

Translation and Reception as a Cultural Process: On the Emergence of Tragedy in Kannada Literature

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Although translation is generally considered as a literary process, it involves a series of cultural maneuvers by the cultures involved in the process, both ideologically and otherwise. The absence of tragedy as a genre in Indian literature has generally prompted scholars to perceive the emergence of tragedy in Indian literature variously as influence, reception, emergence of a new genre etc. However, a closer look at the controversies, debates, criticisms and experimentations and the changes in parallel native performing traditions reveal interesting cultural maneuvers undertaken by different groups of people in responding to the genre of tragedy, which also needs to be looked at as a part of the translation process. The paper attempts to problematize the issue by going through different modes of representations attempted in the history of modern Kannada literature, particularly during the period 1920-50, which constitutes the formation period for the genre. The problem has been approached from six different perspectives.

1. The early translations of tragedies.
2. Controversies that surrounded the early translations.
3. Attempts to create an appropriate aesthetics (sensibility) to appreciate the new genre.
4. Attempts to demonstrate the existence of tragic elements in Indian literature.
5. Attempts to demonstrate the existence of tragic heroes in Jaina literature, specifically in medieval Kannada epics.
6. The tragic nature in Kannada folk performing traditions.

The paper argues for a need to understand translation as a process of cultural production and consumption rather than as a literary one.

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1. Introduction

Translation, right from the time of its inception, is a project of cultural domination and was conceived and executed by the colonial rule in order to substantiate its political interest. Whether it is translation of the law texts or the classics, we can see the western Canon operating behind it and gradually dominating the paradigm. Notions such as the original text, interpolations, different receptions, the accuracy of translation, the chronological ordering of the texts, thereby, implying the influence of one over the other are only some of a few problems that one confronts in the field of textual criticism and translation. At the same time, it is equally important to identify and explore the ways that medieval India used to deal with the processes that are similar to translation during the modern period. As many as three hundred renderings of the *Ramayana* have been identified and terms such as versions and variants have been used to denote them. However, looking into the divergent and pluralistic nature of the narrative traditions, Ramanujan prefers to use the term 'tellings' to denote them. These medieval tellings, many of them radically deviant from the reconstructed original text, seem to perform multiple functions, sometimes mutually antagonistic to each other.

It is highly relevant to probe further the dimensions of different tellings in medieval Indian literary co-text. Each telling probably intended to construct a different cultural view point, but at the same time also affirmed other view points, which were shared by other communities. In this sense, they are attempts to represent various positions reflecting the religious, social, linguistic and regional cultures. At the same time these tellings were probably consumed and appropriated by multiple communities is evident from synchronic evidence available from the performing traditions of such tellings. The processes of participation in such tellings, both at the level of performers, infrastructure providers as well as at the level of audience are always a pluralistic one – multi-religious, multi-caste, multilinguistic and multi-regional. Thus multiplicity of tellings in medieval India represented not only different view points but also made the communities mutually accommodative ones by sharing the view points of each others. This appears to me to be a

radically different one as compared to a monolithic, original text and its authentic translation, which attempts to eliminate the very possibilities of multiple tellings, firstly by its print media in which it gets transmitted and secondly by establishing a single text or telling as an authentic one.

The possibilities for multiple readings as a continuous on going process and of infinite nature in medieval Indian telling traditions need further exploration. Within the hermeneutic tradition, the multiple readings that are possible on a text and the multiplicity of components that get into its representation and interpretation have been highly debated. In addition to the readings that is possible within the text, the readings that are possible due to extra-textual field of reference, the readings that are possible due to inter-textual field of reference can result in the production of several re-presentations. If the listeners of the telling tradition is brought into focus here to theorize the relationship between the performers and listeners, then the process of representation and its readings not only become collective but also its re-presentation becomes a continuous process and its possibilities are going to be infinite. Tellings in such cultural contexts do not have a hierarchy or power relationship as they could also act as mutual contestants. This is all the more significant if we consider the fact that there always exists a power relationship between the original text and its translation.

It is against the backdrop of this problematization that we need to look at the translation and reception of tragedy in Kannada literature. In this context, the present paper not only urges to look at the medieval Indian processes of tellings in problematizing the translations studies but also interrogates the power and authority that has been acquired by the discipline, both academically and economically.

