Burning Ground : Singed Souls

Ilyas Ahmed Gaddi

Fire Area

(English translation of Urdu Novel Fire Area): 2001
pp. 346 Rs. 80/-

Ilyas Ahmed Gaddi (1932-97), recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award (1994) for *Fire Area,* presents in this novel a world where crime thrives and exploitations of all kinds go unnoticed. Collier's life is a doomed existence where one toils for a few crumbs of bread in a dark world of dangers designed by greed and power politics. It is a *'bold and aggressive'* description of human degradation where the virtuous are forced to surrender or are sacrificed without qualms.

Coal tarnishes not only the soul of the contractors, bureaucrats and labour union leaders but also turns them into inhuman tyrants. The unholy trinity of these three groups dictates and decides the fates of roofless, penniless villagers who have no alternative but to yield and live a precarious life - always on the precipice of doom and destruction.

Interwoven in the text is the conspiracy to convert an accident case into a 'missing' case to evade compensation claims. Rahmat Mians 'disappearance' leaves its tragic impact on the aged father, wife and a child who are waiting in vain for the missing person to arrive. Interunion rivalries and feuds have also been authentically described. Gaddi brings us a world where idealism is swallowed by realities of day-to-day survival. Majumdar's idealism triumphs after taking the toll of his own life. He dies without surrendering his soul.

The blurb brings to our notice Jai Ratan's credentials as a translator. *One of the finest and the most prolific of translators from Urdu to English, a Sahitya Akademi awarded translator*, it says, who has been credited with several works. The translator uses several colloquial expressions in italics such as *sala, dhora, pahalwans, qur, qilli-danda, basti* in the body of the text and provides their meanings in the form of footnotes wherever these expressions occur in the text.

He uses the distorted nativised expression of the word 'theatre' viz. *thater* to show how foreign expressions get assimilated in vernacular languages. Yet, at the same time his explanations are not satisfactory, are even incorrect. For example, *jethji* (193) is an expression that a woman uses exclusively for her husband's elder brother. The footnote shows it as 'elder brother' (here brother-in-law). Now both of these explanations are misleading. Can a husband call his wife's elder brother as *jethji*? The correct expression in fact should have been 'husband's elder brother'. The same slip is evident in the expression *de̅war* (199), which translates allegedly as 'brother-in-law'. This also should have been glossed as 'husband's younger brother'. If one is using the vernacular expression *sala* [a mild term of abuse - meaning 'brother-in-law (wife's brother)'], one should use the plural form *sale* and not *salas*. This becomes a hybrid expression. On page 84 Khatunia, a Muslim woman says, *Alif Zabra* which does not seem to be appropriate even if she is an illiterate - it should be *Alif jabar – aa*. A child might be parodying *Alif-be-pe* (97) but the later half *Ma Mufgi Lade* is unintelligible. The country-made revolver has been described as *phatpatu* (p 265), which seems to be slang.

Jai Ratan has tried to retain the colloquial touch while translating. *'How you joke, Ansari Saheb"* (p 21) may not be a totally appropriate translation of *"Kyoun majak karte hain"?*.

The Hindi/Urdu proverb "*paani me rehkar magar se bair*" loses its implication in the *"one who wants to live in the river should not fall foul of the crocodile"* (p 33).

These are academic nuances. These intricate oddities notwithstanding, Jai Ratan's translation is an honest, convincing and engrossing rendering of the original text.

A.G. KHAN, Ph.D

TRANSLATION: WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

Abdul Bismillah,
The Story of the Loom.
English translation of the Hindi Novel
Jhini Jhini Bini Chadariya translated by Rashmi Govind, Madras.
Macmillan India Ltd., 1996
P.251 IX priced at Rs 140.

Abdul Bismillah's Jhini Jhini Bini Chadariya was selected by Macmillan India Ltd. under their ambitious project sponsored by Education Society of Madras to render into English contemporary classics in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarathi, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi. This novel had earned the prestigious Soviet Land Nehru Award and the author was invited to spend a fortnight in the erstwhile Soviet Russia.

