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'THE BOND IS FORFEIT': INDIA REPAYS BY REPLAYING

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's universality is celebrated worldwide in the form of translations and adaptations of his plays down the ages. Each new version of his work further assert his value in the contemporary context and the rendition of his works in various languages and culture worldwide has rendered him a global status. In most of the translated and adapted versions the global works are embedded in local target culture thus making him 'glocal'. This paper describes the indigenisation of his famous play The Merchant of Venice in the Indian culture.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Indianisation, source language, target language, culture, translation, adaptation

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Thirty eight plays in all that is what we owe him - loan that definitely cannot be paid back by our generations till eternity. His ghost haunts every nation, every generation, casting a shadow upon pages and stages and screens, asserting his presence, trying to mingle with the live. Four centuries have passed and we still cannot escape the influence of his presence and never will as he 'was not of an age but of all times!' (Johnson) and "not of a land, but of all lands." (Legouis 437) He started reaching out to the world in the form of performances in the British colonies and along with the empire Shakespeare also gripped the world in the magic of his plays. No doubt he was instrumental in covertly enforcing the British culture and values in the colonised nations, through his plays which formed an important part of the academic curriculum and later invaded the Indian stage as well. The teachers engaged in teaching Shakespeare were always a class apart in the academic circle. This practice started with D. L. Richardson and Henry Derozio enjoying a giant stature due to their extraordinary elocution ability with an added advantage of their historic knowledge and without break the tradition continues till date. Thus Shakespeare enjoyed a red carpet entry in the Indian stage and in no time became an integral part of Indian theatrical culture and Indian academic curriculum to an extent that Indian literary studies definitely will contain a void if Shakespeare is removed from it. In 1947 the British went back, the Raj ended but Shakespeare stayed back in text books, performances and in cinematic plots.

Bengal served as a gateway for Shakespeare's entry into the Indian Stage, with the opening of company theatre. Initially meant for the entertainment of the English officials, the magic of his plays soon began to entice Indian minds, Calcutta being the first place to recognize the Bard's genius. The majority of

stage performances at the first ever theatre built at Fort William consisted of his plays. Having tasted the pleasures of Shakespeare's plays, there was no looking back for the Indian audiences. Besides enjoying the performances, they actively took part in the development of the theatre in India. Dwarikanath Tagore's active participation in the opening of the Chowringee theatre and then buying the same to bring it out of the financial crisis was the first giant step in the field of performing arts in India.

India's encounter with Shakespeare's performances began at school and college level where students would enact his plays with an aim of rendering an Indian voice to the coloniser's language. The actors (students) took pride in delivering the long speeches of the plays with fluency and impeccability, and as Poonam Trivedi observes "Doing it like them becomes a mastering of what was once a master colonising text." (Trivedi 17) Soon the plays started diffusing out of the college campuses into the theatrical spaces of cities and towns. This step involved indigenising the bard into Indian cultural colours giving rise to countless translations and adaptations of his plays into possibly every known Indian language and adapted to every single art form thus realising Shakespeare's statement "How many ages hence / shall this our lofty scene be acted o'er / In states unborn, and accents yet unknown" (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.111-13). The step was taken to introduce Shakespeare to common Indian audiences. The earliest Indian translations *The Taming of the Shrew* in Gujarati and *The Merchant of Venice* in Bengali in 1852 started a never ending chain reaction giving rise to uncountable translations, interpretations, adaptations and performances of his plays in every language and culture. The present paper focuses on indigenising the Bard in Indian colours through translations and adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Translation - an activity involving the transfer of text from one language to another is best described by Susan Bassnett as:

the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structure of the SL will be preserved as close as possible but not so closely that the TL structure will be seriously distorted. (11)

With about fifty translations *The Merchant of Venice* marks the highest quotient in Indian translations of the Bard's plays. The play translated in Hindi by Dr. Rangeya Raghav bearing the title *Venice Ka Saudagar* is a close rendition in terms of translation as not much effort is exercised by the translator to add Indian hue to it. Probably the translation was made to present the play to non-English knowing audiences of post-colonial India. The task is carried out in a combination of verse and prose form. Like Shakespeare's text, the translation portrays a shrewd Jew money moneylender who is abused and despised in a majorly Christian society, reproducing the Jew-Christian conflict as it is. The references to Janus, Hercules, Nestor, Diana, Jacob and Laban, Pythagoras, and Daniel remain unaltered. However the translator has provided a glossary for these foreign allusions, keeping in mind his target audience, thus rendering a "gloss Translation," "in which the translator tries to reproduce the form and content as literally and meaningfully as possible." (Nida 159)