Any one who tries to take a closer look at the development of drama in different Indian languages is struck by certain conspicuous trends that are more or less common to all of them. First of all, there is a conspicuous absence of a dramatic tradition, marked by the lacuna of written plays till the introduction of the English education system. It was for the needs of this newly educated class that the professional drama companies, based on the model of the

Parsi theatre companies, started adapting and writing new plays with the specific intention of performing them on the stage. This stage, in fact, was then using the conventions of the proscenium theatre from the European continent, which had made in roads into the newly emerging Indian theatre. On the one hand, plays were adapted and translated from the classical source, mainly from Sanskrit, where a long standing dramatic tradition had been claimed to have prevailed. On the other hand, plays were also adapted and translated from English, mostly the plays that the Parsi theatre companies were performing during those days. In addition, new plays were also written, mostly making use of the *Puranic* themes from Indian mythology. Thus the emergence of drama in different Indian languages have an underlaying Orientalist statement that the light to overcome the darkness created by the absence of drama has to be over come not only by establishing a link with the tradition of Sanskrit drama through constructing its historical and thematic components (the ancient east), but also through establishing a link with the European west (the modern west). It is interesting to note here that several of the newly written plays, though contained *Puranic* themes, followed the conventions of the Parsi theatre, thereby, implying the Western form in its *desi* version, blending with the traditional Indian themes. An interrogation of the choice of the genre, the nature of translations, the selection of the themes, the modifications and transformations incorporated into them in the process of translation and the heated discussions that have taken place around these early experimentations reveal and demonstrate the complexities of an ambivalent society that was trying to blend the western genre with eastern sensibilities and the transitional nature of the newly emerging middle-class society and their world view.

It is against this background that this paper problematizes the emergence of the genre 'tragedy' in Kannada in the form of translations and adaptations and the reception and controversies that surrounded it during the early phase of its experimentation. Though most of the discussion has been confined to the tragedies that Sri (B.M. Srikanthaiya) wrote during the third and the fourth decades of the present century, I have gone beyond this time frame. Firstly, I have probed the period prior to the beginning of theatre

movement in the Kannada speaking regions during the later part of the nineteenth century and subsequently, to the later period, which involved the controversies following the introduction of the tragedies in Kannada literary and drama spheres. The paper has four parts. In the first part, an introductory background for the study of translations and reception of tragedies has been outlined. The second part deals with the three translated / adapted texts of Sri and the controversies that surrounded them. The third part brings into focus the attempts made by the scholars to construct a history or tradition of tragedy in Indian and Kannada literatures, on the one hand to justify the need for it, and on the other, to show that it is not something totally new to the Indian world view. In the last part, an attempt has been made to show how it is actually the demands of the theatre and the audience that necessitated the emergence of tragedy in Kannada and the subsequent experimentation and diffusion of the characteristics of the new genre.

1. Sri's three tragedies: Gadayuddha Natakam, Aswatthaman and Parasikaru

Sri wrote three tragic plays namely, *Gadayuddha natakam*, *Asvatthaman* and *Parasikaru*. In the first one, Sri had tried to adapt Ranna's *Gadayuddha*, a tenth century Jaina epic in Campu style, to the form of a Greek tragedy. *Asvatthaman* is an adaptation based on Sophocles's Greek tragedy *Ajax* and *Parasikaru* is a translation of Aeschylus's Greek tragedy *Persians*. *Parasikaru* has been excluded from the discussion here because as a straight forward translation it did not generate the type of controversy that the other two plays have generated and thus is not relevant for the discussion undertaken here. Sitharamaiya points out that Sri also had a plan to adapt Euripidis's *Bacchae* into Kannada to write a tragedy involving Krishna as the main character. However, he appears to have hesitated over such an attempt following the controversies raised on *Aswatthaman* and subsequently abandoned the idea. *Gadayuddha nataka* should be seen as an attempt by Sri to explore the possibilities of adapting the technicalities of Greek tragedy to themes from Indian mythology. It is an experimentation similar to his *Inglis gitagalu* (1921), a translation/adaptation of English romantic poetry into Kannada. Kulakarni claims that Sri himself

had given the analogy of 'the damsel in distress' to the tragedy that is hidden in Ranna's epic *Gadayuddha* and his own role as 'Prince Charming' in rescuing it from the holds of the tenth century epic.

It may not be just accidental that Rama's Duryodhana, being modeled on the *Jaina pratinayaka* model (*dhiroddhata* type), and having inherent characteristics of becoming a tragic hero, provided an ideal opportunity for such an experimentation. Moreover, Ranna's epic itself is composed in a dramatic framework. Its dialogue oriented nature rather than epic narration, the actions and situations that are appropriate to a play, the existence of the character of *Vidusaka* that usually is absent in the *Campu* epic tradition adds further justification to the claim that Ranna himself might have planned it to be a play first, but subsequently decided to write it as a *Campu* epic. However, it is only a speculation and it is difficult to get convinced by this argument as the genre drama itself is conspicuously absent not only in ancient and medieval Kannada literature but also in other regional literatures of India.

