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Research Article



The First ever Gujarati Translator of a Shakespearean Play – Bhanji Gokul Parekh

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Abstract

The study of translation history is crucial for understanding the choices and influences of translators, both in terms of their personal inclinations and external factors. Unfortunately, in Gujarat, the exploration of translation history has been limited to basic information such as dates, names of translations, and sometimes the names of translators. However, in the Western world, there has been a growing interest in translation history over the past three decades or so. Western scholars have embraced various theories and frameworks that emphasize the importance of investigating different facets of translation history, such as translator identity, patronage, censorship, support mechanisms, interventions, and the selection of texts. Interestingly, translation discussions often focus solely on the text itself, disregarding the translator as a cultural agent who enables the process of translation. By shedding light on the

life and context of the translator, new facts and interpretations related to translation history can be discovered. One example of the association between Shakespeare's plays and Gujarat dates to 1852 when the first adaptation of "Taming of the Shrew" was performed at St. Andrews Library in Surat. Since then, there have been numerous translations and adaptations of Shakespearean plays in Gujarat. However, very little is known about the lives and works of these translators. Bhanji Gokul Parekh is one such translator who rendered Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* into Gujarati, as *Karunaras Julius Caesar Natak*. Despite being the first translator of Shakespeare's play, his contribution as a translator has been largely forgotten. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight Parekh's significant contribution to translation history of Gujarat in the context of Shakespeare's plays.

Keywords: Translator studies, Translation studies, Translation history, Shakespeare, Translation history in Gujarat

Research in the field of translation studies in the last few decades has been characterised by a growing interest in translation history as a discipline. The understanding that translations do not happen in isolation but are influenced by various factors, including the historical context in which they were produced, has become a significant aspect of translation discourse. Translators are not mere transmitters of language; they are active participants in the cultural and historical process of translation. Translations reflect the social, political, and cultural circumstances of their time. The historical context shapes the choices translators make, such as selection of the text, and strategies for translation. Studying a translation in its historical context allows researchers to explore how historical events, ideologies, and power dynamics influence the translation process. For instance, during periods of colonization, translations were often used as tools of power and control, reflecting the dominant culture's perspective. Conversely, during times of cultural exchange or resistance, translations may have played a role in challenging or subverting established norms. By examining the historical context of a translation, researchers can uncover the motivations behind specific translation choices, identify the cultural and ideological influences on the translator, and gain insights into the reception and impact of the translation within its historical moment. Moreover, translation history is an intercultural and interdisciplinary field. It not only considers the translation itself but also seeks knowledge and information about the historical context surrounding the translation. It encourages a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between translation and its historical milieu. Studying a translation in its historical context is crucial because it recognizes that translations are not isolated linguistic acts but are embedded in specific historical circumstances.

Studying the life and times of the translator is also essential because it sheds light on various factors that can significantly impact the translation process. Translators are individuals who exist within specific historical and cultural frameworks, and their personal experiences, beliefs, and socio-political contexts can shape their approach to translation. By investigating the life and times of a translator, researchers can uncover valuable information about the translator's background, education, language proficiency, ideological influences, and literary

preferences. All these aspects can affect the translator's choices and strategies when rendering a text into another language.

Furthermore, understanding the translator's interactions with other individuals and agencies becomes crucial to comprehending the translation process fully. Translators rarely work in isolation; they often collaborate with publishers, authors, scholars, and other agents involved in the production and dissemination of translated works. These interactions can have a significant impact on the final translation, as external parties may exert influence or impose certain constraints on the translator's choices. Therefore, studying the dynamics between translators and these individuals or agencies helps unravel the complex web of relationships that influence the translation process.

In addition, patronage plays a significant role in the translation of literary works. Translators often rely on the support and sponsorship of patrons to fund their translations, facilitate publication, or gain recognition for their work. It is essential to study the power relations between translators and their patrons because these dynamics can shape the translation in various ways. Patrons may have specific expectations or demands, which can influence the translator's decisions regarding style, content, or target audience. Investigating these power dynamics provides insights into why a translation took a particular form and helps reveal the motivations behind the translator's choices.

Moreover, examining the chronology of a translator's life and work is essential for accurately understanding their translations. Establishing a reliable chronology helps trace the development of a translator's skills, ideas, and approaches over time. It enables researchers to identify patterns, shifts, or innovations in the translator's work and understand how their translations evolved throughout their career. By clarifying the chronology, researchers can provide a more accurate historical account of the translator's contributions and achievements.

