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GOING BEYOND THE CONTEXTUAL BOUNDARIES: A STUDY OF THE WADA TRILOGY
IN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Of all the modern Marathi playwrights, Mahesh Elkunchwar may be said to be the most eloquent defender of the social play. His plays deal with the family theme and offer an exploration of the struggle between family relations and **Social relations** with a force, realism and emotional depth. He is a major playwright who is set to tackle seriously aspects of the human condition unnoticed by a theatre obsessed with psychology and sociology.

Elkunchwar deals with interior psychological questions in terms of existing objective facts in their dramatic delineation of a quest for community.

When began to write *Old Stone Mansion*, he found himself going out of himself, looking at the world with sympathy. This paper highlights the process of social collapse which is the fate of aristocratic families. In *The Wada Trilogy*, he takes a close look at one of those families still struggling against time in some small town or village. The elderly men are lazy drones, the elder women are the patient upholders and preservers of the system, the younger men of the same generations are as subservient as the women in their submission to authority. It is only the new generation that bristles-in several variations of rebellion ranging from bitter cynicism to escape to irresponsibility. It is a kind of surrender to commercialism or careerism to a total disaffiliation. Elkunchwar takes great care to chart out the positions and roles and rules of this great battle that is acted out against a history that drives the Brahmin gentry into bankruptcy

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The purpose of this paper is to examine how a translated text is an independent text of its own kind, irrespective of the original from which it is translated. The purpose is to examine how a Marathi text by Mahesh Elkunchwar like *The Wada Trilogy* and translated by Shanta Gokhale acts as an independent text which explores the issues of rural/urban divide, migration as well as family disintegration within the Wada community. These issues have been dealt with by the translator so as to transcend regional boundary of a community and make the issues available to the entire Indian community where a reader not belonging to Maharashtra or not knowing the Marathi language can also relate to the issues in the translated text.

I

A translation is always assessed from a perspective whether it does justice to the source text or it fails in doing so. However, instead of merely repeating the arguments about the close proximity of the translation to the source text, the focus here is on how a text is recreated by the translator, writing it anew from his/her own internal impetus.

There are various ways a text may be approached by a translator. The translator may choose to be as close to the text as possible, or he may even take creative liberties by transcreating or even adapting the source language text but that may lead to questioning. The translator may also enter into the difficult zone of interpretation or re-interpretation of the original text and create new meanings hitherto unintended by the author. A reader for whom the translation is primarily done may or may not be aware of the original language of the source language text and hence may take the translated version to be the 'real' version and the translated text acts as a medium of cultural exchange between the reader and the text.

II

Let me take the case of the *Wada Trilogy*¹ in English translation. One may assert that the translator in the text has presented the issues of the Wada community in a way to help the reader relate with those issues even when he/she is located in a different culture. Firstly, it is important to know what the term "Wada" means. The term "Wada" refer to the entire culture/tradition of the old, decaying feudal structure of a region in Maharashtra. It is a Marathi word which refers to a group of houses together where people live in joint families and share the wada.² The Wada Trilogy comprises three plays in sequential order: *Old Stone Mansion (wada chirebandi)*, *The Pond (Magna Talyakathi)* and *Apocalypse (Yugant)*. The basic issues dealt with in the trilogy are that of rural/urban divide, migration and disintegration of the Deshpande family (belonging to the Wada community) and how these social and cultural metaphors are used and employed by the translator to comment upon the realities of not just the region but the entire Indian community as a whole.

