

## (Re)reading Shakespearean Translations in the Context of Gujarati

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### Abstract:

This paper attempts to read and trace the lineage of Gujarati translations of Shakespearean plays translated or adapted by native Gujarati writers during the late 19th and early 20th Century as an entry point into the debates around the translation of Shakespearean plays into Gujarati.

While reading these translations, we find ourselves forced to reflect upon questions such as: What does it mean when one says Gujarati Shakespeare or Shakespeare in Gujarati? Does it include performance (Parsi theater adaptations of Shakespeare in Gujarati were performed in the mid-nineteenth century) or translated texts alone? Can we consider adaptations or transcreations as a part of the oeuvre of Gujarati Shakespeare? Or should one consider just 'original' translations as Gujarati Shakespearean plays? Hence, the paper attempts to study these translations and adaptations of Shakespeare to understand what it means to Shakespeare in Gujarati.

**Key Words:** Gujarati Shakespeare, Translations, Adaptations, Parsi Theater, Prefaces

**Objectives:**

In this paper, I attempt to analyze the question of Shakespeare in Gujarati in a sense that how he was received as a playwright, what were the concerns and problems that were raised by Gujarati scholars and critics. How his works were Gujaratified and what were the views of translators and critics regarding the translations of Shakespeare.

**Scopes and Methodology:**

This paper focuses only on prefaces of available Gujarati translations and adaptations of Shakespearean plays published during Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Apart from these prefaces, I have also tried to focus on other critical research that followed the same area of Shakespearean plays in Gujarati.

**Literature Review:**

We find limited literature reviews for Shakespearean translations in Gujarati. There would be many research works available on Parsi Theatre but not much work is done on the printed texts of Shakespearean translations that came up during and after the Late Nineteenth Century. These available research works are rather more informative than discussing the complexity of the issue.

Researcher Hiren Patel, from Centre for Comparative Literature and Translation Studies – Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, has written a dissertation on Gujarati translations of Shakespeare. It is a comparative study of two Gujarati translations of Shakespeare's Hamlet, namely Narbeh Shankar Pranjivan Dave's early twentieth century translation, Denmark no Rajkumar: Hamlet (1917) and Mansukhlal Maganlal Jhaveri's post-independence translation, Hamlet (1967). His research aims to understand the nature of

translation of Shakespearean plays in Gujarati in the colonial and post-colonial periods which includes only two translations of Hamlet whereas this proposal aims to study the basic theoretical questions and concepts raised by different translators and scholars of that time.

Another research that is done in this area is by Dr. Sunil Sagar. It is an illustrative historiography of 73 pages discussing the history of Gujarati translations of Shakespearean works. He at the end questions how to build a methodology for creating a history of Shakespearean translations in Gujarati which is also another interesting but a different view to read Shakespeare in Gujarati.

### **Shakespeare in Gujarati:**

Gujarat shares a unique relationship with Shakespeare starting as early as 1852. The Parsi theater group performed an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* titled as '*Nathari Firangiz Thekane Aavi*' in Gujarati at Andrews Library in Surat in 1852. This was the first ever adaptation of a Shakespearean play in Gujarati.

In his seminal paper '*Shakespeare and Gujarati Stage*' C.C. Mehta, in detail, discusses the performances of Shakespearean plays in Gujarati performed by Parsi actors. C.C. Mehta in his paper says:

“Be that may, there is no disputing that in those halcyon days of Parsi Theatre, Shakespeare had a place second to none as far as scripts were concerned. In the field of acting and direction the histrionic style prevailed – a result of the influence of the Victorian flourishes of the English touring companies, who invariably produced Shakespeare's plays in Bombay.” [C. C. Mehta – “*Shakespeare and Gujarati Stage*” (43)]

He discusses that apart from Bombay; Surat, Ahmedabad, Morabi, Vakaner, and Bhavnagar were the center for these plays. There were great varieties of Shakespearean translations and adaptations performed by various theatre groups.

