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## Bilingualism, Translation and Girish Karnad's Theatre

**Santanu Basu**

Assistant Professor in English,  
Vivekananda Mission Mahavidyalaya,  
Chaitanyapur, Haldia, West Bengal.

The paper attempts to show the effect of linguistic heterogeneity of our country on the works of a bilingual creative writer like Girish Karnad. Self-translation is his preferred mode providing him the opportunity of a complete creative expression for as Vilas Sarang feels to a genuinely bilingual writer expression in only one language must seem an incomplete process. However, the problem of incompatibility of the source and target language, Kannada and English, languages very different in their linguistic construction and otherwise remains one of the obstacles to be overcome. Along with this is the issue of the implicit hierarchy between the two languages involved. This issue of hierarchy between English and a regional language works itself out in a Karnad play Broken Images and it is edifying for us to understand Karnad's take on the whole issue through a close discussion of the play and in the context of the language debate of the sixties.

Language as dramatic medium becomes very interesting in the Indian context especially if we keep in mind the fact that multilingualism and bilingualism are established facts of our literary culture. Indian writers like most educated Indians are usually bilingual to a large extent in their everyday dealings, and though most confine their literary activity to their mother tongue, there are a few who also write in English. Distinguishing functional bilingualism with intellectual and emotional bilingualism i.e. "between reading a language and knowing it through and through", Ramachandra Guha notes that there has been a decline in intellectual bilingualism – in the ability to contribute "to literary or academic debate in that language"(39). However, Sudhanva Deshpande mentioning Girish Karnad among many others argues that theatre is an exception, "multilingualism is well established, and well entrenched, in Indian theatre" (74).

To Vilas Sarang one of the reasons for the bilingualism among Indian writers, other than the obvious one of English being the passport to success and glory, resides in the fact that for some Indian writers "expression in both their languages is perhaps the only means of fully satisfying their creative urge. To a genuinely bilingual writer expression in only one language must seem an incomplete process"(37). This is probably why Girish Karnad diligently translates his plays from one language to the other. However, among the two languages, Kannada seems to be the language of his unconscious mind while English that of the conscious part. A study of the circumstances that led to his first play makes this very clear. While embarking on his visit to England as a Rhodes Scholar the expectations of his family made him go back to the myth of Yayati to give expression to his feelings. Here was a middle class English educated man falling back to his moorings and myth to give expression to his situation.

The importance of translation in a multilingual environment like India is self-evident. While introducing Girish Karnad's Tughlaq in English translation Anantha Murthy argues that such translations serve an important purpose,

many teachers of English in India have felt and still feel the need for English translations of literature in the Indian languages. Teachers like myself have often wished that along with Indian writing in English which we prescribe to our students, we should also be able to teach English translations of classics in the Indian languages which will engage our students' attention fully and meaningfully. (x)

Girish Karnad is unique among contemporary Indian playwrights in being an avid self-translator. He has rendered all his major early plays from Kannada into English, and has reversed the process with his latter plays - The Dreams of Tipu Sultan, Broken Images, and Flowers - which he originally wrote in English and then translated into Kannada. From whichever angle you look at it, the fact remains that Karnad remains a self-translator beyond compare in the Indian dramatic canon. Self translation has its uses. As Karnad points out when you translate your own works you can take a lot of liberty which is not possible for a translator.

I prefer to translate my own plays. When a problem is insurmountable I just find my own solution to it. I can take liberties with my work that another translator cannot [...] And I remember B.V.Karant's indignation when he read my English translation of Hayavadana. As its Hindi translator he had spent hours trying to faithfully solve problems, which I had just ignored and gone ahead. (2002 n.p.)

There are other reasons for self-translation also. Karnad makes the point that though Ramanujan, who he thinks is the greatest translator India has produced, had offered to translate Tughlaq into English, he had reservations, as he did not think Ramanujan's approach to prose would work for theatre dialogues (2002 n.p.). Karnad feels since a play needs to be acted, the language has to breathe. He recalls the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's Hamlet (1602), "To be or not to be..." and says it's remarkable not only for its sheer literary brilliance, but also for the manner in which the lines breathe. "Therefore I choose to be my own translator. Also, as you translate you can do new things"(Ganesh 2007 n.p.).