One of the several linking devices used by Shanta Gokhale is the disintegration of relationships within the Deshpande family where in the first part of *The Old Stone Mansion*, the scattered family comes together for the funeral of their father Vyankatesh but ends up fighting over who should get how much share in the family from the 'wada' that has been left behind by the deceased while no one is ready to spend on the post funeral rites. Vahini says: "But can't everyone share the cost? Wasn't he everybody's father? Or are we alone responsible for keeping up the Deshpande name?" The mother or Aai as she is known as, is a witness to all the bickering that goes on in the house about who would take charge of the post-funeral expenses of her husband. A truce is reached when she decides to sell her share of wada to meet the expenses and says: "Do you all think I don't know what is going on? But things were different when he was alive". She can see the old wada crumbling and with it would collapse an entire network of relationships and an entire culture of living together in a community. Indian readers can immediately relate to such fights that go on in many families where everyone wants to shirk responsibility and just grab his or share of land and money. A reader is able to relate to the disparities of a family deeply rooted in a region and such discrepancies carry a meaning for the reader which is beyond the Wada cultural traditions.

1. The Wada Trilogy was published in translation by Seagull books in 2004; The original was written in parts by Mahesh Elkunchwar : *Wara Chirebandi* , the first part of the Trilogy was published in Marathi in 1987. The Trilogy in its entirety, under the title *Yugant* was published in Marathi in 1997. In a note to the readers about the translation of the Trilogy, Shanta Gokhale explains in her text that the community, in which the Trilogy is set, is closely knit within a network of economic or social relationships. The play is situated in the village of Dharangaon in Maharashtra which comes in constant contrast with the city of Mumbai where some of the characters are placed.

2. The word "Wada" is spelt with a capital 'W' when it refers to the entire culture/tradition of the lifestyle of the regions of Maharashtra and is spelt with small 'w' when it refers to the physical architectural space and structure of an old mansion where a group of families reside together.

Gokhale also makes comments on how the whole family believes in outward show and pomposity. She also brings to light the typical Indian sensibility where families are more bothered about their reputation in the society no matter how hard they try to make the ends meet. Scene 2 of the first part brings this kind of hypocrisy very clearly in the translation where Vahini says: "The Deshpandes decided to be modern and put a tractor there. Forget about usefulness as long as we can make a show of wealth".

At the opening of *The Pond*, the sequel of *The Old Stone Mansion*, the wada is dead and disintegrated. The second part celebrates the post-Wada culture exemplified in all its complexity in Parag's alignment with the underworld, in Abhay's brooding contemplation of settling down abroad, and in Nandini's firm assertion of her independence. The family is seen coming together again in part two—this time, for a couple of weddings. Hence, weddings and funerals become metaphors that move beyond cultural connotations where a reader can relate to the concept of rituals and customs that are carried out in marriage ceremonies which are culturally specific but still identifiable as in each Indian culture the functions have to be performed with a lot of outward show and pomposity to keep their name in their community and where the focus is more on pleasing the people than on fulfilling the customs and rituals. The crisis is more than a family crisis- it is a crisis of traditional culture against commercial culture. As Elkunchwar says, "Wada is not simply a family drama; it is more than that, a document of social change..."³At the opening of *The Pond*, "the old mansion looks different, bearing obvious signs of change in the financial status of the inmates...so also in the taste." The wada does not have the dilapidated, dying looks that comes from poverty. It is well painted and hints at the improved conditions of the family but all wealth and status of the family is acquired through wrong means by Parag who takes the help of people from the underworld to move up the ladder of success and for him there is nothing wrong in acquiring money even though it may be by wrong means but he has to pay for his wrong deeds as he is arrested towards the end of the section of *The Pond* and loses all his money. In part II of the Trilogy, the wada gradually loses its status and Gokhale uses the metaphor of the pond as a site of childhood memories of Parag and Abhay and the pond grows into a state of mind that determines the course of life of the two friends as Parag is left to struggle in the village and Abhay leaves for the U.S instead of settling down with his parents in Mumbai.