Ultimately, the study of translation history goes beyond analysing individual translations in isolation. It seeks to place each translation within its appropriate historical, cultural, and biographical context. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of why and how translations were undertaken and provides insights into the individuals, agencies, and forces that influenced them. By placing translations and translators in their rightful place in history, researchers can fully appreciate their contributions and unravel the intricate web of factors that shaped their work.

This paper attempts to trace the life and works of the first ever Gujarati translator of Shakespeare's play, Bhanji Gokul Parekh. He translated *Julius Caesar* into Gujarati as *Karunaras Julius Caesar Natak* in the year 1874.

Legacy of Shakespeare in Gujarat

The performance of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* in Gujarati by the Parsi theatre group at Andrews Library in Surat in 1852 holds great significance as it marks the first-ever adaptation of a Shakespearean play in any modern Indian language. (Mehta 1964) Every major litterateur in Gujarat engaged with Shakespeare in different ways, such as reading, critiquing, or translating his works. Keshav Dhruv, a renowned Sanskrit scholar, played a pivotal role by conceptualizing the *vanveli* metre, which enabled the translation of Shakespeare's works into

Gujarati. This breakthrough in Gujarati literature paved the way for the rendering of Shakespeare's blank verse, which was previously considered difficult to translate. R.V. Pathak, an eminent Gujarati critic, translated a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* using the Vanveli metre. Inspired by this, Jaswant Thakar went on to create a full-fledged translation of *Macbeth* in 1964 using the same metre. Umashankar Joshi, an influential Gujarati scholar, played a significant role in introducing Shakespearean works to the Gujarati audience. Although he did not provide complete translations of Shakespeare's plays himself, he conceptualized a series of 15 translations under *Kavita Sangam: Nisheeth Puraskar Granth Mala - 22*, published by Gangotri Trust, which he had established. This project aimed to introduce literature and poetry from various languages into Gujarati, including Shakespeare's works. Joshi collaborated with scholars like Mansukhlal Jhaveri and Nalin Raval, requesting them to translate *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest* into Gujarati. Joshi's dedication to Shakespeare extended beyond translations. As the editor of the Gujarati literary magazine *Sanskriti*, he decided to dedicate the publications of all issues for an entire year to Shakespeare, on the 400th birth anniversary of the playwright. Santprasad Bhatt, another Shakespearean scholar and Joshi's friend, contributed articles on Shakespeare for each issue from January 1964 to April 1965. These articles not only discussed Shakespeare's life and works but also included translations of selected lines, titles of his plays, and sonnets by Bhatt. In April 1964, a special issue dedicated to Shakespeare was published in *Sanskriti* magazine to commemorate his birth month. The index of the special issue included a poem on Shakespeare written by Joshi, along with excerpts of translations by renowned scholars such as Mansukhlal Jhaveri, Hansa Mehta, and others. It also contained scholarly articles on Shakespeare by Santprasad Bhatt, C. C. Mehta, Jayant Pathak, Niranjana Bhagat, and others. Umashankar Joshi, contributed a translation of Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question," to the special issue. On the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, Chandravadan Mehta conceptualized *Drashyavali*, an anthology of scenes translated from Shakespeare's plays intended for performance in schools. As a tribute to Shakespeare, Mehta contributed a translation of a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to this volume. His article titled *Shakespeare and Gujarati Stage* was published in *Indian Literature* Vol. 7, Issue I in 1964. This article provided a concise documentation of translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati from 1852 to 1964.

Bhanji Gokul Parekh provided the first translation of *Julius Caesar* into Gujarati as *Karunaras Julius Caesar Natak* in 1874. Narbheshankar Pranjivan Dave undertook a translation project funded by the Princely State of Bhavnagar. He translated five Shakespeare plays: *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet* between 1898 and 1917. After a 25-year gap, Hansa Mehta translated *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice* in Gujarati in 1942 and 1944, respectively. Jayant Patel, a Gujarati lecturer at MTB Arts College, translated *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It* during 1963-64. Jashwant Thakar translated *Macbeth* and *Richard III* in 1964 and 1969, respectively. Mansukhlal Jhaveri, a noted Gujarati scholar, translated *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* in 1967, 1978, and 1983, respectively. Krushnashankar Vyas translated *The*

Merchant of Venice in 1975. Mohamed Rupani translated Shakespeare's Sonnets and *As You Like It* in 1977 and 1979, respectively. Nalin Rawal translated *The Tempest* in 1992.

These instances demonstrate the engagement of Gujarati scholars and writers with Shakespeare's works, including translations, adaptations, and critical analysis, spanning from the late 19th century to the later part of 20th century.