With regard to the success that Sri achieved in adapting Ranna's *Gadayuddha* into Greek tragedy, the following observation of Ranganna is noteworthy.

"In several aspects like the constitution of plot, characterization, temporal sequencing and ambition, *Gadayuddha nataka* follows the pattern of a Greek tragedy right from the beginning to the end... If a chorus had been introduced and scenes like showing the clash, collapse of a character on the stage after having lost the consciousness, kicking the headgear of the opponent and the death had been avoided, this play would have become a perfect example of Greek tragedy."

Critics have noticed that in *Gadayuddha nataka* the three unities – time, place and action – have been strictly followed. However, what makes a significant difference between Ranna's epic and Sri's tragic play is the way that Sri has depicted the character of Duryodhana. In Ranna, as far as his hero is concerned, the intentions of the author and its materialization in the epic are crystal clear. First of all, the second title with which the epic has been associated is *Sahasabhima vijayam*, where *Sahasabhima* is the

epithet for the Chalukya King Satyashraya, who was also the patron of the poet. 'Satyasraya-deva-ne prthvivallabham kathanayakanage-anilajan-ol polisi pelden-i Gadayuddhamam kavi rannam' (Satyasrayadeva, the husband of the earth being the hero, comparing him with anilaja (Bhima) Kavi Ranna told (narrated) this *Gadayuddha*), claims Ranna in unambiguous terms and ends his epic in the anointment (*patta-bandha mahotsva*) of Bhima. Whereas in *Gadayuddha nataka*, not only this end is absent but also that Bhima and Krishna have been given a lesser importance. At the same time, Duryodhana has been characterized as a tragic hero. These changes have triggered serious criticisms on Sri's attempt and the arguments have taken place both against and in defence of the changes incorporated by Sri.

Commenting on these transformations in *Gadayuddha nataka*, Ranganna observes that there could be two reasons for this. Firstly, the love that Sri had towards Greek tragedy and his desire to experiment and see whether it is possible to adapt Ranna's *Gadayuddha* into the format of Greek tragedy. Secondly, his attempt to elevate Duryodhana to the status of a tragic hero in the play.

Ranganna does not appear to be against Duryodhana being transformed into a tragic hero, which has been perceived to be a process of elevation. However, he appears to be not too happy about the way Sri has transformed the characters of Bhima and Krishna, which has been perceived as a process of demotion of the mythical characters. Ranganna further observes that 'the greatness of the character of Duryodhana would not have suffered even if Bhima and Krishna have been depicted as the ones who possess good nature (*sadguni*), as they have been depicted in the epic, or at least, have been depicted as a little more dignified (*udatta*). Bendre was one of the critics who strongly criticized such transformations. In an article entitled '*Duryodhananu durantanayakane?*' (Is Duryodhana a tragic hero?), Bendre argued that there is enough of evidence with the Ranna to justify the way Duryodhana gets treated by Bhima in the epic (particularly the *uru bangha* and the *makuta bhangha* episodes). He further argues that on moralistic grounds Duryodhana does not deserve to be treated as a dignified tragic hero.

Kulakarni has reacted to the different positions taken in favour of Sri's transformations. Although he disagrees with the fact that Ranna ever had any such intention of projecting Duryodhana as a *udatta* character in his epic, he points out that several critics who tried to argue that Virakaurava is the actual hero of *Gadayuddha*, that he is full of *udatta guna* and that his *chala* (notoriety) is the only the weakness that Kaurava had in him. Contrarily Bhima had been claimed by the same critics to be devoid of *udatta guna*, an *adharmi* and *avanita*. However, it needs to be pointed out here that there are significant deviations in the characterization of Duryodhana in Pampa's *Vikramarjuna Vijayam* (a *Campu* epic which pre-dates Ranna's epic and critics have already pointed out Ranna's indebtedness to Pampa in writing his own) and Ranna's *Gadayuddha* (*Sahasabhima Vijaya*) as compared to Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. The very fact that the two writers were Jains and have depicted their *pratinayakas* to suit the conventions of their religion might have contributed towards an *udatta* and humane Duryodhana in their epics. Similarly, Nagachandra's Ravana in the *Jaina Ramayana Ramachandra carita puranam* (c. 1100 A.D.) has been considered to be a tragic hero and Ravana has been considered to be one among the sixty-three *Salakapurusas* that the Jains revere. Kulakarni's observations substantiate the point discussed above.

