



Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ)

Vol.2/ NO.2/Autumn 2012

The Pursuance of Cultural and Historical Binaries in *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad

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Literary translation needs creativity at the highest pedestal. For the sake of brevity, it would be in the fitness of things to say that it is creativity that adds perfection to the work.

In his revised paper, 'In Search of a New Theatre' Girish Karnad comments on the literary need of the play, *Tughlaq* as to fill the gap and remove the doubts of the people because Indian society has faced many changes:

'My generation was the first to come of age after India became independent of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation in which tensions implicit until then had come out in the open and demanded to be resolved without apologia or self-justification; tensions between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of the Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays... .' (Author's Introduction ,1.)

To put the cause before the larger world, English is the most appropriate medium of translation. Originally, Girish Karnad wrote this play in Kannada in 1964. By a leading theatre producer in Bombay, Alyque Padamsee, a suggestion comes to him for translating the play into English and that he does it with perfection.

Lapis Lazuli -An International Literary Journal (LLILJ) ISSN 2249-4529, Vol.2/ NO.2/Autumn 2012

URL of the Issue: <http://pintersociety.com/vol-2-issue-2autumn-2012/>

URL of the article: <http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Rita-Garg-11.pdf>

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Literary translation performs the task of bridging the emotional connection between cultures and languages and also enhances the understanding of human beings across natural boundaries. Against the Indian background of conflicts, the drama, *Tughlaq* is written. For a translator, a text remains hidden in translating and communicating to the target audience reception of foreign thought, particularly the one filled with conflict. In the translation, the soul of another culture achieves transparency and the translator recreates the refined sensibility of alien societies and their natives through the linguistic, rhythmic and visual possibilities of the new language.

In literature, an inherent incompatibility between the objectives of two or more characters or forces is conflict. As per its nature, it remains unstable. Towards the end, one side comes out victorious. The instability, definitely, adds to the curiosity of the reader.

The translator has the difficult task of how to safeguard the spirit of the conflict. This invariably is a touchstone for the performer. Girish Karnad is particularly an artist who creates the charisma of conflict at the same level as is natural and realistic to the target language reader.

Since the beginning of the play, conflict dominates the play at all levels as between the upper class and the lower class; even the limited upper class is not united; lower class is full of cheats; the Hindus are given lower status and the Muslims upper; the Hindus pay *Jiziya* to reduce conflict; royal family suffers from such sins as regicide or fratricide; Amirs and Governors are always on the verge of increasing their area of jurisdiction; the real mother of Tughlaq does not talk to him and the step mother wants to dominate over him; Barani, the historian is not able to tolerate the heinous crimes as prevalent with acceptance from some of the corners; and, above all, Tughlaq the Sultan's conflict within self at the failure of each and every policy of his—first, he shifts the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad; secondly, the copper coin policy which turns houses into mints; and third, that he prohibits public prayers—and with this the result is that he himself is not able to sleep five years.

Drama itself is not too lengthy a literary vein but Girish Karnad has presentation of all the above issues of struggle with translation in curt expressions. How a Hindu presents his views on *Jiziya* in sarcastic manner and appropriate words is remarkable:

Third Man: All this about the Hindus not paying the *jiziya*_tax. That's against the Koran, you know. A Mowlvi told me that--

Hindu: Now, now, don't look at me when you say that. We didn't want an exemption! Look, when a Sultan kicks me in the teeth and says,

‘Pay up you Hindu dog,’ I’m happy. I know I am safe. But the moment a man comes along and says, ‘I know you are a Hindu, but you are also a human being’—well, that makes me nervous.(11.12)

Through this suspicion, lack of security, emotional weakness, as well as outlet, the lack of religious harmony and associated conflict is clear to the utmost. The irony, the sarcasm, the appropriation and the diction are worthy of a perfect translator.

This picture has the other aspect as well. Immediately, the reactions of Muslims are also given in the similar vein:

Old Man: But this wretch is our best friend, Jamal. Beware of the Hindu who embraces you. Before you know what, he’ll turn Islam into another caste and call the Prophet an incarnation of his god....’(1.15)

With this conflict, one aspect of the play is set before the target language reader. How the fears and apprehensions are traceable on both the sides. The background of the Indian soil during the reign of a Turk ruler, Tughlaq, has the religious bias also. In spite of such money extracting and secondary position imposing devices as jiziya, Tughlaq is ever-vigilant of the projection on the line of Hindu-Muslim unity. Aziz, a disguised Brahmin and a true follower of the Sultan’s policies joins Civil Services and expresses views on that to Azam, his friend:

Aziz: From tomorrow, I join the Civil Service. Why don’t you come along too? I’ll get you job under me. You know, a Brahmin with a Muslim friend—the Sultan will like that.(1.76)

The character in a play faces internal conflict. The projection of that is equally difficult a task for the playwright. This presentation is also brought out by Girish Karnad with precision, accuracy and reflection of the spirit.

