

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

5th Year of Open Access

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

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Something Got Lost !!! Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in Arvind Kumar's Hindi Translation

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Abstract:

Could Shakespeare really foresee his popularity in posterity when he in Julius Caesar wrote, "How many ages hence/Shall this our lofty scene be acted over/In states unborn and accents yet unknown." (3.1.121-123)? This gigantic dramatist has been translated and adapted in every possible language and culture, in all possible forms. However one of his most significant tragedies-Julius Caesar, remains the least translated and adapted work in any culture. It is worth mentioning here that despite containing the universal themes of betrayal, jealousy, power, and love, this play has not attracted the attention of many in the trade of translations and adaptations. The issue of power dealt in the play has always been a contemporary one and can be superimposed in any situation, culture, age and background. The intermingling of Roman, English, Mediterranean and Oriental tones could be one of the reasons that make his works fit in every culture and suit the taste of every society. This paper deals with comparing and contrasting the cultural and to some extent linguistic details in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and its Hindi translation by Arvind Kumar. The same was directed by the noted theatre icon Ebrahim Alkazi for the National School of Drama. Despite the best efforts made by the translator to make the Hindi translation a close textual equivalent of the Elizabethan one, certain fragments still remain untranslated.

Keywords: Shakespeare, translation, culture, language, appropriation, performance, indigenisation

Could Shakespeare really foresee his popularity in posterity when he in Julius Caesar wrote, "How many ages hence/Shall this our lofty scene be acted over/In states unborn and accents yet unknown." (3.1.121-123)? This gigantic dramatist has been translated and adapted in every possible language and culture, in all possible forms. However one of his most significant tragedies-Julius Caesar, remains the least translated and adapted work in any culture. It is worth mentioning here that despite containing the universal themes of betrayal, jealousy, power, and love, this play has not attracted the attention of many in the trade of translations and adaptations. The issue of power dealt in the play has always been a contemporary one and can be superimposed in any situation, culture, age and background. The intermingling of Roman, English, Mediterranean and Oriental tones could be one of the reasons that make his works fit in every culture and suit the taste of every society. This paper deals with comparing and contrasting the cultural and to some extent linguistic details in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and its Hindi translation by Arvind Kumar. The same was directed by the noted theatre icon Ebrahim Alkazi for the National School of Drama. Despite the best efforts made by the translator to make the Hindi translation a close textual equivalent of the Elizabethan one, certain fragments still remain untranslated.

The setting and theme of Julius Caesar can be closely related to the Indian milieu. The very first parallel I wish to draw here is between Roman republican society in the times of Julius Caesar and the ancient Indian society. An ideal society as described by Plato in his famous treatise *The Republic* consists of three main classes of people—producers consisting

of craftsmen, farmers, artisans, etc.; auxiliaries or warriors; and guardians or rulers. An ideal and just society seeks to maintain right relations between these classes. Each group must perform its appropriate function, and only that function, and each must be in the right position of power in relation to the others. Rulers must rule, auxiliaries must uphold rulers' convictions, and producers must limit themselves to exercising whatever skills nature granted them (farming, blacksmithing, painting, etc.) Justice is a principle of specialization: a principle that requires that each person fulfil the societal role to which nature fitted him and not interfere in any other business. (Spark Notes editors, 2002)

In this type of society the power rests with the philosophers who are believed to be the supreme individuals. Drawing a parallel between this form of society and the Indian society since antiquity proves why Julius Caesar holds an important place in the Indian context. The class system in the ancient India was analogous to the class system mentioned in *The Republic* by Plato. The *Brahmins* were the 'Guardians' or the 'philosophers', occupying the topmost rung of the power structure in the society, The *Kshatriyas* were the "auxiliaries" or the warrior class and the "producers" in *The Republic* were analogous to *vaish* class comprising of traders, merchants, artisans and craftsmen; and *shudras* comprising of labourers and working class. The rigid Hindu class system covertly and overtly enforced every individual to live according to the rules framed for the specific class to which s/he belonged. Failing to do so would impose strict punishments including total social boycott. The same situation is highlighted in Caesar's Rome where the producers, as a sign of their identity had to be dressed in the apparels definitive of their job as well as their place in the society. Moreover they were not entitled to take an unauthorized holiday on "a labouring day", no matter the reason for it was the celebration of Caesar's triumph, which in turn denoted Rome's victory.

