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**'INDIANIZING' THE MERCHANT OF VENICE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BHARTENDU
HARISHCHANDRA'S DURLABH BANDHU AND ATUL CHANDRA HAZARIKA'S BANIJ KONWAR**

SURANJANA BARUAH

Research Scholar
Dibrugarh University, Assam



ABSTRACT

This paper makes a comparative study between two Indian translations of Shakespeare's famous play *The Merchant of Venice*. The translated texts selected are Bhartendu Harishchandra's Hindi translation *Durlabh Bandhu* and Atul Chandra Hazarika's Assamese translation *Banij Konwar*. The paper explores how both the translated texts indigenize the Shakespearean story by placing the characters and action in Indian context. Further, the paper studies how the two texts present two different adaptations of the Shakespearean text. While Harishchandra's text advertently attempts an almost word-to-word translation of the original at the cost of sacrificing its poetic structure, Hazarika's text is more of an adaptation as it gives a more Assamese colour to the text while retaining the essence of a Shakespearean play through its balanced use of both prose and verse in terms of its structure.

Keywords: Translation, adaptation, Indianization.

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In the modern period, translation is viewed as a complicated, difficult and far more creative process than it was viewed earlier. The process of translation involves much creativity because although it seems to be a re-presentation of an already existing work, it is no less an entirely new product for the targeted group of audience who are perhaps unfamiliar with the language system of the original text. The act of translation primarily takes place between two languages: the language from which the text is translated which is called the source language and the language to which the text is translated which is called the target language. As such the process of translation can be simply understood through the definition put forward by J.C. Catford in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), "translation is an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another..." (01).

Shakespearean plays have been translated into several Indian languages ever since Indian writers and dramatists came into contact with European literature through colonialism. According to Poonam Trivedi, the earliest instances of performance of Shakespearean plays can be dated around 1775 in Bombay and Calcutta. Translations of Shakespearean plays into Indian languages were beginning to be performed since around

1850s. Some of the prominent Hindi translations of Shakespeare's plays during this period were Munshi Imdad Ali's translation of *The Comedy of Errors* titled *Bhram Jhalak* (1879) and Bhartendu Harishchandra's *Durlabh Bandhu* (1880). Translations of Shakespeare's plays gained momentum with the turn of the century, the most prominent being Lala Sitaram's as many as 15 translations of Shakespeare's plays into Hindi between 1900 to 1926. These were *Bhool Bhullaiyan* (*Comedy of Errors*, 1915), *Man Mohan ka Jaal* (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 1912), *Apni Apni Ruchi* (*As You Like It*, 1915), *Bagula Bhagat* (*Measure for Measure*, 1915), *Sati- Pariksha* (*Cymbeline*, 1915), *Raja Richard Dwitya* (*Richard II*, 1915), *Raja Henry Pancham* (*Henry V*, 1915) and *Prem Kasauti* (*Romeo Juliet*, 1930) among others. Assamese translations of Shakespeare's plays also began to appear since the second decade of the twentieth century although more often the translated versions were presented in the form of story, for instance. Jyaneswar Sarma's *Dhumuha* (*The Tempest*, 1931) and *Bhenisar Saud* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1930) or Bipin Chandra Barua's *Bharama Ranga* (*The Comedy of Errors*, 1928). However, dramatic versions of Shakespeare's plays in Assamese were mostly adapted into Indian context and situations; prominent among them included *Chandravali* (*As You Like It*) and *Ratnavali* (*Cymbeline*) by Durgeswar Sarma, Atul Chandra Hazarika's *Banij Konwar* (*The Merchant of Venice*) and *Asru Tirtha* (*King Lear*).

This paper shall analyse how the two selected translations of *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), despite being 'faithful' translations of the original, give two different 'Indianized' versions of the Shakespearean text.

II

Bhartendu Harishchandra's *Durlabh Bandhu* (1880) is one of the famous translations of *The Merchant of Venice*. It would perhaps be unjustified to call it a literal or word-to-word translation of the play because Harishchandra himself calls it a "*bhartiyakaran*", i.e. "Indianization" of the Shakespearean play. The play has been "Indianized" by replacing the names of characters and places with similar sounding nomenclature in Hindi. Thus, Venice becomes 'Vanshnagar' and Belmont becomes 'Vilvamath' while the characters like Antonio, Bassanio, Shylock, Portia and all other characters are renamed as 'Anant', 'Basant', Shailaksh', 'Purashri', etc respectively. Unlike Harishchandra, Hazarika's *Banij Konwar* (1950) shows more of an adaptation even while naming the places and characters. As such, instead of some fictional place, Hazarika sets his play in Guwahati and Rongpur as counterparts of Venice and Belmont respectively. Similarly, while renaming the characters Hazarika has emphasized more on indigenizing them rather than making a strenuous attempt at finding similar sounding Assamese equivalents to the English names. Thus, Antonio, Shylock, Portia and Nerissa gets more of an Assamese touch with such names like 'Amiyo Kumar', 'Chondonmol', 'Protibha Devi' and 'Nirmola' respectively. Other names like Lancelot Gobbo, Old Gobbo, Lorenzo and Gratiano have been completely transformed into typical Assamese names like 'Memera Medhi', 'Bhokotram Bormedhi', 'Dibakor Borbora' and 'Nironjon Saikia' respectively. Thus, it has been observed that *Durlabh Bandhu* attempts at conforming to the phonological structure of the target language while sufficient liberty has been taken in renaming the characters in *Banij Konwar*.

