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Historicizing the Bard of Avon: Shakeshifting Shakespeare and the Constitution of Guarati Literary Culture

Abstract: In a century and a half of his continuous presence in India, Shakespeare has shapeshifted into manifold textual and performative "avatars," from an agent of moral edification transforming into a subversive stick with which to beat the imperial culture. The "Bard" adapted to his immediate environs like a chameleon on the one hand, while standing tall on his native stage, on the other, asserting the imperial will and throwing the native cultural background in sharp relief. The Gujarati theatre and literary histories have borne witness to this ceaseless transformation. The present paper traces the high points in the histories of the "Bard's" localization—from Shakespeare to Sheikh Pir—as well as his "non-localizations," examining in the process how they reflect the evolution of the Gujarati literary culture along the caste, ethnic, and communal lines. An attempt is made in the paper to understand the role these histories could have played in engendering the essentialized, elitist, and monolithic ideas and identities that Gujarati literary culture still suffers from. Finally, the paper also points to the possible directions the translation and staging of Shakespeare's plays can take in the postcolonial era.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Gujarati Literary Culture, Parsi Theatre, translation, adaptation, literary historiography.

Introduction

The author of the famous dictum "What's in a name?" could have turned in his grave, either in righteous anger or in climactic delight when, in 1989, Radio Tehran announced Muammar Gaddafi's historical view of the Bard of Avon as Sheik Zubayr bin William, a man of Arab origin who lived in the sixteenth-

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century Britain.[1] As befits the "Occident," the British media laughed the idea off, coming as it did from the most strident and somewhat screwy, anti-imperial voice from the "Orient." Perhaps there was also selective amnesia at play in the reaction, as in the heyday of empire, none other but Sigmund Freud proclaimed, post his afternoon visit to National Portrait Gallery in London on 13 September 1908, that the Bard's face was "completely un-English" and that he could be a Frenchman with such a pre-lapsarian name as Jacques Pierre (Molnar 41). If the physiognomy does not constitute evidence enough, the Bard's unflattering characterization of the Jews, the Turks, and the Brits in his plays, his staggering knowledge of the history, language, politics, and culture of northern Africa, southwestern Asia, and southeastern Europe, the possibility of Dark Lady of the sonnets being an Arab woman and his apparent familiarity with the Latin translations of the eleventh-century Arab scientist Alhazen (Badawi, "Shakespeare and the Arabs" 182) have been marshalled by critics and historians to prove the Arab-origin hypothesis. In fact, the debate about the origins, not only of his works but also of the author himself, goes back to the nineteenth century. Contrary to the demi-god-like status Shakespeare has enjoyed in India, the classist Western analysis has deprived the author of moral superiority and sagehood, accorded to Dante, Goethe, and Tolstoy, for example.

Nearer home, in anticipation of Gaddafi's claim, Kannada scholars maintained that in the early phase of Kannada theatre (1880-1920), Shakespeare had indeed been popularly known in south India as Sekh Pir (Satyanath 45). The act of naming in intercultural contexts is anything but apolitical and value-neutral; it inheres a politics of cultural construction that has implications for deepening or neutralizing the asymmetrical power relationships between civilizations locked in historical antagonism. For example, it takes a moment of (un)naming Avicenna as Ibn-e-Sinna to unveil the politics of appropriations at the imperial heart of the European civilization. T. S. Satyanath sums it up beautifully:

> All projects of translation, be it translating the Bible into a native language as part of the missionary activity, or compilation and codification of law texts like the nyayasastra, or defining linguistically ordered power relationships through terminological categorizations such as donor-recipient, original-translated, etc., are activities in which the land, people and their representations were constructed through a process of inscribing, literally "writing over," existing concepts, categories and terms, often existing in oral tradition, by the concepts, categories and terminologies of the colonizers. (46)

[1] The controversy is neatly summarized in Margaret Litvin's blog entry Qadhafi: Shakespeare Was an Arab Named Shaykh Zubayr | Send Down the Basket! https://arabshakespeare.blogspot.com/2011/04/qadhafi-shakespeare-was-arab-named.html

Thus, the project of introducing Shakespeare as a literary authority in the classroom and an agent of moral edification on stage was a part of the ideological construction that sought to constitute the culture of the colonized as the other. Concomitantly, the colonized, too, translated the Bard within diverse frames of reception out of the desire to resist the colonial hegemony on the one hand and the compulsions of emergent vernacular public spheres on the other. What this led to in effect was the development of "[…] a wide range of attitudes to Shakespeare, and indeed to the English and England generally through him, (that) varies from eager adoption and assimilation on the one hand to what may be called literary subversions on the other, with many moderate political shades being represented in between" (Trivedi 16). Thus, in a century and a half since his arrival in India, Shakespeare has shapeshifted, in his manifold inscriptive and performative avatars in different Indian languages, from being "a moral yardstick, …a chastising rod by which to measure and reform defects of native character" (Trivedi 14) into a postcolonial stick to beat the culture of the colonizer with.