Mob supremacy and the behavioural pattern of mob is another feature of the play with which the Indian audience can relate to. Time and again when tyranny has tested the patience of people it gave way to democracy and the mob emerged as a super power, disrupting the power structure in the society. India has known such situations when the oppressed becomes the oppressor, inverting the pyramid of power, on innumerable occasions like Chauri Chaura, Mutiny of 1857 and the contemporary Naxalite and Maoist movements to name a few. Mob holds a very important place in this play and has been very realistically depicted by Shakespeare. Mob consists of people from all classes, but it acts as a single entity. There may be educated and practical people, having the faculty to analyse and reason out, as suggested by the plebeians who divide to listen to Brutus and Cassius separately and "compare their reasons, when severally we hear them rendered" (3.2.10) to find out whether their gruesome act is justifiable or not. This same mob in an instant loses all their reasoning power by Brutus' clever words: "—Not that I loved/ Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more./ Had you rather Caesar living and all slaves, than Caesar were dead, to/ live all free man." (3.2.21-24) They shout in praise of Brutus, decide to "Bring him with triumph home..." and to "Give him a statue with his ancestors." (3.2.52) and are even ready to "crown", "Caesar's better parts" (3.2.54) in him. Not to forget here is Marullus' address to the mob, "You blocks, you stones, you worse / Than senseless things! / O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome. / Knew you not Pompey?" (1.1.38) This is the same mob which once on seeing Pompey's chariot appear, would "make a universal shout that Tiber trembled underneath her banks." (1.1.48) This respect is soon transferred to Caesar "that comes in triumph over Pompey's blood" (1.1.54), and then in turn to Brutus who has killed Caesar, and finally their respect is transferred to Antony and all their sympathies are again with Caesar, after listening to Antony's generous description of Caesar. They soon turn against the conspirators willing to kill them and burn their houses, thus challenging the oligarchy and reaching the final chaotic stage of democracy when mob attains supremacy, breaking the power structure. The

mob in every society is alike-- faceless and fickle. In Indian context, the mob represents the common man or the Indian Janata which is time and again persuaded by the clever and euphemistic talks of the clever politicians. It is the common Janata which always trusts the make believe stories and the utopian world often promised to them by the cunning orators.

Some of the other features of the play appealing to the Indian sensibility are the foretelling of future events, forewarnings through dream sequences and bad omens like hooting of the bird of night in broad daylight and the appearance of birds of prey, barrenness seen as a curse, belief in supernatural, revenge and of course justice rightly served. It is of prime attention that the play sharing so many equivalences with the Indian scenario has not been translated much. One of the many possible reasons for the unpopularity of the play in the translation canon in India could be the gruesome murder of Caesar by his close friends on the grounds of tyranny and dominance and dictatorship of Caesar which is not well pleaded by the playwright. There is not enough evidence in the play to prove the dictatorship and tyranny of Caesar. Common Indian audience would in this case sympathize with Caesar rather than considering him vicious and thus his murder would be rendered unjust in the audience sensibility. Before any further discussion, I would like to draw out the cultural and linguistic resemblance and differences between Shakespeare's text and its Hindi counterpart.