The political rivalry is the persisting conflict jeopardizing the highest level. Tughlaq the Sultan is always getting those Amirs and Governors subdued who show even the slightest inclination of rebel or even ambition. How widespread this conflict is that is well projected in utter simplicity of expression. Ratan Singh, previously a prince tells about Shihab-ud-Din whose father had usurped the throne of the former’s father by killing him:

Ratan Singh: His father is supposed to have killed my father by treachery and usurped the Kingdom. Shihab can’t forget that. He wants to make up for it. That’s why I’m here, as his adopted brother. (5.44)

All this demands clarity of language and that is commendably and perfectly accomplished a work by the translator.

The conflict between religion and politics is as complicated as the conflict of mind and soul. The subjects have a religious bent of mind and the political control is a binding which frames a binary. A religious priest has become like a backbone of the rebels—consisting of Amirs and allies. This political threat is to be curtailed but-- keep it camouflaged-- has to be the manner to subside it. The easiest expression makes it possible to convey the spirit to the reader as Najib, the historian says, 'Yes, Your Majesty, and get rid of him.' (2.49)

Thus it is planned to eradicate this growing problem. The conflict of a historian is based on his humanitarian judgment of the events. Barani, the historian cannot judge as to what the repercussions of a situation would be. He simply evades any strict decision:

Barani: He said it in the heat of the moment, Your Majesty. I'm sure he didn't mean it.
Your Majesty must ignore these little things. (2.63)

While the comments of Sheikh Imam-ud-Din are that the Sultan forfeits the right to rule as he is a regicide, parricide and fratricide. The conflict of a politician increases when a vizier has to keep a suspicious eye on one and all, i.e., inclusive of the Sultan, the historian, the religious priest and this or that. How people dislike being spied as Barani says, 'Your Majesty, but I don't like being spied upon.'(2.54)

This use of translator's skilful use of language in direct words makes the most effective presentation. The connotations of a non-plotting historian, the politically sound statesman, Najib and the plotting Sultan are uttered in a few words. No doubt remains there.

Tone modulations are also maintained by the translator. Particularly in the scene when the step mother is to be sent for execution. Even when he sends her for such a dire consequence, his speech modulation is maintained. Her voice is also befitting as that of an ordinary criminal—a queen begging for life—and Tughlaq too does not miss the command over speech. That remains as that of a ruling King only. His finding the crime of his step mother does not add enthusiasm of the search made to find the criminal; his demoralizing the mother has no sympathetic touch; his show of her punishment is in the same order as that of any criminal; his indifference to relationship with step mother calls for no confusing tit bits what-so-ever; and above all, similarly, like a strict royal personality, his tone has the colour maintained—no doubt, the incident retains the relevant anxiety for the target reader. The theme of step mother's

involvement in the murder of Najib, has an underlying plot and crime as well. Nothing changes the attitude of Tughlaq who remains unmoved. This word ‘unmoved’ gives the irony to the stature; this word adds attraction to the sense of justice of a King; this more or less voiceless attitude is tremendously in line with the requirements of the kingly stature.

The reader does not feel sympathetic to the cause of step mother or the justice of the Sultan. No doubt, the speech modulation comes to the level of explosion, screaming, and to being stunned. When passing on the order to take her away, he talks in the voice as per the role of his:

Muhammad: You are worse than an adultress. But I can't think of a worse punishment for you. Take her to prison.(10.44)

The hesitant soldiers are not able to comply with the orders.

Muhammad screams: Take her away!(10.46)

She pleads but he says:

Muhammad: That's how an adultress dies. Take her away. (10.47)

Sending step mother to an ordinary being's punishment is not flustering. His voice modulation is again highlighted through the prayer well-worded:

Muhammad: God, God in Heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in Your path, Lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of you. Why am I become a pig rolling this gory mud? Raise me. Raise me. Clean me. Cover me with Your Infinite Mercy. I can only clutch at the Hem of Your cloak with my bloody fingers and plead. I can only beg—have pity on me. (10.49)

This voice claiming control over emotions, that too, in a translated work with the ease of discernment adds to the beauty of translation.