In Maharashtra, a considerable number of Brahmins have migrated from their villages to the cities. Elkunchwar was criticized because many critics in Maharashtra felt that the Trilogy was essentially about Brahmins. However, he rejects this charge and feels that the play is more about a family settled in a small region of Maharashtra. Gokhale in her reasons for translation of the Trilogy feels that life is much more politicized now, and things which had no social sanction before have found new sanctions, as can be seen in part II of the Trilogy. Thus the two friends take up different roads in their lives where one has to deal with difficulties in the village but the other is forever looking for a home to call his own though he is settled abroad. Here, the Rural/Urban divide gets highlighted where in an attempt to migrate to the city of Mumbai which is like a promise, Abhay feels lost as he is not able to decide whether he belongs to the village, or to the city, or to a foreign country where he lives with his wife. The distance between the village, where the action takes place, and Mumbai where Abhay is situated with his parents is the distance that yawns between decaying feudalism and the metro. The part of the family that is settled in Mumbai lives a hard life and yet in the village they represent prosperity, and are at pains all the time to disillusion and their relations lest too much is expected out of them. The city of Mumbai, in this case, is more a site of shattered dreams, deceptions, and pretences than a haven of emancipation. Abhay's father Sudhir is quick to pinpoint the backwardness of the village when he says: "What roads you people have...Look at the Bombay-Pune roads and look at our vidharbha...".The urban/rural divide is so stark in the trilogy that it constantly reminds the reader of how most of the readers themselves juggle between the life of the city and village and the readers can immediately relate to Abhay when he says: "people like me who have uprooted themselves can't put down roots too easily there...In a way we belong, in a way we don't". In the entire trilogy comparisons are made between the village

3. Elkunchwar, speaking at the Natya Shodh Sansthan.

and city life and it is not just related to the marathi community but to broad issues such as these which transcend cultural boundaries of a particular community.

At the beginning of the third part of the trilogy-*Apocalypse (Yugant)*, the wada is reduced to a pile of stones and empty walls with just Parag, his wife, and their child living in the wada and struggling to make the ends meet. Despite all hardships, Parag refuses to leave the wada and settle in Mumbai with Abhay. He says: "This is my choice. To stay here... I can't tear myself away from this village, Abhay..." Abhay who has been struggling to find roots all the while, agrees with Parag: "This terrifying drought, these collapsing walls...how happy your home is in the midst of all this...You... have an impregnable house of your own..." Readers can relate to the attachment that Parag has for the wada and his village. This reflects upon the typical Indian psyche of looking back to one's own roots in spite of all the riches one might have accumulated elsewhere. Thus, the entire trilogy explores issues that are talked about in a particular community but these issues also become the issues that are experienced by most communities in India. In focusing upon the Marathi community in particular, Gokhale focuses upon the Indian condition generally. He transforms the local into extra-local, and creates a broad Indian perspective on the socio-cultural issues concerning the people of various backgrounds at large.

CONCLUSION

To conclude one can say that Gokhale in her translation of the trilogy is driving home the point that though the play is specifically about the Wada culture, the specificities of this culture are used to comment on the reality that most cultures in India represent. While dealing with issues of family disintegration, rural/urban divide and issues confronting the Wada community, Gokhale is able to capture the essential burden of the people concerned. In translating the trilogy relating a particular socio-cultural ethos, an effort is made to translate the broader Indian reality. The trilogy, thus, is a microcosm that represents a macrocosm.

An act of translation is an attempt at mediating between different cultures. In the context of the present text, Gokhale's strength as a translator lies in how he mediates between two languages—Marathi and English. It strengthens Gokhale's position as a translator as she makes an attempt to raise the translated text to an independent text of remarkable independent merit. It may also be asserted that although the basic premise of the play is contextual, it reaches out to all those parts of India where orthodoxy and feudalism still exist. Elkunchwar has always insisted on regional identity but Gokhale takes the trilogy beyond that identity and transforms it into a larger Indian text. Gokhale, though a translator of a regional text, is able to bring out the contextual issues in order to extend the boundaries of the text in the English language. The translated text, thus, acquires an independent status and can be read along this line. At the realistic level, the Trilogy delves into the predatory instincts that eat into relationships within a traditional feudal structure, decaying into decrepitude.

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