. The influential English-educated people were keen to gatekeep Shakespeare uncontaminated by translations, even as they were the only ones who could translate him. They were fluent in English and could translate him. But, their position was ambivalent. "The ambivalence on their part conditioned the whole exercise of Shakespeare translations in India" (Das 43). This ambivalence also contributed to the secondary status ascribed to translation in India in general.

Shakespeare translations are neither considered for their literary merit nor their impact on local literary polysystem. They are seen only as useful means to introduce Shakespeare in local languages and help one read the original. Reading Shakespeare translation is regarded inferior although reading French or Spanish works in translation are not considered so. Those who could read Shakespeare in the original do not have to read him in translation. Thanks to their English education, they are familiar with English and with Shakespeare. This is quite contrary to countries like China, Japan or Germany where translations were meant for those who could not read the original and for those who depended on translation to appreciate Shakespeare. This made Shakespeare translation a good ground for examining literary translations from English.

Over time, the success of the Indian translation of Shakespeare could be interpreted in two ways: as an act of compliance, or as defiance. Michael Madhusudan Dutt's defence of the western ambience of his novel *Shormishta* (1858) illustrates this: "I'm writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking: and I intend to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile administration for everything Sanskrit" (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 44).

From the deferential approach of the early translations, Indian translations have moved a long way. This can be seen in the recent Hindi scripts like *Maqbool, Omkara, Haider, Piya Behrupiya Kaliyattam, 10 ml Love,* etc. In the level of confidence and competence, these film scripts match Shakespeare's manipulation of his source materials. Atul Kumar's *Piya Behrupiya* hybridizes Shakespeare with Nautanki by missing music, popular language, and meta theatricality. Its translator who doubles up as the actor who plays Sebastian even breaks the illusion of the theatre. He walks towards the audience and complains that the translator gets no credit and everyone only says *"Wah* Shakespeare" although what they hear and appreciate his language and not Shakespeare's. Such confident translations do not represent loss but gain. This theatrical metadiscourse on translation reveals the lack of attention paid to the subject in both translation studies and Shakespeare studies.

The translation of *The Comedy of Errors* is an interesting story. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's free translation of the *Comedy of Errors* as *Bhranti Bilas* (1869) into Bengali was a play and a film in Bengali in 1963. It was made into two Hindi films *Do Dooni Char* (1968), and *Angoor* (1982). *Angoor* is rated as the finest movie version of the play in any language. Gulzar, who scripted and directed *Angoor* had been associated with the earlier version films in Bengali and Hindi. It is a classic case of gain in

translation. But, did his translation comes from English *The Comedy of Errors*, Hindi *Do Dooni Chaar*, or Bengali *Bhranti Bilas* is a complex question that tells something about the Indian approach to the translation itself.

¹ Claude Monkton (1789 - 12 Aug 1814) was the ninth of the 14 children of Sophia and Edward Monckton of Somerford, Staffordshire. Claude died at the Cape of Good Hope on 12 August 1814 and is buried there. His siblings were Edward, George, John, Henry, Sophia, Mary Leonora, Leonora, Philip, Robert, Hugh, Anna Maria, William and Emma Francis. His mother Sophia was the daughter of Leonora, an illegitimate daughter of Lord Pigot, the Governor of Madras and Mrs Joanna Eleanor Jackson. (https://www.geni.com/people/Sophia-Monckton/600000004547697788; "Monthly Obituary" *European Magazine and London Review*. Vol 66 (July to December 1814). p. 464; "Deaths", Memoirs of the late Rev. Dr. James Scott, The *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*: (July to December 1814) vol, 84. p. 603).