The rise and fall of tone and rhythm is particularly appealing in more scenes as when masses are shifting to Daulatabad; in the scene when young soldier apologizes the Sultan repeatedly; the Sultan accepts defeat; or, the Sultan's kneeling to pray and in all these examples there is found an exceptional sensitivity by the receptive ear. In return to the apologies of the soldier, the Sultan also speaks to him in a settled language and intonation of his words, gaps and pauses to correlate his nostalgia—the words are positively nostalgia-soaked. In few words, the expression is enough to carry the melancholy included in, and prosaic appeal of the present

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situation, detachment starting to shroud and also the role of chorus played befits him in accordance with the situation:

Muhammad: The torch, the gate and the sky—all melted and merged and flowed in my blood-stream with the darkness of the night. The moment shed its symbols, its questions and answers and stood naked and calm where the stars throbbled in my veins. I was the earth, was the grass, was the smoke, was the sky.(8.34)

The young soldier is enthused and allured by the acceptance of the Sultan's failing in plans—admittance of his lack of practicability—mesmerizing youthful dreams which could not be implemented fruitfully. What the Sultan designed, tumbles down as the comet would. Here appropriation of the rhythm of the falling tone of the Sultan's voice is apparent:

Muhammad: (Incensed) You don't understand! You don't understand! Why do you live? (Suddenly calm) I am sorry....(Uncomfortable silence) (8.36)

This rise and fall captures throughout the play. The translation is replete with beauty and style. Also connotation is used to give additional depth and insight. When Ain-ul-Mulk, a Governor revolting against the Sultan, is being gheraoed by the forces of the Sultan, the priest disguised as the Sultan is superimposed with an artistic aura connoting the religious purity at heart and simplicity in faith, with the firmness of skill in controlling the wrong to the appropriate stand of the attitude and thinking.

The galvanized priest is till the end putting in the effort to be the real nice human being working for the cause of Islam.

To his dismay--well projected in the target language—he becomes a gory porcupine. The details are not given in details then, but much remains for assumption. That comes out factually in a discussion of some characters. The irony of the description is remarkable and demarcated. The trauma associated is implied in the words 'gory porcupine'. The bloodshed is also implied. The death of a harmless priest at the hands of barbarian forces is another sense suggested. To the surmise of the reader, when the victim is sure of his dead end, what could be the force of suffocation or dread to the sufferer. If a religious priest cannot save himself, who would? Is the religion to be strangulated? Is humanity above God? What has gone wrong with spiritualism that there is no reasoning left in the butchery of masses or a priest? Then there is the question of the arousal of curiosity of what next?

Those are the days of regicide and usurpation to be the ruler. The translator's task is to spread messages about the appropriate acts. Also to increase awareness of the ones which were being acted upon. The cultural, historical and social in-depth understanding of the context of the original text enables the translator about the accuracy of the semantic translation of the literary text.

Girish Karnad's adequacy of translation, in particular, of the conflict in the drama is based on his knowledge of both the languages—Kannada is his language¹ and English is language 2. His studies have the advantage of Bombay and also of abroad on scholarship.

In his childhood, in a township, in Karnataka, he used to see two theatre forms. He had seen the performances of natak companies. Another form of theatre, and a more traditional performance, Yakshagana, he used to see once the harvest was over.

In Bombay, he used to see theatre, e.g., *Miss Julie* by Strindberg, under the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi. The conventions of language and limitations of text may cause hurdles but for the qualified translator, the task of translating is like any performing art being interestingly performed by the translator. The translator is qualified on the basis of passionate attachment for the work, knowledge of the world, creativity and language skills more than the set ones.

To top all this, translator would better have a sense of dedication to his work. This would help him prove a necessary distinctive characteristic to make the translation enjoyable rather than the prosaic exercise on the part of the translator. With this background, the cultural and language gaps are filled with the understanding of the human nature and demands across and beyond borders. For a good translator, the knowledge of language only does not suffice. The translator has to have much capacity to receive by listening. His sensitivity is not confined to receptivity but also to the context, connotations and origin of the particular word. Above all, the translator as a creative writer also needs like the creator, intuition, i.e., sixth sense which links him to the subconscious or the state of trans.

Fulfilling the need of creativity as the uppermost skill, a sensitive attitude to translation is also much called for. The translator faces internal conflict when translating the situation of conflict.

The avoidance of vagueness and firm determination along with the deep understanding of culture of both the societies linked with the source and target language while dealing with significant difference are observed. Against this background, the translator accomplishes literary

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as well as social activism. Also, the role of translator is affirmed as intercultural agent or cultural mediator. Girish Karnad although translates his own creative work, *Tughlaq* but he avails of the role of cultural mediator based on the grounds of political history of India.

Girish Karnad observes accuracy, formal loyalty, naturalism, consistency and unity. All through, the redundancy of words is saved, and the use of appropriate words is made. In conformation to formal loyalty, the expressions depict the subject matter in all the richness of the style. No speech ever goes beyond naturalism and that binds the audience. The naturalness surrounds consistency. Out of natural ethos, emerges one incident after another and this chain develops in unity.

Tughlaq is full of varied incidents and episodes being full of a number of characters which are of the rank of the miserables, robbers, cold-blooded murderers, soldiers, and the administrative hierarchy culminating into a regicide, parricide and fratricide usurper king, Tughlaq. The panorama of the drama extending from one region to another is assimilated in few scenes in a clear hue and that is the excellence of a translator who is playing the role a cultural mediator to sensitize one and all.

Work Cited

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All the subsequent references shall be made to this addition.

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