The present chapter will outline the history of Shakespeare in Gujarati translation on page as well as on stage and examine how it reflects the evolution of the Gujarati literary culture along caste, ethnic, and communal lines. Such an approach is largely in tune with the 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies, which has opened newer avenues for charting out the historiography of translation, aiming to unpack the interrelationship of translation with ideological projects, significant events, and movements in the literary field. What follows is a historical account of Gujarati's engagement with Shakespeare, split into three periodic segments, with a caveat that periodization often ends up being a problematic exercise, and temporal boundaries often tend to be porous and fluid.

Shakespeare on the Gujarati Stage

As a persecuted community that migrated from Persia around the tenth century and adapted to the new socio-cultural environs without ruffling too many feathers in the local power circles, the Parsis played a remarkable role as interpreters and translators in the centers of colonial trade and commerce like Surat and Bombay, translating the difficult terrain, unknown concepts and confusing epistemologies to the British imperialists. While negotiating an in-between space, they became the first community to get early exposure to colonial modernity and eventually to uphold and undercut its authority through such technologies of power as print media and the theatre in the nineteenth century. Naturally, the backdrop of English education, print modernity (newspapers like *Rast Goftar*), the establishment of societies and associations (*Gyan Prasarak Mandali*, etc.), and the access to stage performance

(Parsi Theatre) led the community elites to initiate a reform that would facilitate "a form of intra-group control and intergroup self-representation" (Nicholson 44). Accordingly, the Parsi Theatrical Committee, whose reformist founders were closely associated with *Rast Goftar*, began to stage plays in the 1850s that were based on Persian mythology to engender in the community secular, ritualistic, and customary transformation through a conscientious promotion of introspection before the juddins (non-Parsis/Hindus) pointed them out.

Though there was a tacit admission of the British cultural and civilizational superiority in the burgeoning Parsi public sphere, the initial plays, staged between 1853 and 1857, drew extensively on Persian myths and non-linear history to forge a stable community identity (Nicholson 49). These mythical plays were staged alongside farces that directed a critical, and semi-juridical gaze at the social ills prevalent in the contemporary Parsi society (Nicholson 50-53). Thus, the first plays to be staged at the Grant Road Theatre in Mumbai were *Rustom Zabuli ane Sohrab* [*Rustom Zabooli and Sohrab*] and *Dhanji Garak* [*Dhanji, the swallower*]: the first a mythical play, the other a farce. However, following severe criticism from the traditionalist Parsi establishment about the theatre's ploy to tarnish the community's reputation, the Parsi stage undertook a swift course correction and shifted its attention from Persian myths to English literature; this shift lasted until 1968 when the mythical gaze returned, under the patriotic instinct of the contemporary journalist and playwright Kaikhushro Navrojji Kabra. With this epistemic shift and through the decisive move from the cunning greed of Dhanji to the virtue and morality of Shakespeare, the Parsi theatre proclaimed its break with the precolonial religio-performative traditions and undertook a wholehearted, scientific engagement with the colonial modernity as a purveyor of reason and sophistication. To announce the arrival of a transformed stage, the theatre staged the first Gujarati translation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as *Nathari Phirangiz Thekane Avi* in 1857. This production was lavishly praised by *Rast Goftar* for providing a useful model for the moral and intellectual reformation of Parsi women (Kabraji 158). Within the next decades, the Grant Road Theatre in Bombay witnessed the performance of Gujarati adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Timon of Athens* and others.[2] What is noteworthy here in terms of the character of the incipient Parsi public sphere is the fact that while the reverence for Shakespeare on the Bombay stage implicitly served to assert the moral superiority of the colonizer's culture—thus concealing the material realities of the oppressive colonial rule—it was imaged

[2] There is little clarity among scholars about the exact dates. Nicholson and other scholars like Baradi and Mehta mention them without mentioning the years of production.

off-stage in the explicit validation of the desirability of the colonial rule by the Parsi intelligentsia after the first war of Indian independence in 1857.

Though the Parsi theatre came across as a unitary enterprise in its originary moment, its internal constitution and cultural politics highlighted a radical anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic stance. While it goes beyond the scope of this writing to offer here an exhaustive history of the translation of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati, I would like to trace the contours of this politics by focusing on (1) the cosmopolitan professional culture and linguistic pluralism that created a vibrant, dialogic literary culture in the second half of the nineteenth century (2) the transformative adaptations in Gujarati, Urdu, and Hindi that "escorted" the Bard "into the psyche of these audiences without them knowing that it was Shakespeare" (Trivedi 15).

Once the initial euphoria about Bard's cultural caliber died down, his plays were relentlessly localized, even professionalized, in a smorgasbord of the Victorian stagecraft, the raw and critical energies of folk theatre like *bhavai*, a diversity of popular and classical musical traditions, and finally, a subterranean strain of social criticism directed at the follies and the foibles of the elite. The success of the localized Shakespeare on the Bombay stage didn't owe anything to the Bard's poetic or dramatic genius; in fact, the adaptations became a rage with a heterogenous audience because they provided good stories, thrilling action, music, song, romantic situations and a surfeit of spectacle (Shah 485).