The other translation of the play by Bhartendu Harishchandra captures the attention of the reader through the beauty of the language and the strategy adopted by him in the process of indigenisation. His translation has made use of the "dynamic relationship" between the source and target language, matching the signs of source language with that of the target language "but with a dynamic relationship", which Nida defines as "the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message." (159) The title of the translation *Durlabh Bandhu* focuses on the virtuous bond between Antonio and Bassanio instead of the vicious moneylender thus emphasizing on the preciousness of true friendship as is common in Indian folktales. The characters are rechristened with Indian names thus Shylock becoming Shailaksh, Antonio as Anant, Bassanio as Basant and Portia and Nerissa as Purshri and Narshri. Bhartendu has set his version of *Merchant* in Marwaar where Jains form a considerable portion of the local population. Jew-Christian conflict in the original is exchanged with Jain-Christian relationship where Shailaksh belongs to Jain community and Anant is a Christian in a predominant Hindu society. It is worth mentioning here that Jain is a popular business class in India, known for

owning large amount of wealth and property. Jain-Christian relationship introduced by Harishchandra in his adaptation does not bear the same dimension of hatred as carried by the Jew-Christian one in the original play.

The play's heroine Portia is compared to Cato's daughter by Shakespeare as well as by Raghav, whereas in *DurlabhBandhu*, Purshri is compared to Goddess Saraswati, the deity of knowledge. The suffix 'shri' in her name denotes the greatness in her character and beauty. Her suitors come from Nepal instead of Naples and Fanesh instead of France. The Baron from England is replaced by a suitor from Angdesh who speaks Maithili of which Purshri is ignorant as she only speaks Hindi and Vrajbhasha. Allusion of Portia to Sybilla is exchanged with that of Markandeya known in Hindu mythology for his immortality. Sisir Kumar Das observes that some of the effort taken by Bhartendu to Indianise the text, like replacing "Troilus with "Trivikram", Cressida by "Kamini, Dido by "Jayalakshmi" . . . completely denudes them of all traces of Greco-Roman association without creating a meaningful Indian alternative."(53) The Biblical story of Laban and Jacob referred to in the play is exchanged by that of *Yadavas* – the class comprising basically of cowherds. Churches are substituted with temples and candles with deepak – earthen lamps. The translation is primarily carried in the verse form with *Chaupais* (quatrain) as the dominant form of metre. Some portions of the text which are evident of the translator's genius to Indianise the play need a special mention, as: "Shut doors after you / Fast bind, fast find. / A proverb never stale in thrifty mind. (2.5.51-53) is rendered as a common proverb in Hindi: "Jaage so pave sove so Khoye." (Bhartendu 232) Seldom use of Urdu – the lingo of common Indian, can also be seen in the play. For instance the simple statement by Gratiano "All things that are with more spirit chased than enjoyed (2.6.12-13) is translated into "Jo maza intezaar meindekhavahanahinvasleyaarmeindekha" (Harishchandra 233) echoing a line from FanaNizaamKanpuri's Urdu poetry "Din guzargayaaitbaarmein/womazakahanwasl-e-yaarmein/ lutfjomila intezaar mein." Bhartendu in Act II scene v surprises his readers with yet another beautiful couplet by Jasoda (Jessica) "Gar bar aayiaarzo, meri to rukhsataapko / aapnebetikohoyaaurmainebaapko" a translation of "farewell and if my fortune be not crost / I have a father you a daughter, lost." (2.5.54-55)