Before attempting to analyse the translated text, it becomes necessary to judge the intention of the translator in translating the text. What could be the possible intention of Arvind Kumar in translating Julius Caesar? Why did he choose Julius Caesar? For whom did he intend to translate? The answers to all these queries would give an ample idea about the alterations made by him, if any, to the source text and of course about the linguistic patterns he chose and the portions he left unchanged. A note here is to be made that Arvind Kumar is a prominent translator and a lexicographer with translations like *Sahaj Gita* - a Hindi prose translation of *The Bhagvad Gita*, Vikram Saindhav- a verse adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Angrezi Julius Caesar* and *Faust: Ek Trasadi* - a Hindi verse translation of German poet Goethe's classic play *Faust: A Tragedy*, to his credit. His lexicographic works include Hindi Thesaurus-*Samantar Kosh*, *Shabdeshwari*- a unique thesaurus of Hindu mythological names and the Penguin English- Hindi/Hindi-English Thesaurus and Dictionary. His most important work is *The Arvind Lexicon Database* which comprises about one million expressions in Hindi and English. The next question that arises here is -who is the initiator for this translation? The source text *Plutarch Life* was translated by Thomas North from which Shakespeare has borrowed the plot for his play, which was further translated into other languages and cultures. So it can be well understood that the Hindi translation must be far removed from the original one as in every translation made prior to this the text would have been manipulated multiple times in cultural contexts. According to the information provided in the translated text, Arvind Kumar converted *Julius Caesar* into the Indian poetic form when he was in the resting period due to heart illness. Later it was initiated by Ebrahim Alkazi, the director of world fame, that Arvind Kumar translates his poetic form into play which was directed by Alkazi for National School of Drama in 1992. So Arvind Kumar remains the receiver of the source text and the initiator of the poetic form but the initiation of the play was done by Ebrahim Alkazi .

To understand the similarities between the source and target text, the preliminary knowledge about the concept of equivalence in translation becomes a necessity. Equivalence refers to the degree to which the target text is faithful to the source text and the accuracy of its appropriateness to the source text. It is a deciding parameter for the degree of the effect felt by the target audience in comparison to that produced by the source text in the source culture. An important view of theorists to be noticed here is that no matter how hard he tries, the translator is unable to translate "something" in the text. This part is referred to as "Nucleus" of the text by Raymond Williams. This nucleus is defined by Williams as "... the

element that does not lend itself to translation. Even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted, the primary concern of the genuine translator remains elusive.” (Venuti, 19). Having attained mastery in English language and already well versed in Hindi, it being his mother tongue, and with interest in literature, he tried to convert the play into the form which closely resembles the verse form used by Shakespeare. The creativity of the translator is further recognized by the fact that he made a complete attempt to translate the text in a poetic form so that it would not read very different from the original, using equivalence wherever required as in case of some culturally rooted phrases and idioms, which if translated word to word would not make sense in the Indian culture. Few such instances are the translation of “upon what meat doth Caesar feed” (1.2.155) into “*aakhir Caesar kis chakki ka aata khata hai*”(Kumar,27). The line by plebeian in act III scene ii-“I fear there will a worse come in his place”(3.2.119) is translated as “*uski jagah jo baithega kya hoga vaha doodh ka dhula*”(Kumar,133). Casca relating Caesar’s reluctant rejection of the crown is translated in the Indian context as “*Man bhav moond hilave*”(Kumar,33). He tried his best to keep the flavour of idioms and language style intact but it is a fact well accepted that the magic of Shakespeare’s blank verse cannot be translated. Alexander Shurbanov is of the view that “The best practice of proverb rendition illustrates one of the basic rules of translation: its two complementary principles of familiarity and novelty should always operate in conjunction, so that the final product is both intelligible and refreshing for the audience.” (Shurbanov 59).

Apart from indigenising some of the phrases and idioms, the translator has not made any cultural changes to the title of the play and the names of the characters all remain the same as used in the English or Roman version. It is to be noted here is that even in Shakespeare’s translations the Roman characters converse in Elizabethan English. Though Shakespeare’s famous lines from Romeo and Juliet, “What’s in a name. /that which we call a rose,/by some other name would smell as sweet.”(2.2.47-48) try to justify this discrepancy but as a matter of fact in certain cultures names do bear cultural roots. Names are derived from the rich mythologies in Greek, Roman, Indian and many other cultures. So names in a sense become culture specific and in a way, define the nationality of the individual. In the Indian contexts most of the names are derived from the names of Indian gods, goddesses and sages. Names are symbolic of the virtues and powers attributed to these epitomes. For example parents tend to name their son Rama rather than Ravana as the latter is associated with more vices than virtues. Had the translator converted the Roman names into Indian ones, corresponding changes had to be made in the themes and settings. An example of such a modification can be seen in the Indian adaptation of Othello by Vishal Bharadwaj,. The title changes to *Omkara*, a name used for fearless Lord Shiva in the Indian Mythology and Desdemona becomes Dolly. Movie is set in the plains of Uttar Pradesh instead of Venice. The racially different status of Othello is substituted by indigenised *aadha Jat* status of Omkara.