Bhanji Gokul Parekh: A Forgotten translator

In the year 1964, Indian Literature journal published an article by C.C. Mehta, titled *Shakespeare and Gujarati Stage*. The article gives a brief overview of the various translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati, done between 1852 to 1964. However, it does not give any detail about the first translation of Shakespeare's play into Gujarati. The bibliography at the end mentions that a certain Bhanji Gokul Parekh translated *Julius Caesar* as *Karunaras Julius Caesar Natak* in 1874, and its poetry section was translated by B.R.Junarkar. Nowhere it is stated that Parekh was the first translator to translate a play by Shakespeare into Gujarati. Not just that, he was the first translator in any modern Indian language to do so. Even the seminal publications on Gujarati literary history, such as *Gujarati Sahityano Itihas* (History of Gujarati Literature), which run into 7 volumes do not have any record of his life and works. On reading the preface of his translation of *Julius Caesar*, one can infer that he was connected with powerful individuals in Rajkot, who funded his translation. However, it appears that the details about his life and how he became interested in translating an English play and lectures on law are not well-documented. Therefore, conducting thorough research would be necessary to uncover more information about Parekh and his works.

Studying Parekh's life and works could provide valuable insights into the cultural and intellectual landscape of Gujarat in the latter half of the 19th century. As the first translator of Shakespeare's play into Gujarati, his story holds particular significance. By delving into his life, researchers may be able to shed new light on the motivations, influences, and connections that led him to undertake these translation projects. To reconstruct the story of Parekh's life, it would be essential to explore various historical resources, such as archives, newspapers, correspondence, and publications from that era. These sources might contain information about Parekh's background, education, professional endeavours, and personal relationships. Additionally, seeking out any existing biographical accounts or records of Parekh could provide valuable clues about his life and the context in which he operated. Furthermore, investigating the cultural and intellectual milieu of Gujarat during that period could offer a broader understanding of the factors that shaped Parekh's interests and accomplishments. Examining the educational landscape, literary circles, patronage systems, and social networks prevalent at the time might reveal connections and influences that contributed to Parekh's translation work. Reconstructing the life of Parekh and delving into his translations could illuminate the history of Gujarati literature and the reception of Shakespeare's works in the region. It would also provide insights into the individuals and institutions that supported literary endeavors during that time.

Parekh's translations and translation strategies

Bhanji Gokul Parekh holds the distinction of being the pioneer translator who accomplished a comprehensive and authentic translation of a Shakespearean play into the Gujarati language. He translated *Julius Caesar* in the year 1874; it was titled *Karunaras Julius Caesar Natak*. It is also pertinent to point out that the verse portion was translated by a gentleman named B.R. Junnarker. As mentioned on the first page of the text of his translation, Parekh was the Headmaster at Anglo-Vernacular School at Vala, which was an erstwhile city near Vallabhipur in Gujarat. However, the translation did not occur in Vala. Parekh was on leave for 20 days and came to Rajkot. While he was there, he was thinking about ways to spend his time productively. He wanted to undertake something that delights as well preaches values at the same time. Thus, by the “divine intervention” he decided to translate *Julius Caesar* into Gujarati. The printing of this translation was done at *Kathiawad Printing Press* in Rajkot. Parekh dedicates the translation to the then Political Agent of Kathiawad, W.W. Anderson, which hints at the fact that he must have received some sort of patronage for getting his translation published. Interestingly enough, the translation towards the end contains a list of people who had placed their purchase orders in advance, including Junnarker’s brother. It can be inferred that although Parekh did not reside in Rajkot, he was well-connected with the influential and powerful people in the city who helped him in getting his translation published. This aspect highlights the significant influence of patronage in facilitating the efforts of the first translator of Shakespeare’s play into Gujarati. Parekh states unequivocally in his eulogy of W.W. Anderson that his translation is “a humble tribute of admiration and respect” for the Political Agent of Kathiawar for “his munificent patronage of authors, and for his warm and enlightened zeal in promoting education” (1).

In the preface of his translation, Parekh recounts his desire to gauge the potential popularity of his work before its publication (2). To accomplish this, he organized a gathering of literary scholars and recited the first act of his translation. Many of them argued that the language was high Sanskritised; he justifies his translation approach by asserting that since Gujarati has its roots in Sanskrit, it is not problematic if the language exhibits such characteristics (2). The translation is in prose mainly; however, as mentioned in the previous section, it also carries verse translation at certain places, which was done by B.R. Junnaker. Parekh focuses on conveying the meaning rather than rendering word for word translation.