Peter Newmark writes in *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) that "... the overriding principle of any translation should be to achieve 'equivalent effect', i.e. to produce the same effect (or one as close as possible) on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original" (48). However, Newmark further states that although the 'equivalent effect' is the "desirable result" in any translation, it is difficult to achieve if there is a sufficient cultural gap between the source language text and the target language text (48). Such examples of cultural gaps are certainly witnessed in the Shakespearean play and the two selected translations. For instance, in Act I, Scene 3, lines 74-87; Shylock refers to the story of Jacob and Laban from the Bible while justifying his act of charging interest to Antonio. This story has been translated exactly in *Durlabh Bandhu* with the only difference that the Biblical characters Jacob and his uncle Laban has been substituted apparently with Hindu lord 'Yadav' (Lord Krishna) and his uncle 'Lavendra'. It is to be noted that there is no mention of any such story in Hindu mythological texts and as such the 'faithful translation' of the play into Hindi fails to create the desired 'equivalent effect' on the readers. However, in the case of *Banij Konwar*, no such attempt has been made by the author in finding cultural equivalents in the target language and Hazarika has subtly obliterated the Biblical anecdote while translating the text.

In another instance, it is observed that a reference to the Greek Classical characters Troilus and Cressida has been substituted with similar cultural equivalents in both the target language texts. As Newmark writes in his book, "cultural words are often transferred to give local colour, to attract the reader, to give a sense of intimacy between the text and the reader..." (82). The lines from the Shakespearean text can be quoted as follows,

LORENZO. The moon shines bright. In such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night. (5.1.1-6)

When the above lines are translated in Harishchandra's text, Troilus has been substituted with Trivikram (Lord Vishnu) and Cressida becomes Kamini as follows,

LAVANG. Chandni kya aanand dikha rahi hai! Mere jaan aisi hi raat mein jabki
vaayu itna mand chal raha tha ki vriksho ke patto ka shabd tak sunai
na deta tha, Trivikram durg ki bheet par chadhkar Kamini ki raah
taakta hua, jo Yavanpur ke kheme mein thi, hriday se thandi saans
nikaal raha tha | (105)

On the other hand, the same lines have been recreated in the Assamese text with reference to the popular mythological love story of Usha-Aniruddha which gives it a regional colour to the remote Shakespearean story and brings it closer to the readers of the target language. The corresponding lines in *Banij Konwar* are as follows:

DIBAKOR. Sua priye! Akaxot purnimar jun!
Rupoh junak rati xeetol modhur|
Mondo mondo mridugondho boi xomiron,
Toruye sumise lota, lotai pollob|
Edua junali nixa tahani edin
Dwarkar pora ahi konwar Aniruddha
Poxisil ognigor baan-rajdhani,
Rupohir modirat hol oboruddho| (158)

Thus, it has been observed through the above instances that both the texts attempt to remain true to the source language text. However, Harishchandra's *Durlabh Bandhu* aims at translating the lines exactly into Hindi as well as transferring the setting and plot into Indian scenario. Therefore, as per Newmark's categorization of different forms of translation discussed in Chapter 5 of his book *A Textbook of Translation*, Harishchandra's version of *The Merchant of Venice* can be called a "faithful translation" (46). On the other hand, Hazarika almost rewrites the play by adapting the entire story into a typically Assamese context while simultaneously preserving the plot, themes and action of the source text. Thus, *Banij Konwar* is rather a freer form of translation and it can be called an "adaptation" of the Shakespearean text (Newmark 46).