The acts of translation in both directions indicate Karnad's equal felicity in the two languages and his interest in a wider audience. "But" as Aparna Dharwadker indicates "they also indicate his desire to retain control over his plays, and occasionally to act as critic and censor of his own work" (2005a:xii). For example, in spite of the fact that Yayati was successfully produced both in Kannada and Hindi, Karnad did not translate it into English till a few years ago as he thought Yayati to be a part of his juvenilia. B.R. Narayan's Hindi translation was published in 1979, but the English translation had to wait till 2008. "For some reason, I felt uncomfortable with the work and decided to treat it as part of my juvenilia" (Karnad 2008: vii). His reason for translating it after so many years is not because there has been a change in his mind about the play but simply as a concession to the demands of the market. "The play however has been translated into different Indian languages and continues to be staged. I have had to face complaints from students of Indian theatre, as well as those wishing to stage it, about the non-availability of the text in English. Hence this version" (Karnad 2008: vii). Karnad's translation was done as he says with the benefit of inputs from the play's various directors (Karnad 2008: viii). Ironically there was lying all this while an English text available in Priya Adarkar's translation done for Enact unused. Similarly Anju Mallige and Hittina Hunja did not appear in English translations after the

Kannada editions were published in 1977 and 1980, again because of the author's ambivalence towards those plays.

It is interesting to dwell on how the act of translation necessitates subtle shifts in the structure and connotation of the languages involved. Christopher B. Balme mentions Rudolph Pannwitz, the German cultural philosopher who thought that ideally in translations the target language should be subject to alteration by the source language. "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. [...] The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully altered by the foreign tongue" (qtd. in Balme 125). This can happen when as Meenakshi Mukherjee feels a translator takes "a deliberate position that the language of translation must contain syntactical as well as lexical reminders that the source text comes from another culture" (193).

Balme is of the opinion that when the author himself does the translation these problems get resolved.

Firstly the union of author and translator in one person means that the frequently articulated problem of power relations, particularly between First and Third World languages, can be addressed inasmuch as the translation is in indigenous hands. Furthermore, the dramatist is in the position to translate adequately and creatively not just words, but also concepts and structures of thought. This means that dramatists are able to indigenize the European target language by their own source language in both a linguistic and theatrical sense (125).

This however is easier said than done. The author-translator cannot claim to be free from the global linguistic power politics. And moreover, though the translator may try his best to reproduce the indigenous cultural concepts of the source language into the target language, yet as Girish Karnad mentions, when the two languages between which translation takes place represent very different culture systems and world views, then;

The basic intractability of the target language remains. In texts such as Tale-danda for instance, much of the linguistic play and dialectical nuances are lost in translation. In India, a person has to open his mouth and his speech reveals his regional, class, caste affiliations. Whereas the Kannada version of the play engages with these implications, the English version does not provide any scope for this. If you are also asking whether I transcreate my plays: well, I do not make too many changes – only what is demanded by the language. (2006b: 37)

However, the more important thing about translation is the relative power of the two languages. This becomes especially evident in the case of translation into English from a local language, "there is an implicit and inevitable hierarchy involved in the process" (Mukherjee 190). Meenakshi Mukherjee refers to Susie Tharu and K. Lalita who makes the point that, "translation takes plays where two, invariably unequal, worlds collide, and that there are always relationships of power involved when one world is represented for another in translation" (1:xxii). Tharu and Lalita continues, "when we translate a regional language [...] into English, we are representing a regional culture for a more powerful national or 'Indian' one, and when this translation is made available to a readership outside India, we are also representing a

national culture for a still more powerful international culture” (1:xxii). The anthropologist Talal Asad reaffirms this phenomenon:

To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies [...] are “weaker” in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation processes than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political economic relations with Third World countries Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, secondly, Western languages produce and deploy desired knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (qtd in Balme 125)

It would be interesting to interpret a Karnad play Broken Images from this point of view of hierarchy among languages. A monologue, it had simultaneous English and Kannada productions. Though it deals with language, there are no changes in the script between the two versions. As Karnad says, “And that’s the beauty of the storyline which functions well in the dual language situation”(Thomas n.p.). Earlier titled Macaulay’s Children – the title itself is very instructive - at one level it is about the antagonism between Indian English writers and regional language writers. This mutual antipathy, as Karnad notes, is widely chronicled, “Shashi Deshpande talked about it, there is a whole book by Vijay Nambisan about the ethics of Indian language, many Kannada writers are upset about the money that Indian English writers earn, the publicity they get, there is something theatrical about all this, so I used it” (Nanda Kumar n.p.). The play itself was a result of a conversation between Karnad and Shashi Deshpande, a witness to a much publicized spat between the regional writers and the Indian English writers at a writer’s conference held in Neemrana.