Before explicating this politics, let me touch upon an important issue regarding the opposite trajectories of translations of Shakespeare's plays in different regional languages. Following the institutionalization of English education, the colonial society split along class lines, a development that "had its consequences on the reception of Shakespeare too: there developed two mutually exclusive streams—of an 'academic' literary Shakespeare led by Anglicized Indian and a popular Shakespeare on stage, transformed and transmuted in translation" (Trivedi 15). Though this trend is historically witnessed in languages like Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, and Marathi, the watertight compartmentalization posited along class lines is problematic, at least in the case of the Parsi stage where arguably a large number of writers, translators, and even actors were the product of the colonial Anglicizing mission, but not completely so and even the audience represented a heterogeneous group comprising the English-educated elite and Gujarati and Urdu speakers of cutting across classes (Hansen 388; Isaka 87). What this scenario, in effect, suggests is that the rich polyglotism and cultural pluralism of the Parsi theatre—far from being an outcome of a pre-existing multilingual public—made conscious efforts towards a democratic reconstitution of the public sphere as well as a re-configuration of linguistic identities. In contrast to their Hindu counterparts, various Parsi drama companies—which produced mytho-historical plays, Shakespearean adaptations and original farces in English, Gujarati and Urdu—

represented the fluid nature of the emergent linguistic identities. The high incidence of multilingualism, the instability of "standard" forms of literary language, the divergence of idioms between prose and poetry, and the fluctuations in the choice of script—all were apparent in the Parsi theatre and its printed literature. In the period of its efflorescence between the 1870s and the 1890s, the companies aggressively commissioned plays/adaptations advertised them in multiple languages in print media, and even published them subsequently in book form with prefaces, stating the rationale for the choice of language, its bearing on the target audience, readership, etc. An astonishing feature of this heterogeneous creative practice was the presence of a sizable number of Urdu plays printed in Gujarati script; this corpus reflected the presence of a populace that resisted the incipient nationalistic sentiment, split along linguistic lines and religious communities like Hindus and Muslims. Such interlingual and intercommunal fluidity was affirmed by candid admissions of inaccuracy and error by translators like Behram Fardun Marzban, the Urdu translator of the celebrated Gujarati play *Sona na Mul ni Khorshed* [*Khorshed, worth her weight in gold*] and "Aram" who translated *Jahangir Shah ane Guahar* [*Jahangir Shah and Guahar*], both originally written by well-known Gujarati playwright Edalji Khori. The point is, despite the proverbial predilection of the Parsi theatre for profit and prestige, the stage evinced an unflinching commitment to the politics of accommodation, co-existence, and social coherence. Somanath Gupt has underlined the democratic, inclusive, and harmonious ethos of Parsi theatre by saying that it was: "Parsis, non-Parsis, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians who spread the art of theatre by founding theatrical companies, who built playhouses and encouraged drama, who became actors and popularized the art of acting, who composed innumerable dramas in Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu, who composed songs and defended classical music, and who wrote descriptions of the Parsi stage and related matters" (Gupt qtd. in Hansen 43).

As a cultural institution, the Parsi theatre enabled the afterlife of texts and the renewal of literary cultures. Thus, it helped to shape Bombay into a site of confluence of cultures and communal harmony. Its tendencies like the incorporation of an inordinate number of songs in productions, though commercial in nature, collapsed the barriers between the notions of high and low arts by curating a diverse repertoire of texts in multiple folk-classical-local genres like *lavani*, *ghazal*, *hori*, *thumri*, etc. C. R. Shah reminds us that: "At the performances of these Urdu plays, the programs which were sold in the theatre for two or three annas were printed in Gujarati script and gave the cast, the synopsis of the action of the play, scene by scene, and the full text of the songs with the names of the persons who sang them" (484). Through its "publicly mediated hybridity of form" (Willmer 16), the Parsi theatre not only reflected the hybridity of social sphere but, more importantly, strove to underscore, assert,

and even sustain these fluid, unsure identities within the Gujarati public sphere that was rapidly advancing towards fashioning an overwhelmingly homogenous, monochromatic socio-cultural realm.

Drawing inspiration from the success of the Parsi theatre, several Hindu drama companies too began to adapt Shakespeare's plays in the late 1870s. The man in the vanguard was Ranchhodbhai Udayram Dave who established Gujarati Natak Mandali [Gujarati Theatre Company] in 1878 with the express purpose of putting an end to the reliance on Parsi stage for enacting Hindu religious plays and adaptations for Hindu-Gujarati audiences (Baradi). In the same year, another prominent director, Vaghji Oza, established Shri Arya Subodh Natak Mandali in Morbi, opening the floodgates for other Hindu drama companies with identical nomenclature and politics (Baradi). One look at the nomenclature of these new-fangled theatre companies—Arya Gujarat Natak Mandali [Aryan Gujarat Theatre Company], Arya Natakotkarsh Mandali [Aryan Company for the Rise of Theatre, Nitidarshak Natak Madali [Theatre Company for Moral Guidance Arya Gurjar Harishchandra Natak Mandali [Aryan Gujarat's Harishchandra Theatre Company, Arya Sangitottejak Mandali [Aryan Music-oriented Company]—would reveal that, by that time, the ideological fault lines defining who did and who did not belong to the freshly imagined national community had been drawn and the Bombay stage had transformed into a space for contestations over a homogeneous nationalist identity.