Set in the mythological city of Kashi or Varanasi or more popularly known as Benaras, the novel weaves the sad and lamentable plight of thousands of weavers around Benaras, who become pawns on the chessboard of a capitalist system of merchants, brokers and bureaucracy. The glitter of Benarasi brocade is coloured with the blood of the weavers who live a hand-to-mouth existence. The woman folk who toil all their lives in helping the men weaving fabulous Benarasi saris die in poverty never draping themselves in the saris they help weave. The progressive and liberal policies of the government are masterminded by the horde of merchants to their own advantage by bribing the officials entrusted with co-operative

movement. Hence Mateen's bid to form a society of thirty weavers is set at naught by the scheming Hajis Ameerulla and his henchmen.

Amidst this stark exploitation are woven the political aspirations of local leaders who make matters worse by fanning communal passions. Hence, whatever little resistance the poor weavers could muster is reduced to surrender to the Hajis who rush to their *'rescue'* under the guise of charity.

Aspirations of Aleemun, Iqbal, Rauf uncle, Najibuniya and Rehana are nipped in the bud thanks to a system of mass exploitation. While Aleemun dies of Tuberculosis, Rehana falls victim to illiteracy, poverty and superstitions when her hysteria (Seizures) is treated through prayers or witchcraft. The weavers are condemned to live a life of suffering with no prospects of a silver lining.

Rashmi Govind, the translator, is a product of two prestigious universities of Delhi i.e. the University of Delhi and the J.N.U. The translation leaves a lot to be desired. She says every year the ninth month of Hindu calendar synchronizes with the ninth month of the Muslim calendar (p.29). She also blunders when the *babool* tree of the Hindi text is transformed into a *neem* tree in the English version (p.189).

She also betrays some ignorance of historical or cultural facts. For example, Imam Sahab in the context of Moharrum is not a ' *leader of prayers in the mosque'* (p.115). In fact, in the given context Imam Sahab stands for the martyr Hazrat Imam Hussain's taaziya. Similarly, in the dirge (p.116) Hazrat Hasan is described as *'going off to war'* whereas Hazrat Hasan was poisoned prior to the martyrdom of Hazrat

Hussain at Karbala. Moreover, *Imambara* is not '*a place in graveyard*'a she has it. 'Imambara' is a building (and not a graveyard) where Taaziya and other things related to Moharrum are kept (p 219). Rashmi hurts the common man when she translates *bahuji* a popular endearment for Kamlapati's daughter-in-law into 'wife' (p137).

There are several odd expressions scattered all over the book that are either grammatically or contextually incorrect.e.g. *which* (p.11), *extensive* family (for extended/joint family) (p.249); Bevada (p.99) is *not* 'clumsy' but 'drunk'. Similarly an atheist (or even kaafir) is not a 'materialist' (p.231)

The work would have been better with academic consultations with colleagues.

The layout, the cover page and printing are extremely pleasing and befitting the name of the Macmillans. At the nominal price of Rs. 140 it can be recommended to people who want to have a glimpse into the world of the weavers or breathe in the exotic Benarasi environment.

A.G. KHAN, Ph.D

TRANSLATION OF "PACHOLA" [MARATHI] INTO "FALL" [ENGLISH]

Prof. Sudhakar Marathe from The Central University of Hyderabad, a well known literary scholar, and an established translator has translated into English a Marathi rural [Grameen] novel, PACHOLA by a well-established author in Marathi, Mr. R.R. Borade. Fall, the translation has been published by National Book Trust, India. It is a highly commendable achievement on Dr. Marathe's part as translating from the rural dialect in to English is a challenging task. As he is a highly educated urban individual, this dialect is not Marathe's home ground. To interpret the writing in the rural style and to bring it into English successfully is not a simple job. Dr. Marathe has tried his best to accomplish this. The novel reads quite well as an independent work. The title chosen for the translation is befitting and heavily loaded with meaning as it includes both the meanings of the fall: the fall as a season when leaves fall from trees, and the fall of the protagonist leading to his tragic end.

By bringing it into English, Dr. Marathe has made available to readers the flavour of rural Indian living and writing, making a regional author's work known to other Indian readers, and adding to the body of translated Indian writing in English.

If we examine and analyze **Fall** on the tenets of the theory of translation so far, by what is usually expected of a good or successful translation, the following points have to be considered:

(a) Linguistic equivalence at the lexical / idiomatic level, and syntactic level.

(b) Consistence of rural turns of expression in English.

(c) Rural Cultural Tone in translation.

If we begin to consider these one by one, some light can be shed on the challenges Dr. Marathe has faced.