Gujarati translations of Shakespearean plays in printed forms/texts started appearing only from 1898, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. B. K. Thakor (1869-1952) and R. V. Pathak (1887-1955) wanted to see Shakespeare rendered in Gujarati and lamented about how major Gujarati poets have failed to usher in Shakespeare in Gujarati. According to Hansa Mehta and B.K. Thakor Gujarati poets have been aloof from Shakespeare and he is not at all celebrated in the context of Gujarati language and literature. Hansa Mehta, in the first edition of the preface (“Be Bol”) of her translation of Hamlet (1942). She says,

“પરંતુ જેમ પ્રો. બી.ક. ઠાકોરે કહ્યું છે તેમ કોઈ કારણથી આપણા વિશિષ્ટ કવિઓ શેક્સપિયરથી દૂર જ રહ્યા છે, ગજરાતને માટે એ કમનસીબીની વાત છે. શ્રી રામનારાયણભાઈએ પણ આ બાબત અફસોસ દેખાડ્યો છે. એમના ‘અર્વાચીન ગજરાતી કાવ્ય સાહિત્ય’ એ પુસ્તક માં લખે છે કે: “આપણા જુવાન લેખકો ઘણીવાર ધનૂ જેવી વાર્તાઓના અનુવાદ કરે છે અને શેક્સપિયર જેવા જગવિખ્યાત નાટ્યકારની કૃતિઓને ગજરાતીમાં ઉતારવા કશુંજ કરતા નથી, એ મને બહુશોચનીય લાગે છે.” [Hansa Mehta – “Be Bol”, Hamlet (05)]

“But, As Prof. B. K. Thakore has said that because of some reasons our prominent poets have always been aloof from Shakespeare. It is a matter of great loss for Gujarat. Shree Ramanarayan bhai has also shown grievance towards this. In his newly published book, he writes that: “our young writers many times translate the naïve works but they have not shown any interest to translate the works of well-known playwrights like Shakespeare. It is a ponderous matter for me.” [Translation: mine]



She further in her preface says:

‘જ્યાંમાર્ગ ના હોય ત્યાં ઝાડઝાખરા કાપી રસ્તો બનાવવો એ કાર્યકઠિન છે.’ [Hansa Mehta: – “*Be Bol*”, *Hamlet* (05)]

“It is a difficult task to begin and construct a new way where there is not a single clue.” [Translation: mine]

From the above lines of the preface written by Hansa Mehta it can be assumed that these Gujarati translators and scholars completely ignore the fact that during mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, that is just around 50 years ago, Parsi theater and other natak mandlis (Local theatres) played a major role to constitute a role of Shakespeare in Gujarati literature.

It is ironic that Hansa Mehta in the second preface of the same translation (1954) expects to see performances of her translation (asks the same question in preface to her second translation.

(વે નિસનો વેપારી).

She, in conclusion to her second preface, says:

“જેમ શેક્સપીઅરના વિખ્યાત આતમભાષણોનું પઠન અંગ્રેજી શાળાઓમાં શીખવાડાય છેતેમ ગુજરાતી શાળાઓમાંપણ શીખવાડવામાંઆવેતો આવા પુસ્તકો પ્રત્યેજરૂર રસ જાગતૂ થાય. અને એવુંથાય તો જ કદાચ આવા નાટકોનેતખ્તા પર જોવાની આશા રાખી શકીએ. આશા છેકેત્રીજી આવત્તિ નો વારો આવેતેપેહલા આ પરિસ્થિતિ સુધરશે” [Hansa Mehta: – “*Be Bol*”, *Hamlet* (05)]

As the English medium schools teach the recitation of the famous soliloquies of

Shakespeare, if the same thing is taught in Gujarati medium schools then the readers will take interest in these kinds of translations and if this happens then only one can hope to see such plays on stage. I hope that this situation will improve before the third edition.” [Translation: mine]

It is possible to say why B K Thakor, Hansa Mehta and other Gujarati critics did not consider it important or ignored the role that Parsi performances played to constitute Gujarati literature and translations of Shakespearean plays in Gujarati. Most of the Shakespearean plays performed by Parsi theater were adaptations. Adaptations were criticized or were considered as an inferior form as well as a work of piece that diversifies the whole history. As it was not considered or seen as a permissible act to change the setting and names of characters.

Aapabhai Motibhai Patel was one of the literary figures who wrote 6 adaptations of Shakespearean plays in Gujarati. In prefaces of the adaptations, he says that to create a Hindi atmosphere he altered the names of the characters and setting of the play. They were all fictional (Setting and names of characters) which had no relations with history or historical figures. It was just to create fictional characters which were based on historical figures.