In the next three decades, Bombay's literary scene witnessed an unprecedented vibrancy and success, and the thirty translations/adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, both textual and performative, had no small part in it (Baradi 35). In tandem with the reigning discourse of the time, influential managers like Vaghji Oza placed a great premium on improving the literary taste and moral character of the audience. Marking a departure from the vulgarities and base attitudes, characterizing the folk genres and cheap productions, Oza staged three major adaptations of Shakespare's *Cymbeline* (1887), *The Winter's Tale* (1894), and *Merchant of Venice* (1895). Quite remarkably, he adapted *Cymbeline* into a historical play titled *Champraj Hado* (1887) by recasting it in the era of the Mughal King Akbar and making it almost unrecognizable as Shakespeare's play through a deft recontextualization of the action and intercommunal politics.

However, despite being conceptually and ideologically averse to each other, the textual and professional practices of Parsi and Hindu theatres both can be regarded as "hybrid" in so far as they rendered the generic colonial authority—and that of Shakespeare in particular—ambivalent, ultimately engaging into what in today's terms we could call subversive mimicry. Victoria Theatre Company's U-turn to the staging of Persian myth and history over and against the production of Shakespearean adaptations in 1868 was marked by a simultaneous rejection of the unthinking imitation of English ways of life. The debate on the

issue of colonial mimicry in pages after pages of *Rast Goftar* in 1868-1869 underscores how Parsi and Hindu companies were united in fore-fronting an anti-colonial resistance on stage:

> With the advent of the English Raj in this country, our people have begun to wear vests, trousers, and boots; roam in horse-drawn carriages, use tables, chairs, desks, and numerous fashionable objects… these are mere *nakal* [mimicry] of the English… these new trends are *jangli* [savage] and have nothing to do with the tradition of our ancestors. (qtd. in Nicholson 100)

The Gujarati adaptation of *Macbeth* by N. V. Thakkur, the author of several historical novels in Gujarati, such as *Vasundhara* or *Bedhari Talwar* (1900), is a case in point. Thakkur adapted the play for one of the Hindu theatrical ensembles called Nitidarshak Natak Madali, a conservative company subscribing to an identity-based nationalist politics and typically unsure of its negotiation of tradition and modernity (Shah). The opening scene of the adapted play unfolds in the military camp of Minketu (Macbeth), a victorious army commander, who is shown trying to humiliate the neighbouring king, Jayadhwaja, whom he has freshly defeated. Unvanquished and defiant, the captive king shrewdly gives it back to Minketu by calling him a slave of the old king Agnimitra (King Duncan). Stung by humiliation and jealousy, Minketu instantly kills him, but then the ring of bitter truth in his opponent's words disorients him. His wife, Vasundhara (Lady Macbeth), salts his wounds by encouraging him to kill the king and seize the royal throne. Thakkur's clever re-engineering of *Macbeth*'s opening scene not only makes it more plausible and interesting for the local audiences but also caters to the Indian audience's distrust of the supernatural on the stage (three witches do not figure in the adaptation at all). In another interesting twist, Minketu is provided with an accomplice in crime, Yakub, who later develops a conscience and plays a powerful foil to the beleaguered usurper. The character of Yakub embodies a familiar trope of shifting loyalties in Shakespearean plays and replaces the three witches as the agents of Minketu's ultimate fall. Minketu finds yet another nemesis in his own daughter Meenakshi, who, in deep love with Agnimitra's son Vikram (Malcolm), helps him slip away from her father's clutches. To cater to the romantic sensibilities of the audience, the play introduces several pairs of lovers and amorous situations. Finally, typical of the Bombay stage, the play introduces a farcical sub-plot, not even remotely connected to the main plot, that weaves in and out of the main action to facilitate comic relief as well as scathing social satire, directed at the lovelorn oldies from Bombay's posh world who would seek to trap young partners in marriage. The astutely deployed device of the subplot is a ruse to mock the ills of modernity like late marriages and widow remarriages from an orthodox standpoint; it also targets foreign returned "mimic men"—complete with their

coats, hats, and pipes—for their blind imitation of the English lifestyle. The subversive politics of colonial mimicry, fashioned through an act of translation here, simultaneously constitutes the acts of mimicry and resistance in the sense explicated by Bhabha (143-165).