Due to the basic difference between the rural dialect and the educated English of the translation, we notice that the lexical equivalents of many Marathi dialectal words such as *kaarta, kalkudri, maayandali* and many more such words do not reflect the same shades of meaning. *kaarta* for example means a boy whose deeds are condemnable, and usually, it refers to a child whi is born unfortunate. The word has been used in its neuter gender form, which has rendered it as even more contemptuous. Usually used in masculine form, *kaarta*, for a boy, or in feminine form, *kaarti*, for a girl, when it is used in its neuter form, it is still worse, not even giving the person the status of a human. The words Marathe uses as equivalents for *karta* in two different places on the same page (p.2) are *rascal* and *brat*. Rascal is a dishonest person or when referred to a child, it means the one who misbehaves or plays tricks, but is regarded with fondness. In Marathi, we have a word *labaad*. Surely Parbati does not refer to Garad's son with fondness. In fact, an apt equivalent for English rascal for a child is *labaad* as mothers and others fondly refer to such children. A *brat* is an ill-mannered child. However, it means much less than *kaarta*. Perhaps, if Marathe had used *a damned boy/child* for *kaarta*, it would have been closer to the original. *Kalkudri* could have been better translated as 'culprit' in the particular context, though that is not the meaning of the word. Usually, it means the one who sets people to quarrel by talking ill of one to the other. *Maayandal* means plenty, or a great deal. Marathe has translated this as really and truly as he could have translated the sentence as *He was immensely angry.*

Well, at times, there is not enough time given by the publisher to really check small details. The translators have to be content with approximate equivalents.

At the idiomatic level, there is bound to be a great deal of difference. A few instances of idiomatic transference from Marathi appear on pages 45 and 67, for example. *He's cut my nose before the folk.* (p.45) *He is respected in government and all. He will spend money like water, if he has to* (p 67). These and similar others must be purposeful transferences to give the translation the flavour of the original Marathi expressions.

At the syntactic level, there are a large number of sentences in **Fall**, possibly for a similar effect as in the original, which are without a subject. They begin with the verb, though they are not imperatives. The sentence, *popped up in his bed suddenly like a jack in the box* (page 66) is not Marathi, while on the other hand a phrase like *jack in the box*, a very western concept, not mentioned in the original at all has been added. On other occasions, sentences appear to be direct pick-ups from Marathi resulting in non-English syntax. For example, *I don't want ye to yell and scream after, that's why I am warning ye right now* (page 98). Perhaps, to achieve the effect of the original, the translator seems to have taken syntactic liberties. In this sentence, the word used here viz. *after* is not appropriate. It should have been either *later*, or *afterwards*. Usually, *after* would need a time-referring object such as an event following it.

It must have been difficult for Marathe to find an equivalent English dialect to translate the rural dialect R.R.

Borade has chosen for his novel, Pachola. Marathe has tried to create some effect by using only a few dialectal words in English such as *ye* for *you.* However, this choice has not been consistently made use of. *Ye* and *you* have been used as free variants. Marathe has made use of colloquialisms to substitute the lack of dialectal repertoire. For an urban scholar of literature, taking up a whole rural/uneducated community's dialect from English such as the Cockney, or the Black English Vernacular and so on is a difficult choice and it is far too exhausting an effort to interpret from a rural Marathi dialect and to keep fitting the essence and the matter accurately into a rural or uneducated English dialect. And yet, which of such dialects in English to choose would also be hard to think. The best decision would be to make a firm choice right at the outset, realizing the limitation, and state it in the foreword that the translation would make use of normal English known to the majority.

Some cultural concepts need to be brought into a translated text in the same form, as they exist in the original writing. They are so culture-specific that there is no equivalence for them in another culture, and hence, in the language. In this context, some of the terms are borrowed from the original. Words and phrases like *choli, uparna, roti-kordyas, Mriga, Bhabi*, or a few translations like eating-house man, seventeen different mouths mouthing seventeen different things, are some of the examples. Marathe has been successful in bringing out the rural and cultural tone in his translation, though.

To sum up, it can be said that Marathe could have been more careful with some choices of words or expressions, but in

other cases, he has done the best possible. Translations are, after all, intercultural documents. Culture-specific concepts/terms could perhaps be summarized or paraphrased. And yet, they may fail to convey the exact sense, and spoil the compactness of expression. Borrowing or code mixing is the only way out which makes a translation interesting and colourful. If this remains within a proportionate limit, a translation becomes readable. Marathe has limited his borrowings and made the translation readable.

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