For instance, in Act 1 Scene 2, the Soothsayer tells Julius Caesar,

SOOTHSAYER: Beware the ides of March

Parekh translates it as

BHAVISHYASUCHAK: Jagrut rehje, Caesar, hoshiyar rehje, March ni pandarmi tarikh aave che.

This can be translated as –

SOOTHSAYER: Beware Caesar, the 15th of March is approaching. (19)

Since the Gujarati readership wouldn’t know the context of “ides of March” he translates it as March 15, which is what the Romans meant by this phrase. Also, Soothsayer

means a person who foretells events; Parekh chooses the word *Bhavishyasuchak* to convey that this person is trying to warn Caesar about the ominous event that awaits him.

Parekh's focus is to convey the meaning of the original text through his translation. He does not provide a literal translation, instead he focuses on conveying the intended meaning. This is also a unique case translation of a Shakespearean play because it was translated by two people jointly in two completely different ways – prose and verse. Parekh uses the Gujarati words that the contemporary reader is familiar with, but the verse portion translated by B.R. Junnarker comprises of words from old Gujarati, which is why the scholars had remarked in the meeting convened by Parekh, that the language appears to be Sanskritised. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 1, Junnarker has translated the lines spoken by Marullus in verse. He has used various *chhands* (metres) such as *Shardukvikridit Vritta*, *Saavaiyo*, *Vasant tilaka Vritta*, *Shikharini Vritta* from Gujarati and Sanskrit to translate those lines into verse. Also, he was a Marathi who was evidently well-versed in all these languages apart from the old English in which Shakespeare's plays were written, which is why he could translate using different metres from these languages. Parekh has also used a lot of Sanskrit words in his translation such as in Act 1 Scene 1, he translates the first line of the scene in the following way -

Shakespeare

FLAVIUS: Hence, home, you idle creatures, get you home.

Bhanji Parekh

Arey aalsu praniyo, palayan karo; swagruhe palayan karo;

Which can be translated as –

FLAVIUS: You lazy people, go away; go away to your homes.

The word *palayan* is originally a Sanskrit word; similarly *swagruha* is also a Sanskrit word. (14)

Parekh has deployed prose form to render the play into Gujarati and is largely faithful to the original text in terms of number of Acts, scenes, characters and lines spoken by them. However, he does not do literal translation and takes liberty with words while translating, as discussed in the previous sections with examples. Apart from that, he provides a glossary of difficult words at the end of the translation for the readers since he must be aware that certain Sanskrit words used by him may not be known to the common Gujarati reader. He also provides a very brief synopsis of the plot of *Julius Caesar* in the beginning. As opposed to this approach wherein he takes liberty with words, and even the language in which he is translating, one would be amused to read his preface of another book which he had translated in the year 1888 titled *Rajkumar Law Lectures* into Gujarati, which consisted of a series of elementary lectures on law addressed to the students of Rajkumar College, Rajkot by George Clifford Whitworth. In the preface to the translation, he states, "In translating a work on law, the translator must adhere strictly to the original. In other words, the translation should be literal. Free rendering will not do" (2).

It is evident that Parekh was aware that subjects like literature and law, while translating, must be dealt with differently. Since the details about his life and works are scarce,

there is no other source except the translation of the play wherein one could read and analyse why he translated in the way he did.

Conclusion

Translation history is indeed a significant pursuit, as it provides valuable insights into both the translations themselves and the historical context in which they took place. The process of translation is complex and multifaceted, requiring translators to make choices that can greatly impact the translation. Therefore, the role of the translator is crucial in shaping not only the individual translation but also the overall translation history, as subsequent translators are often influenced by the precedent set by their predecessors. In this regard, the life and work of Bhanji Gokul Parekh, the first translator of Shakespeare's play into Gujarati, hold great importance. Parekh's translation can shed light not only on the quality and nature of the initial translation but also its impact on subsequent translations. The translation history of Shakespeare's plays in Gujarati remains largely unexplored territory, and Parekh's life and work can serve as a valuable starting point for revisiting and reconstructing this history in its entirety. Studying his translation can provide insights into the specific challenges and choices faced by the first translator of Shakespeare into Gujarati. His approach, style, and techniques can offer valuable clues about the reception and adaptation of Shakespeare's works in the Gujarati language. Furthermore, understanding how subsequent translators were influenced by Parekh's translations can provide a comprehensive picture of the evolution and development of Shakespearean translation in Gujarati. By uncovering the nuances and intricacies of the translation process, as well as the broader cultural and literary context in which these translations took place. This exploration can contribute to a deeper understanding of the influence of translation on the reception and dissemination of literary works across different languages and cultures.

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