Shakespeare in Interlingual Translation

Parallel with and in opposition to the vibrant, heterogenous publics constituted by the Parsi theatre, a Hindu Gujarati public sphere was also taking shape since the 1860s; its roots can be traced to the idea of Hindu theatre and Hindu literary tradition mooted first by William Jones and institutionalized later by dramatic companies from the Maharashtra state, south of Gujarat, that enacted narratives based on *Ramayana* and *Purana* in the Grant Road Theatre (Hansen 390). With its distinctive discourse, upholding an elite linguistic identity and high literary culture, this public sphere was to assume the canonical status and play a dominant role in the nationalist politics of twentieth-century Gujarat. The articulate elites of this emergent intellectual class, mostly the Brahmins who found habitus in this sphere, responded to colonial modernity and enlightenment rationality with acts of translation—just like their Parsi counterparts. Thus, Ranchodbhai Udayaram Dave, who wrote plays aimed at social reforms and later even formed a drama troupe to differentiate his poetics and politics from those of the Parsi theatre, translated Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* into Gujarati in 1867. Though the translations of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *King Lear* had been serialized in the form of narratives in the prominent Gujarati magazine *Buddhiprakash* throughout the 1860s, the translation of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in 1871, done by Ratilal Desai, arguably remains the first translation proper in Gujarati. In the English preface of the play, Desai made a categorical statement about his politics of translation, i.e., the conviction to produce a faithful translation and a real Shakespeare for discriminating students of literature. Making no bones about his dissatisfaction with the localizing practices of the popular Parsi stage, he maintained that he felt it to be his desideratum "to make the translation as literal as possible" (ii). In a similar vein, Narayana Hemchandra qualified his translation of *All's Well That Ends Well* (1895) with an admission of the impossibility of rendering Shakespeare's poetic genius in Gujarati through translation (3).

It is important to note that the dominant note in these translatorial commentaries about the benchmark excellence of the source and the relative inferiority of the target language was played against the background of a synchronous literary movement calling for the standardization of the Gujarati language and literary culture. This project called for a (re)turn to Sanskrit and Western traditions and, simultaneously, advocated a purge of those from the

"polluting" Parsi and folk influences. Instructively, the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS), founded by British magistrate Alexander Kinloch Forbes with the support of English-educated, mostly upper-caste intellectuals, and writers in 1848, first promulgated this linguistic inadequacy-improvement theory and marked language as a site for defining community identity and forging a region. In the realization of this mission, the high-caste literati, who also played counselor to British officials, vehemently tried and fairly succeeded in entrenching a dichotomy between language and dialects; as a result, regional variations of Gujarati like Surati (South Gujarat variety), Kathiawadi (Saurashtra variety), Parsi and Muhammedan were posited as the other of a pure, standard Ahmedabadi (North Gujarat elite variety). A natural corollary of this linguistic apartheid was its extension into the literary and social realms; thus, artistic forms and human bodies using these dialects were considered inferior to the elite, upper-caste speakers of pure language. The otherness transferred to everything associated with Muslim identity was consolidated by forging racial (Aryan) and linguistic (Sanskrit) kinships with the colonial master. Several prominent writers and scholars echoed such linguistic and communal bias throughout the Pandit Era (1885-1915) and Gandhi Era (1915-1945) in Gujarati literary history. Interestingly, though the writers of the Pandit Era like Mansukhram Tripathi and Manilal Dwivedi, who led an orthodox movement to Sanskritize the Gujarati language, were ruthlessly mocked by Ramanbhai Nilkanth in his novel *Bhadrambhadra* (1900), the perception of Parsi language and theatre being inferior persisted. In his canonical history of Gujarati literature, K. M. Munshi verbalized this sentiment explicitly.

> The theatrical companies in Bombay, mainly controlled by the Parsis, staged plays full of gaudy and dazzling scenery with the help of actors who generally acted with vehement and unnatural emphasis. The traditions, however, of the Gujarati stage were different, the Morbi and Vankaner Nataka Samajas being the pioneers. Their plays followed the lines laid down by Ranchodbhai. (304)

As noted earlier, Ranchhodbhai Dave parted ways with Parsi theatre on account of his strong belief in the edifying function of theatre; edification, in his case, apart from being moral and literary, was interlaced with a strand of class-caste distinctions. Echoing the discursive note, dominant in the Hindu literary and intellectual circles, Dave (47) differentiated his plays not only from the gaudy, glitzy productions of Parsi theatre but also from the folk artform of *bhavai* which, to him, was a lowly genre used exclusively by lowly people. The Sanskritization extremists like Mahipatram went so far as to refine and reform the genre by purging it of its non-conformist content and stamina for social critique and published a sanitized volume of *bhavais* in 1874. If such a reconstruction reflected the emergence of an exclusivist nationalist sentiment,

it also seriously impinged upon the way translations of Shakespeare's plays were undertaken in the next hundred years.

The flamboyant, appropriative, and critical style of Parsi productions threw in sharp relief the textual and academic style of canonical and elitist translators like Narbheshankar Dave, as reflected in his *Shakespeare Mala* (1898-1917), a series of five translations of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati. Dave's translations belonged to the tradition inaugurated by the productions of Gujarat Natak Mandali that imitated the Bard in letter and spirit. A writer, critic, and a professor of English, Dave imparted an academic turn to the tradition of Shakespeare's translations by inflecting them with heavy introductions, combining Western critical thought with insights from Indian poetics and philosophy. Shoring up a non-localization model, Dave's translations followed a word-for-word trajectory, disregarding the differential theory of translation propounded by the eminent Gujarati writer Navalram Pandya (1836-1888). Borrowing the conceptual framework from the rasa theory of Sanskrit poetics, centred on the primary sentiment evoked by a text, Pandya (29-30) differentiated literary texts into the categories of the sublime literature (Kavya Sahitya) and the light literature (Mohan Sahitya). Accordingly, he classified translations into three broad categories,