III

Shakespearean plays are marked by a fine blend of both prose and verse. While modern plays are mostly written in prose, the playwrights writing before Shakespeare predominantly employed verse in their plays because poetry was the most popular literary form at that time. The trend of mixing prose and verse in playwriting became popular only after Shakespeare arrived at the Elizabethan stage. Scholars have made extensive research on the use of prose and verse by Shakespeare in his plays. Critics have often argued that Shakespeare employed prose and verse in his plays in order to distinguish the various classes of people in the Elizabethan society. For instance, in *The Merchant of Venice* characters like Lancelot Gobbo and Old Gobbo often speak in prose while the dialogues of Antonio, Bassanio, Portia or her suitors have been mostly mouthed in verse. Thus, the entire conversation between Lancelot Gobbo and his father (in Act 2, Scene 2) has

been written in prose while most of the conversations between the other prominent characters are entirely in verse. However, Shakespeare's shifts between prose and verse are not consistent even with the same characters. For instance, in the third scene of the Act 1, the opening conversation between Bassanio and Shylock is in prose. But as soon as Antonio arrives in the scene after around thirty lines, Shylock switches to verse. Similarly, Portia and Nerissa's conversation are mostly in verse, but the very first dialogues between them about Portia's opinion regarding her various suitors have been completely written in prose. Thus, it has rightly been pointed out by Kim Ballard that Shakespeare employed both prose and verse for various dramatic purposes for instance, "to fashion psychologically interesting characters, chart relationships, support plot developments, and even explore attitudes and ideas" (par. 2).

Shakespeare's style of mixing prose and verse is not very easy to adapt when his plays are translated into other languages. This difficulty is primarily witnessed when the translators attempt a 'literal translation' or 'faithful translation' of the source language text. Thus, the feat of translating Shakespeare's play into verse has been rarely achieved by the Hindi authors excepting Harivanshrai Bachchan and Raghuvir Sahay (Thakur, par. 9). Like most of the Hindi translators of the Shakespearean plays, Bhartendu Harishchandra also follows the original text too closely and thus in order to remain true to its contextual meaning, he renders his version entirely in prose. As such, *Durlabh Bandhu* manages to be "completely faithful to the intentions and text-realisation of the SL writer", but at the cost of compromising with the aesthetic value of the original text (Newmark 46). This can be observed by comparing the following corresponding lines from both the texts:

PORTIA. Away then! I am locked in one of them-
 If you do love me, you will find me out.
 Nerissa and the rest, stand all aloof.
 Let music sound while he doth make his choice-
 Then if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,
 Fading in music. (3.2.40-45)

PURASHRI. *Accha toh aap jaaye, un sanduko mein se ek mein mera chitra hai;
 yadi aap mujhe chahte honge toh wo aapko mil jaayega | Narashri,
 tum ab alag khadi ho jao aur jab aap sanduk pasand karne lage toh
 kuch gaan ka bhi aarambh ho, jisme yadi aap kahi chuk jaaye toh
 jaise battak apna dam nikalne ke samay gaata hai waise hi aapke
 vida hone ke samay bhi gaana hota rahe | (64-65)*

The above comparison shows that the selected lines have been translated in *Durlabh Bandhu* syntactically as well as semantically i.e. by keeping both the grammatical structures and the meaning intact. However, the prose translation of the verses fails to evoke the required 'equivalent effect' of the original among the readers. On the other hand, the Assamese translation by Atul Chandra Hazarika has followed the Shakespearean style of mixing both prose and verse. Quite contrary to *Durlabh Bandhu*, *Banij Konwar* faithfully follows the writing style of the source language text although it does not make an exact translation of all the lines of the original. Hazarika has reproduced the content of the play by adapting it in accordance to the syntactic structures of the target language. Thus, Hazarika has succeeded in translating the play into verse as well and managed to create a similar aesthetic effect upon its target readers or audience which is evoked among the readers of the original Shakespearean text. The following corresponding lines of the above indented lines can be cited as an example to prove the point:

PROTIBHA. *Jua tene sai lua tinita xofura
 Etar maajot taare bondini Protibha;
 Val pua jodi muk uliua bisari |
 Nirmali! Aah tohotu aagbarhi |
 Bhagyor porikkha ei hua aagotei
 Boi thok dharaxare xongeet-jomuna |
 Hoi jodi porajoi bhagyo-biporjyoy*

Xongeetor taalotei tumi mur priyo!
Moraalor dore hoba xurote bileen;
Notuba miliba mur osru-xolilot| (89)

Thus, it can be concluded that both the selected translations of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* not only represent the famous play in two Indian languages but also reproduce them in a new manner by 'Indianizing' them for the target audiences. Bhartendu Harishchandra rigorously retains the content and matter of the original in *Durlabh Bandhu* but does not make an attempt to adapt the verse form in his translation. Atul Chandra Hazarika, on the other hand, certainly retains the plot as well as dialogues of the original but adapts them according to the cultural and linguistic requirements of the target group of audience.

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