"If we compare the story of Gada-Sauptika Parva from Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and that from *Pampabharata* and *Gadayuddha*, Pampa-Ranna's Duryodhana excels Vyasa's Duryodhana by his *udatta* and humanitarian aspects. Further, Sri's Duryodhana far excels that of Pampa-Ranna in these aspects. It might be possible, for these very reasons, that many critics tend to believe that Ranna's Duryodhana is too *udatta* a character and thus the real hero of his epic."

In fact, Sri's attempts appear to have triggered several such attempts of transforming the *pratinayakas* of the ancient epics into tragic heroes. Apart from Sri's tragedies, V. Sitharamaiya's *Agraha*, which appears like a slightly corrected version of Sri's *Asvatthamam* and *Sohrab-Rustum*, C.K. Venkataramaiya's *Mandodari* and *Nachiketa*, G.P. Rajaratnam's translation of T.P. Kailasam's *Kicaka* and Samsa's *Vigadavikramaraya* are some of the tragedies which followed the path that Sri had newly introduced

in Kannada literature. Raghavachar has translated Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Sophocles's *The Oedipus Tyrannus* and Aristophanes's *The Frogs* into Kannada where he has tried to use a similar style that Sri has used in his tragedies. In addition it should be pointed out that he has also translated Sophocles's *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* into Kannada and his translation of *Antigone* appears to be the earliest Indian translation of the text.

Ashvatthaman appears to have created the highest degree of controversy among the critics. It is actually the suicide that Ashvatthama commits towards the end of the play which has become the controversial point. Although this suicide is justified keeping in mind the characteristics of the Greek tragedy and its source play *Ajax*, where the tragic hero commits suicide as he has been refused the right to own the weapons of Hector and the subsequent events that follow. However, in the case of *Ashvatthaman* the controversy seems to have arisen due to the fact that Ashvatthama, who is considered to be an eternal entity (*ciranjivi*) has been made to commit suicide in the play. Kurtukoti's evaluation of Sri's attempts involves admiration for his achievements, and at the same time, expresses strong resentment for the lack of cultural responsibility.

"Sri, in an attempt to frame his plays on the model of the Greek tragedy, also incorporated the world view of the Greek tragedies in his plays. Although there are certain limitations and problems in the adaptation of Greek tragic tradition to Indian mythological themes, his *Ashvatthaman* remains as a brilliant play. A radiance (*ojas*) could clearly be seen in the heroic-tragic actions of Ashvatthama. The poetic excellence in the songs of the chorus makes the essence of the play to be supernatural in content. The lightening brilliance that could be seen in several of his poems (*Inglis gitagalu*) could be seen here too. However, this poetic glitter has also brought in certain flaws into the mythological morality (*pauranika niti*). Can we consider as right the greatness (*udattate*) given to Ashvatthama and his heroic deaths to be moral necessities of the play? Isn't there a *alaukika kavya* present in the *anudattate* of the *Puranic* Ashvatthama? Has the radiance of

the villains like Duryodhana and Iago have become the theme of poetry (*kavya-vastu*) any where else in the world?"

1. In defence of tragedy

The type of experimentation on tragedy that Sri and his followers undertook was at a time in which the country had been placed under a peculiar cultural condition. This involved a series of ambivalences with which the Indian newly educated class had to cope with. It is a sort of love-hate relationship with the new genres for which they were responding, with a consequent and apparently contradiction. The first ambivalence is towards the very system in which they were the agents, towards which they were having an admiration, particularly towards the colonial knowledge system, its art and literature but at the same time, were opposed to the colonial rule. The second was the nation building agenda expressed through love for the motherland and its arts and literature, but at the same time, had a critical attitude towards its degenerated and dogmatic institutions. The third one involved a simultaneous agenda of building the region and the nation together and to provide a respectable position to the language, arts and literature of the region. This entrepreneur was a difficult task indeed, but the writers, critics and readers were able to synthesize and handle harmoniously all the three agenda through a series of complex maneuvers. In this section I have attempted to outline some of these attempts.