> There are three types of translation: word-based (literal), meaning-based (semantic), and rasa-based (adaptation)… rasa-based can alternatively be called *deshkalanusari* as it is situated in the time (*kal*) and place (*desh*) of the target culture. This is a precondition to the translation of a text emanating from a non-native time and place into a native one. Shakespeare's plays are famous because he set them in his own time and place, and, by the same logic, their popularity in Hindustan depends upon the observance of the same doctrine. (29-30)

However, the incipient theory of translation in Gujarati at the turn of the century seemed to increasingly correspond to the Western theoretical models, undergirded by the notions of equivalence and fidelity. Not only did the emergent discourse in canonical journals like *Buddhiprakash* toe the line of Western translation theory with its hang-ups about the loyalty to the source, but it also subscribed to the colonial discourse that branded Gujarati literature and language as underdeveloped and in dire need of translations from superior European literature. A critic called Mohanlal Dave took issue with Navalram's designation of Shakespeare's play as light literature and pleaded for recategorizing the Bard's work as pure literature. His advice to the writers in Gujarati to stop their creative writing and strive to develop pure creativity through translation marked a logical culmination and full realization of Macaulay's dream:

> For the time being, Gujarati writers should drop the idea of creating original works at least until the time true creativity dawns upon us… instead, we should do the readers good by translating canonical works from other languages… such translations will be accessible to one and all, whether they are well-versed in languages like English or Sanskrit. (196)

One wonders if the apologetic and reverential tone of such theorization would have influenced the translation methodology in *Shakespeare Mala*, which was commissioned by the Princely State of Bhavnagar and closely monitored by the state's minister. Though Narbheshankar Dave didn't come clean on the extent to which the state patronage had constrained the translation process, it's not difficult to speculate that it substantially did because his rendering of *All's Well that Ends Well*, done independently of patronage, was an out-and-out adaptation without an introduction, even a dedication. The translator's self-contradictory attitude to his practice here goes to prove that the boundaries between the conceptions of a translation and an adaptation had been sealed and that a reconstitution of literary culture was underway. Partly on account of this devaluation of adaptation as well as due to the advent of cinema, the production of Shakespeare's plays took a serious beating on the Bombay stage by 1913. However, Dave's translation strategies tendentiously avoided extremes, producing texts that could be read as well as performed on the stage; the diction, too, was mediated between the high Sanskritized register and the low, colloquial one, boasting a judicious mix of Sanskrit and Persian words. This kind of conscious and constant negotiation between stageability and readability, high textuality and low textuality, obscurity and accessibility in the translation of Shakespeare's plays eventually wore off during the lull of three decades in Bard's visibility.

The next round of translations of the Bard's plays *Hamlet* (1942) and *Merchant of Venice* (1944) by Hansa Mehta was a natural progression of the literary culture that had struck root in the late nineteenth century. A veteran freedom fighter, a women's rights activist and a member of the Constituent Assembly, Hansa Mehta translated the plays in heavily Sanskritized Gujarati, using the famous classical metre called Anushtup in which Valmiki's *Ramayana* was set. In the preface to her verse translation of *Hamlet*, Mehta admitted to being stung by the observations of B. K. Thakore and R. V. Desai, who attributed the non-availability of proper translations of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati to the lethargy of the young poets and scholars. B. K. Thakore, a respected scholar and one of the pioneers of the Pandit Era, was greatly interested in the comparative approach to criticism and linguistic analysis; he himself had tried his hand at translating Kalidasa's plays, though without success. His preoccupation with the theoretical and linguistic issues involved in the process of translation led him to engage in rigorous study not only of the

works of Bana Bhatt, Bhavabhooti, Euripides, Shakespeare, and Milton but also multiple translations of the same text (Panchal 51-52). Thakore's take is worth quoting at length.

> It should not be beyond our comprehension if our poets looked at Shakespeare with a sense of "*Door thi karu Vandana*" (Overwhelmed, I give him a wide berth). How will that vigour, that flow, that spring, that change, that flutter, that fierce pungency wedded to naturalness, that freshness in dialogues, that straightforwardness and depth of heart-searching, that love of nature in description, that lustre, that clash of sentiments, that dissection of fibres of heart, etc., be brought in our poetic composition marching with graceful rhythmic gait, dancing with ringing sounds of anklets of alliteration or moving like a decorated she-elephant on left and right. (qtd. in Joshi, *Studies in* 41)