The text dealt with in this paper is a translation and not an adaptation and it seems that the translator’s primary intention was to present Shakespeare’s text to non English speaking people, though later it turned out to be for the specific cause of National School of Drama. The close reading of the text gives an idea that Arvind Kumar wanted to expose his readers to the Roman culture and so he does not make any alteration in the names and the culture specific events in the play. This has also helped in maintaining the “foreignness” in the translated version. For instance in the opening scene the first reference to Lupercal is made by Marullus, when he is ordered by Flavius to “disrobe the images.”(1.1.67) if he finds them “decked with the ceremonies”. Marullus, sceptic about following the order confirms “May we do so? You know it is the feast of Lupercal”.(1.1.70) In the text by Shakespeare, no further description of the feast of Lupercal is given. On the contrary, though Arvind Kumar does not

use a culturally equivalent event like *makar sankranti* for the feast of lupercal but his translation of the above mentioned lines as “*hai aaj nagar mein lupercal. Hai aaj basant aagman ka utsav*”(Kumar, 13) provides his reader with an added information which gives an idea that lupercal is a festival celebrated on the commencement of spring . There are other culture specific references like Caesar’s comparison with Colossus, which is beyond the comprehension of the Indian audience. Colossus was originally a huge bronze statue of Emperor Nero and was called *The colossus Neronis*. Another important reference to Roman culture is made in Act IV scene i by Cassius when he compares his heart to “Plutus’ mine, richer than gold”.(4.3.113) “Plutus’ mine” could be used as a vehicle for the depth of Cassius’ heart or his love towards Brutus or it could be used to refer to the richness of his heart, as Pluto was considered by the Romans as the giver of gold, silver, and other subterranean substances. Because these "gifts" were mined, Pluto became recognized as the god of the physical underworld, which in turn helped him become recognized as the god of the spiritual underworld and thus death.Plutus is not translated into the Indian equivalent figure that most probably is *kuber* –the god of wealth or *yama*- the deity presiding over hell . Indian reader would also not relate to the reference to the Greek theory of humours when Brutus tells Cassius “to show your slaves how choleric you are.”(4.3.48). This line is omitted in the Hindi version. The above analysis clearly shows that the terms that are specific to source culture are left untranslated in the Shakespearean text as well as its Hindi counterpart. The “foreignness” is further augmented during the stage performance of the same play as we see the actors clad in Roman togas.

The translator took utmost care to translate the blank verse style of Shakespeare. Aiming to achieve the dramatic effect of the blank verse he had to make relevant changes in the natural construction of sentences. For example, Mark Antony’s famous funeral address :

Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears/
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them.
The good is oft interred with their bones.
So let it be with Caesar (3.1.80-84)

Would be translated in plain text as :

Doston, Romano, Deshwasiyon/meri baat suno/main Caesar ko dafnane aaya hoon na ki uske gungaan karne/Aadmi ke sabhi sadgun uske saath dafna diye jaate hain/uske baad avgun reh jaate hain./Caesar ke saath bhi yahi hone do.

It is quite clear from the construction of sentences on the above quoted example that the verb holds the last position in every sentence. The sequence of the parts of speech is subject/object/verb. However the translator has twisted this normal arrangement to produce the dramatic effect of the blank verse and the same lines in the translated text read as :

Doston! Romano! Deshwasiyon!/Sunno Meri Baat...Nahin karna hai/ mujhe Caesar ka gungaan./Main aaya hoon/ Caesar ko dafnane Sabhi sadgun/ dafna diye jaate hain aadmi ke /saath. Avgun reh jaate hain uske baad./han,yahi Caesar ke saath hone do.(Kumar,129)

Arvind Kumar has mentioned in the preface of this translation that he has translated this text in iambic pentameter. However despite most sincere efforts the so called “magical sweep” of The Bard’s blank verse remains untranslated at several points. The other literary devices which are unsuccessfully rendered in the translation are the puns and the idioms. For instance in the opening scene the cobbler’s response to Marullus question about his trade-“A trade sir, that, I hope, I may use with a safe conscience; which is sir a mender of bad soles.” (1.1.15-16) is a pun which leads to humorous effect as the word “soles” is homophonic to souls and cobbler’s witty double meaning reply could be understood as mender of bad souls which would refer to Marullus. In the republican hierarchical society, it would be an offence

for a producer to talk in that manner to a person in power. It is Shakespeare's artistic power to use that intentional pun which would mean an offence but not sound like one.