Without going into the details of the process of adaptation, the process can be basically understood as the transference of literal text into a different medium like screen or stage. It is the translation of one sign system into another and can be categorised as the 'inter-semiotic translation.' The target medium primarily chosen in this paper is the stage. The most interesting play with an intermingling of tragic and comic elements drew the attention of Indians in 1852 when the play was staged in Bengali as *BhanumatiChittavilasa*. The performance probably acquired greater attraction because of the social division of people into two broad categories - rich *zamindars* and poor farmers and labours. The former would lend money at high interest rates and exploit the latter in every possible way echoing the cruelty of Shylock in his readiness to carve out a pound of flesh from closest to Antonio's heart. While writing the character of Shylock, Shakespeare was completely unaware of the fact that he was painting the imagery of stereotypical blood-sucking Indian moneylender whose debt would never be cleared off by the poor debtor even after his death, in which consequence the debt would be transferred to his future generations. Shakespeare's Shylock being a Jew has strong reasons to hate Antonio belonging to Christian community. This hatred is further enhanced by Antonio's policy of lending money without charging any interest which certainly affects Shylock's money-lending business. The titles of some other Indian adaptations are suggestive of the story being told about the merciless moneylender Shylock. Some such versions that need a mention here are *ChandiSahiSudkhor* – an Urdu adaptation where 'ChandiSahi' is the Shylock of *Merchant*; and *SudkhorSaodagar*(1915) – a Bengali adaptation of the play. Some of the versions focussing on the character of Portia are *EkAuratkiVakalat*[The Pleading of one Woman](1908) in Hindi by Krishna Hasrat; *StriNyay Kala* [The Art of Logic of Woman] (1893) – a Gujarati adaptation by NaridasVanamalidas; and *StriNyayCaturya*- a Marathi version by A.V. Patkar.

AnandaLal's adaptation of the play titled *The Merchant of Venice* adds a humorous touch to the play by the inclusion of current technical gadgets like cell phones and calculators. The major roles of Antonio and Shylock are played by female actors in Lal's version on account of the majority of female students in the Department of English. This however provided an interesting turn to the play as the audience experienced a

kind of love triangle between Bassanio, Antonia and Portia which is highlighted by Lal in the trial scene where Portia is seen “watching Bassanio and Antonia like a hawk” (198). To overcome the difficulty in casting, Lal transformed Lancelot, Solanio, the Duke and Tubal into female characters. The steps he took to Indianise and contemporise the play involved costume and colour schemes. According to Lal, he altered the colour schemes to suit the post Babri Masjid issue at the time of staging his play. Shylock is presented as a Muslim, wearing “a black embroidered kaftaan, upturned nagra footwear, an ethnic sartorial style that Indians could instantly recognise.” (199) In the trial scene the stage is occupied by a large orange banner- suggestive of Hindu saffron of *Ram sewaks*. The play is modernised by the portrayal of characters as men and women of twenty first century, in contemporary attires and accessories. Bassanio is portrayed as a gambler tossing coins before choosing the casket. Lorenzo is a macho man involved in body building exercises like dumbbells, and sporting an unbuttoned shirt to flaunt his biceps. Gratiano sports Ray-Bans and does his hair in a ponytail. Salerio and Solanio communicate using cell phones and Shylock maintains his accounts through a pocket calculator. Solanio is seen carrying an attache Case containing money, to bribe Shylock, which is later given to the judge as an incentive for Antonia’s release. Lal admits to have included the scene to highlight the corruption prevailing in the contemporary Indian society. (199)

The most recent adaptation of the play was staged at Epicentre, Gurgaon. The adaptation titled *Saudagar* directed by AtulSatyaKoushik is set in 19th century Mewar district of Rajasthan. Shylock lends a sum of rupees thirty thousand to Basant (Bassanio) who requires money to court Priyamwada (Portia) – the Princess of Pratapgarh. The play is rendered Indian flavour by including the common jokes prevalent in Rajasthani culture, dressing the characters in typical vibrant Rajasthani costume and rustic folk music. (*Saudagar*)

There has not been much effort in the direction of screen adaptations of the play. *DilFarosh* (1927), the earliest experiment was a silent film based on the Parsi play of the same name. Another effort was a production by the Radha Film Company of Calcutta. The film was titled *ZalimSaudagar* [The Cruel Merchant](1941). Though there have been women actors playing a lawyer and meticulously defending their case, thus echoing Portia’s character, but there have been no recent adaptation of the play by the Bollywood industry.

It can be seen that the Indianisation of Shakespeare’s play is done through a variety of methods like indigenising the language, Indianising the titles and the names of characters, exchanging the culture specific events, objects and allusions with their closest possible equivalents in the target language, the use of idioms and proverbs rooted in the target culture, Indianising the costume and most of the times adding songs and dances to the plays. To conclude, the Bard has been Indianised to a great extent in the Indian translations and adaptations – a process parallel to the ending of *The Merchant of Venice* where Shylock the money-lender is converted into a Christian.

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