It's also important to remember that Mehta took up the challenge of verse translation while acknowledging the poverty of the Gujarati language to accommodate the ring and zing of Shakespeare's world-class plays; the translations for her were tools of enrichment. Probing the politics of Mehta's translations would be pertinent as her work unfolded in the heyday of the anti-colonial movement as well as in the period that is known as the Gandhi Era in the history of Gujarati literature. It's tempting to speculate that Mehta's choice of a high, Sankritized register and the *anushtup* meter, drawn from the classical Sanskrit tradition, resulted from the general oriental, Brahminical ambition for a cultural kinship with the colonizer. However, her politics of translation was both due to and despite the Gandhian take on the language politics of the times. As a competent translator, sensitive to the roots of words and their potential political implications, if Gandhi was so wary of using words that could carry Sanskrit connotations (Yagnik and Sheth 163) and was committed to the promotion of Hindustani all his life, he was also deeply suspicious of and distressed by the forms of Parsi and Muslim Gujarati, and made a case for:

> That Gujarati which is spoken and written by hundreds of thousands of educated people who have their home in Gujarat… Having been derived from Sanskrit and being its daughter, Gujarati must necessarily lean on Sanskrit—no one can question that. (qtd. in CWMG XIX 507)

He appealed to the Gujarati literati and intelligentsia to use more straightforward language for easy comprehension but also asked Muslim, working-class readers of *Navjivan*, who requested him not to use difficult words, to take a keen interest and education in civilized language (Isaka 117). Suffice it to say that Gandhi's indirect, at times tacit, avowal of the high-caste politics of language supremacy served to promote and consolidate the Brahminical hold over the Gujarati literary sphere, and Shakespeare became the site for frontlining its hegemony.

Shakespeare's Postcolonial Contexts

The year that marked about a century of Shakespeare on the Gujarati literary scene was also the year that marked the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's global existence. To celebrate the historical moment, Umashankar Joshi, a towering figure on the Gujarati literary scene, decided to devote all twelve issues of *Sanskruti* (Culture), a monthly literary journal he edited, to the critical and creative evaluation of Shakespeare. With an entire battery of eminent Gujarati writers, translators, critics, and pedagogues contributing to issue after issue of *Sanskruti*, the journal ended up producing a veritable festschrift. Most of its literary criticism, being derivative, ended up eulogizing Shakespeare as the greatest interpreter of human nature. Joshi prevailed upon his fellow Gujarati writers like Nalin Rawal and Mansukhlal Jhaveri to undertake full-length translations of Bard's plays, and himself wrote a slim book of literary criticism titled *Shakespeare*, wherein he says:

> The colonizers have been generally disliked on account of their political and economic aggression. However, from a cultural point of view, their acceptance is almost unanimous and universal. When the life and consciousness of a people have been embodied in a great poet, their domination over the heart of the world is bound to remain perpetual. (3)

While Joshi somewhat confusingly believed that the t English language was "three parts Bible and one part Shakespeare" (*Studies in* 33) on account of the frenetic Bible retranslation enterprises in the history of the English language, he also tried to develop a substantial theory of *samshloki* translation (composed of similar or parallel verse in the same meter as the meter of the source text). While discussing its problematics, he came down heavily on Keshav Chandra Dhruv's (1859-1938) Gujarati translations from Sanskrit and Prakrit, criticizing them for their tendency to mix loan words from Sanskrit with local dialectal words. Condemning the use of rustic words as ridiculous, he also took issue with Dhruv's lexical choices in terms of his highly subjective typecasting of words into the categories of words that are anachronistic, "old bookish," and contemporary. Condemning Dhruv's translation of the Sanskrit play *Mrichchhakatic*, Joshi announces:

> Even the name "Mrichchhakatic" is rendered in children's speech as *Matee ni Gayee* in brackets in rustic Gujarati. Here is an example of how subtleties of scholarship get trapped in unnecessary trivialities and allows itself to be ridiculed (because the title of the play in the original is not in children's language). (*Studies in* 39-40)

Joshi's ideological position weaves together an unqualified endorsement of the cultural supremacy of the master race with a prescriptive and de-contextualized model of translation theory. Among the translations Joshi commissioned for *Sanskruti* as well as for *Kavita Sangam* (an anthology of fifteen translations he edited), he liked Mansukhlal Jhaveri's translation of *Othello* (1978) the most; in Jhaveri's prose, he said (*Isamu Shidaane* 158), he heard Shakespeare's voice. At the insistence of Joshi, Jhaveri also rendered *Hamlet* (1967) and *King Lear* (1983), largely following the non-localization or unIndianizing model of translation in vogue. In his construction of translation theory, Jhaveri (41) highlights the pitfalls of valorizing stageability over loyalty in the translation of "immortal" texts because the former invariably diminishes the intrinsic literary merit of the original through the compulsion to localize. In a gesture that reiterated his loyalty to the Bard and Western translation theory, Jhaveri crowned his translation with a Gujarati translation of J. Dover Wilson's famous essay on *Hamlet* as a paratextual device and followed it with an introduction consisting of predictable stock responses about Shakespeare's unparalleled greatness.

Conclusion

What the above historiographical sketch suggests is that, in his century-long functioning in Gujarati, the Bard remained largely aloof from the social realities of the (post)colony as if in a strict compliance with the imperial policy of non-interference. However, this politics of insularity was double-edged: on the one hand, the garb of Shakespeare's greatness helped translations to steer clear of the dangers of excessive nativization, thus helping Shakespeare in translation elide the social inequalities and differences (caste, community, gender, etc.), but on the other hand, Shakespeare became instrumental in forging and feeding the fault lines of literary and social cultures in the new nationalist realities of the 20th century, tipping the balance of power in favor of the Brahminical stronghold. To exemplify this point as well as by way of conclusion, let me turn to a personal, and extremely pertinent, anecdote.