The predicament of the translator engaged in translating any Shakespearean text is further augmented by the complex Shakespearean language which is heavily loaded with various literary devices, which form an integral part of his writing, thus making his plays sublime. The translator fails to translate this sublimity, as these figures of speech are not superimposed adornments but embedded in the text just like the meter and rhyme in poetry. Few of the numerous instances of alliterations used by him in Julius Caesar can be listed as "like twenty torches joined"(1.3.17), "Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women"(1.3.23), "Pompey's porch"(1.3.131), "Old feeble carrions and such suffering souls that welcome wrongs; unto bad cause"(2.1.137), "count the clock"(2.1.203), "it was a vision fair and fortunate"(2.3.88), "for I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,..."(3.2.232). Personification and apostrophe are other important tools used by Shakespeare to create the dramatic eloquence as "O conspiracy, /Shamest thou to show thy dangerous brow by night, when evils are most free?"(2.1.81), "O constancy, be strong upon my side,"(2.4.7), "o hateful error, melancholy's child"(5.3.73), "O judgement ! thou art fled to brutish beasts"(3.2.111). The text shows presence of anaphora as "why all this fires, why all these gliding ghosts./why birds and beasts from quality and kind, why old men, fool and children calculate,/why all these things change from their ordinance"(1.3.67-70) or "nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,/ nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron, /can be retentive to the strength or spirit"(1.3.97-99). These and other literary devices form the "nucleus" of the any Shakespearean text and cannot be transferred to the other language without marring their beauty and the effect created by them.

Despite all the interesting devices and themes, the play does not find an important place in the canon of translated texts. I believe that the reason for this can be attributed to a somewhat weak plot structure or we can say that the title does not entirely suit the plot. The title character Julius Caesar has basically very less role in the play. As the play opens the reader or the audience gets the knowledge of his victory and of his dominating and tyrannical nature through the speeches of the other characters. He is not shown as a man of action. He makes no mind-blowing oration as Antony and Brutus. The Audience does not find a single reason in the play to be moved or awed by a single utterance or act of the character on which the entire play is based. In fact Caesar seems to be the weakest character as compared to Antony, Brutus or even Cassius. With this weakness in the plot structure the play fails to evoke the feeling of catharsis. In the Indian scenario of translation also we do not find many translations and adaptation of the play except a few in the Bengali theatre. The concerned translation despite being associated by great names like Arvind Kumar and Ebrahim Alkazi was not received successfully by the audience. A review by Ananda Lal in *The Telegraph*, 3 April 1992 states "'Julius Caesar' was the biggest disappointment [of a week-long festival of plays by the NSD]. ... [Cassius] behaves as if in a permanent frenzied fit. [Brutus] ... has no clue of the man's dilemma or nobility....

'[Antony looks] more like a strapping wrestler than an idealistic yet shrewd young man. ... Alkazi's own set design, of imposing steps topped by pillars, works well in the first half but becomes a major negotiatory nuisance during the battle scenes. Arvind Kumar's Hindi translation misconstrues several passages.'

It can thus be concluded that any text of Shakespeare cannot be completely translated in all respects, the reason being that the complete and exact reconstruction of the time and space of his plays is impossible. Moreover the translator taking up this venture of translating Shakespeare needs to be well versed in various cultures and other works of other writers because of the allusions and the references used by him. The complex web of various cultures, literary devices and the style and stylistics used by him, make the translation of his

plays, a herculean task,. No matter how hard the translator tries the beauty and the craftsmanship used by Shakespeare, is lost in the translated version thus rendering them bland to a certain degree.

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Internet Citations:

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