In the second preface of his adaptation of ‘As you like it’ titled “*Kanan-kallol*” he confesses that he was challenged by scholars for altering the history and it was not a permissible deed to do that. I quote his words here,

“ગયા નિવેદનમાં એક બાબત જણાવી રહી ગઈ હતી, અનેતેએ કે મારા રૂપાંતરોમાં હિન્દી વાતાવરણ ઉભું કરવા જે ઐતહાસિક પરુષોના અનેસ્થળોના નામ મેંયોજેલા છેતેમનેઇતિહાસ સાથે કોઈ સબંધ

નથી. તેસઘળા કાલ્પનિક છે. માત્ર ઐતહાસિક હોય તેવો આભાષ ઉભો કરવા તેયોજેવા છે. એક ભાઈએ લખેલુંકે" આવો લાંબો પરવાનો તમનેમળી શકેનહિ, તમેઇતિહાસનેવિકૃત કરી શકો નહિ." પણ આ ચર્ચા નો વિષય છે. અત્યારેઆપણેએ છોડી દઇશુ ચર્ચા માટેઆ સ્થાન નથી. ઉપરાતં જરૂરી ખૂલાસો મેં ટૂંકમાં જ આપી દીધો છે." [Aapabhai Motibhai Patel – Nivedan, ‘Kanan-Kallol’ (06)]

“In the previous preface (adaptation of Macbeth entitled ‘Tandav Nrutya’) I forgot to mention that in my adaptations the historical figures and places which have mentioned (is) to create Hindi atmosphere have no relations with history. They are all fictional and solely created to reflect the historical atmosphere. A critic has reviewed “This is not a permissible act and you cannot diversify the history.” This is the subject of argumentation which must be left to discuss later since this is not an appropriate platform. Plus, I have revealed the needed information in brief.” [Translation: mine]

Ramanlal Desai is one among well-known early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Gujarati poets, playwrights and critics who played a major role in grounding early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Gujarati literature. He wrote a preface entitled “Be Bol” for the first edition of Kanan-Kallol in which he congratulates Aapabhai on creating a masterpiece. In a preface Ramnallal Desai says,

“શ્રી આપાભાઈ પોતાનેસાહિત્યકાર તરીકેઓળખાવતા નથી. પોતાના નિવૃત્તિ જીવનમાંએક શબ્દ પ્રવૃત્તિ યાવુરહેએ અર્થે તેમણેવિખ્યાત નાટ્યકાર શક્તેસપીઅરના છ-સાત નાટકો ગુજરાતીમાં ઉતારી એક પછી એક પ્રસિધ્ધ કરવાનો વિચાર રાખ્યો છેઅનેએ નાટકો ખરેખર ગુજરાતી ભાષામાં

પ્રસિધ્ધ કરવા સરખા છેકેકેમ એ બદલ મારો અભિપ્રાય માગું યો છે, જેથી તેમના ભાષાતરં પ્રસિધ્ધ પાત્ર હોય તો તેઓ આગળ બીજા છપાવી શકે. તેમનું" કાનન-કલ્લોલ" જરૂર પ્રસિધ્ધિપાત્ર છેઅને તેમની શૈલી આ નાટકમાં જે ઢબેઉપસી આવી છેતેઢબ જોતા તેમના અન્ય નાટકો પણ જરૂર પ્રસિધ્ધિ પાત્ર

હોવા જોઈએ એમ કહેતા મનેજરાયેસકોયં થતો નથી.” [Ramanlal. V. Desai – “Be Bol”,  
'Kanan-Kallol' (09)]

“Mr. Aapabhai does not acknowledge himself as literatesque. During his retirement period, in order to stay active, he has decided to write and publish 6-7 adaptations based on famous Shakespearian plays. For doing that he has asked for my opinion whether they are publishable or not. His adaptation 'Kanan-Kallol' is definitely publishable. And the way his writing style has emerged, I do not hesitate to say that his other adaptations are also worth publishing.” [Translation: mine]

From the above statement of the preface by a Gujarati critic and novelist Ramanlal Desai, it can be said that there were also a number of critics who considered adaptations as a creative part of literature. Further in the same preface R. V. Desai notes:

Hence, we can clearly state how adaptations were considered as not just literary/literal translations from source text to target text or from source culture to target culture but also to feel the essence of one's own (target) culture. One should also note here that B. K. Thakore [in his preface to Hansa Mehta's translation of Hamlet (1942)] takes notes of adaptations of Shakespearian plays in Gujarati written by Maganlal Patel which got a significant place among Gujarati canonical texts published by Shree Motibhai Amin.

It can be said that these adaptations played a significant role in the history of native or regional Gujarati literature. These adaptations no longer remain inferior to original works of an author but a significant part of target culture text which is Gujarati literature here. These adaptations cannot also be ignored for the history of translation.

From the above discussion, we can speculate that there is no single view that follows the same argumentation. Each and every writer treated adaptations in their own ways. Few

of them considered them as a part of translation where others did not. For some critics and translator's adaptation was a creative piece of work where for others it remains just inferior to translation.

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