Because of the language-mediated reconfiguration of the conceptions of region and religion over nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the socio-cultural sphere in Gujarat today thrives on the politics of *asmita*, a proud self-identity, that has rendered Islam and Muslims strange, inessential and external to the idea of Gujarat. Today, as a result, "it is becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit a Hindu religious identity that is not at the same time articulated in opposition to a Muslim Other in Gujarat… [and] for Muslims to represent themselves or advocate for their rights as *Muslim* and as Gujarati" (Chandrani 3). The communal carnage that the state witnessed in 2002 was a hideous exhibition of

the calcification of unitary identities along religious, but also caste and class, lines. (Shani) In the wake of the communal riots, instead of a collective expression of remorse and grief, what the state witnessed was a deepening of discursive fault lines and the forging of fragile identities of the self and the other, based on narrow identity markers (Kothari).

To intervene in the cultural climate, ensuing the post-Godhra pogrom, of selective amnesia and collusive silence, I rendered into Gujarati Arun Kolatkar's long poem *Sarpa Satra* (2004), a subversive retelling of the apocalyptic rite of snake sacrifice, the opening genocidal myth of *Mahabharata*, from the point of view of the victim, a mythical snake-woman Jaratkaru. Elsewhere I have discussed how the Gujarati avatar of *Sarpa Satra* (2021) aims at triggering mourning in a society that has slipped into deep and dangerous "Forgetting that thwarts all representation" (Lyotard), the subliminal and unreasonable denial of the humanity and life of the other. (Ashwinkumar *forthcoming*) In 2020, I sent the long epilogue to the book titled "Translation as Mourning" to a reputed, Mumbai-based Gujarati journal *Etad* for publication. The article began with an epigraph from Bilkis Bano, a brave gangrape survivor of the 2002 riots who had waged a long and lone legal battle against her assaulters and the politics of hatred gripping the state. The "controversial" content of the article drew an email response from the editor, Kirit Dudhat, condensed and reproduced below (personal communication, 15 September 2020):

> Translation as mourning is a figment that seems to have lodged in your imagination. The poem itself does not support the linkage of the poem to post-Godhra violence. The quote of Bilkis Bano, too, appears to be forcibly glutinated. You can include Kolatkar's or Chitre's verses in your political analysis of post-Godhra violence for magazines like *Nireekshak* and *Caravan* but can't selectively cite (Anjali) Nerliker and others who write about Kolatkar's poetry.

Nireekshak and *The Caravan*, the monthly magazines published in Gujarati and English, respectively, are famous in contemporary India for their commitment to socio-political critique and counterhegemonic stance. To get back at the editor, I translated Bengali writer Nabarun Bhattacharya's short story "Abba"—a gripping account of an orphaned Muslim kid caught in communal riots and saved by a disabled Hindu rioter—and shot it off to the journal for publication. Much to my surprise, they accepted the story but with a set of suggestions regarding the language of the translation. In translation, I used a language that had the lexis, the turn of phrase, and the idiom closer to Surati Gujarati, which has a distinct Parsi flavor; further, in sync with the setting of the story, I also used the lingo typical of Ahmedabad's walled city, giving feminine or neuter gender to masculine words, nominalizing actions that did not exist in the Ahmedabadi and naturalizing English words as in the Bangla version.

The Editor, who had found my language in the rejected article scholarly and inaccessible, did not have any acquaintance with the demotic language of the translation; he feared it would alienate the Gujarati readers, i.e. mainstream, upper-caste, upper-class readers from central Gujarat. After a fair bit of negotiation, the story did appear in that mainstream literary space, but only after subtly suggesting to me that the state's inherent multilingualism had been expunged from its literary culture, as also from its social fabric. The politics that charged the translation of *Sarpa Satra* was preciselythe politics that animated a number of Shakespeare's plays, i.e., the question of how autocratic, paranoid, and narcissistic rulers are able to arrogate supreme power to themselves and bring about destruction and desecration of laws, institutions, and even the moral character of people and polity. The Bard lived in times far more perilous, but he could imagine oblique ways to address the seminal issues that plagued his society. That a postcolonial, post-global Gujarati stage or literati has not found in Jack Cade (Henry VI), Richard III, Macbeth, or King Lear rich material "[…] to probe the psychological mechanisms that lead a nation to abandon its ideals and even its self-interest" (Greenblatt 07) speaks volumes about a shrinking literary culture and a fossilization of cultural outlook. I can only hope that the category of "enablers," Greenblatt describes in his book, would be reclaimed by well-meaning, disobedient, unfaithful (re)writers today in whose sinuous hands the Bard will shapeshift—the way Ariel does in *The Tempest*, assuming the form of an invisible water nymph to wake up Miranda—and set free the birds of literary and social imagination.

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