This language question, we may add, has been a hotly debated topic from the independence itself. There were many in the newly independent nation who wanted to have no further truck with English, to them the language was representative of colonial yoke. However, the problem was to find a suitable replacement for English in the linguistic multiplicity that India is. In his “Introduction” to An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English the editor Arvind Krishna Mehrotra notes the turbulence of the 1960s resulting from the contending claims of the English and Hindi camps. “The north was for abolishing English from educational institutions and from the state administration and for switching over to Hindi; in the south people agitated for the opposite reason: for retaining English and against imposing Hindi upon them” (14). But though this was about language, literature of the Indian English variety also came under attack, for example Buddhadeva Bose’s entry on Indian Poetry in English in the Concise Encyclopaedia of English and American Poets and Poetry (1963) reads, “Indo-Anglian poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere” (qtd in Mehrotra 15). This went on to take the shape of linguistic fundamentalism where writing in English took all kinds of sinister meanings. Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni was not representing a lunatic fringe when he exclaims in high metaphor, “Butcher them [Anglo-Indian playwrights], castrate them, and force them to write in their native Hindi or Urdu or whatever language their fathers and mothers used to speak” (85-86). The expression of nationalism in terms of language was making itself increasingly felt.

Buddhadeva Bose’s dictum on Indian English poetry raised a lot of hackles in the Indian English fraternity, it merited a response that took the shape of a six hundred page compilation

called Modern Indian English Poetry: An Anthology and Credo (1969) edited by P.Lal. Lal taking it upon himself to speak for the Indo-Anglians sent cyclostyled copies of Bose's entry to seventy five poets with a questionnaire. Among the questions asked was: "Do you think English is one of the Indian languages?" It would be quite interesting for our present purpose to quote what R.K.Narayan once told an interviewer on being asked the reason behind his books not doing well as translations into Indian languages, "Because they were written in an Indian language to begin with" (Nambisan 77). The language question however continues to haunt Indian English writers and they have been subject to regular potshots from regional language writers as eminent as U.R. Anantha Murthy and Bhalchandra Nemade.

The writer Manjula Nayak in Broken Images stands as a metaphor for all those writers limited to their native language (Kannada); not out of responsibility, but due to lack of choice. The image of Malini projects the Indian English writer who is ostracised for his stupendous success because the native writer (Manjula) has to settle for second place. The play shows Manjula stealing Malini's work in English, though she pretends to be addicted to the Kannada language. "I wrote the novel in English because it burst out in English [...] What baffles me - actually, let me confess, hurts me - is why our intellectuals can't grasp this simple fact!" (Karnad 2005 2: 264) says a defiant Manjula defending herself against critics accusing her of betraying her mother tongue in the confrontational prelude that prepares the emotional ground for Girish Karnad's Broken Images. These accusations have troubled Girish Karnad also in his own career as a writer as he confesses, "It's not just me, it's the whole genre of Indian writers in English who are attacked. It's the money and recognition that English brings which is a point of envy"(Ganesh 2005 n.p.).

However a problem arises in closely aligning Karnad's views to that expressed by Manjula in the play. Manjula, we find, as the play progresses has not written the bestselling English fiction, she has simply stolen the work of her sister, so that all she says in her support as an Indian English novelist is simply a case of pretentious breast-beating, a monument of hypocrisy made up and paraded for the public. The question begs to be asked, what is Karnad's intention in putting all these stock arguments in the mouth of a character who is simply a hypocrite? Is Karnad, by implication, suspicious of some of the arguments put forward by Indian English writers in their defence? Karnad, Aparna Dharwadker claims, is however different from Manjula in that he has never been, though writing in Kannada, a regional language, far from the limelight. (2005b: xxix-xxx) This is simply because of his felicity in English as well. "Now I can't say that I am foreign to English, it maybe Indian English, but that is also part of my home language now. We have fought in it, we have brought up our children in it" (Nanda Kumar n.p.).

The importance of language in the Indian context is further attested by the fact that following independence, a major reform of the boundaries of India's states and territories, organising them along linguistic lines through the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 took place. In expressing a response to regional aspirations based on language, it set an example of linguistic sub-nationalism that has gripped the nation. There have been demands for the increasing use of local language even if that entails foisting it upon the uninitiated migrants. State governments have made learning of local language mandatory in schools run by them, governments have seen to it that the local language is prominently displayed in signboards and other display units. The

cosmopolitan Bangalore as the setting in this context of linguistic fundamentalism, Karnad points out, has its own significance:

But the issue is a touchy one. Bangalore is a metropolis that struggles with the local language and doesn't even have one [...] But in Bangalore, there were always more speakers of Telegu and Tamil than Kannada [...] the Kannada language has suffered in importance. So the tension between the Kannada speaking population and the other populations in Bangalore has never really subsided. There is an ownership issue (Karnad 2006a n.p.).

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