I have categorized these maneuvers broadly into three types of literary activities. The first one consists of activities in which critics tried to demonstrate that there is nothing wrong in doing modifications to the *Puranic* characters, like what Sri did for Duryodhana and Ashvatthaman. In other words, these attempts aimed at finding support from ancient and medieval Indian literature, both from Sanskrit and Kannada, to show that the tragic elements were not totally alien to us and could be found in ancient India. As the term *duranta vastu vinyasa* (the tragic theme design) repeatedly appears in such attempts, I have called this position as a mission to search for the tragic theme designs in Sanskrit and Kannada literatures. Sri himself had done extensive work in this regard is evident from the fact that even before attempting to adapt

Gadayuddha natakam, he had written a long article on the theme of 'A tragic Ravana'. He had dealt in detail as to how Ravana had been depicted as a tragic hero in Nagachandra's *Ramachandra charita purana*, written in the Hoysala court of Vishnuvardhana around 1100 A.D. In this paper, stressing the need for a sympathetic treatment of Ravana and pointing out that such a treatment could be found in our own literary tradition, Sri argued as follows:

"Such a sympathetic treatment of the character of Ravana, it is perhaps ideal to expect in the ancient and the medieval Hindu atmosphere of India. From an independent and critical writer, however, such a thing was possible: indeed it had been done. Not quite with the freedom of a Western poet, perhaps, yet sufficiently distinct to arrest the attention and to refresh the imagination of a reader who longs for a new, a tragic Ravana."

Apart from the zeal to demonstrate the existence of a tragic Ravana in an ancient Kannada epic, Sri also has suggested that such an imagination, though appears to be Western in nature is not only Indian but also has come from its historical past. It was equally important for Sri to convince others that tragedy is not something new to the Indian mind but also has long-standing traditional links. In a lecture delivered on '*rudranataka*', he points out that there are plenty of instances of such tragic theme designs in Indian literature.

"If one cares to observe, it is not that there is no feeling of experience of sorrow (*dukhanubhava*), life in death (*amrtatva* in *mrtyu*) and the knowledge that the divine delight ('*anandamaya devatamsa*') can exist in the human sorrow ('*duhkhi manava*'). We have them in plenty, to the extent that we can lend it to the other world. Poets too have amply reflected/depicted this secret of sorrowing ('*duhkharahasya*') in their poetry."

Subsequently, several attempts have been made by the scholars to reevaluate the '*pratinayakas*' of the *Jaina* epics as tragic heroes. Attempts have also been made to demonstrate the existence of tragic Ravana, tragic Karna, tragic Kichaka in medieval Kannada epics. Commenting on such attempts Kurtukoti observes as follows:

“After Ranna’s Duryodhana got his resurrection (*‘pratyabhignana’*) from our critics, the villains (*‘khalas’*) of our *Puranas* are becoming dignified and getting elevated as *‘udatta’* characters. However, the responsibilities of these changes are significantly high. Particularly, when sentimentality (*‘bhavana-vasate’*) becomes the root cause of this dignification process, it has brought in several complications”.

Despite all these controversies, Sri’s experimentations on tragedy have been considered to be a significant contribution to the development of Kannada drama. At the same time, it deserves to be mentioned that his love for Kannada and his eagerness to bring in new genres have never led to any sort of artistic and aesthetic compromises. Even the harshest critics of Sri have only pointed out the cultural and moral inappropriateness of transforming Duryodhana and Ashvatthama as tragic heroes. However, it is the poetic eye and skills of Sri which were able to locate a tragic Duryodhana in the epic of Ranna and Ajax in *Ashvatthaman* which makes his contribution a highly significant one. They are not only attempts of grafting a new genre for Kannada but also have provided an ideal model for adaptations and translations. The consequences of Sri’s efforts had far reaching effects on modern Kannada literature. He has not only been responsible for a subsequent good crop of tragic plays in Kannada but also has stimulated a thorough search for tragic elements in ancient and medieval Kannada literature.

In his article on *‘rudranataka’* Sri has made a single line reference to the way in which a tragic Vyasa’s *Sakuntalopakhyana* has become a *‘mangalanta’* play in Kalidasa’s *Abhignana sakuntalam*. As though a response to this statement, T.N. Srikanthaiya in an excellent and lengthy article written in Kannada, *‘Kalidasana natakagalalli duranta vastuvinyasa’* (the tragic theme design in the plays of Kalidasa) thoroughly explores the tragic elements integral to *Vikramorvasiyam*, and *Abhignana sakuntalam*. Similarly Marulusiddhappa’s survey article, *‘Kannada natakagalalli duranta vastuvinyasa’* (the tragic theme design in Kannada dramas), which actually came much after the entire controversy had cooled down, still continues the search for tragic

themes that was triggered during the 1940s. This suggests that the tradition which was started by Sri and his associates in the 1920s still continues to have its effect, at least indirectly.

The second category of activities aimed at developing a body of critical evaluations of tragic plays written in Kannada. It appears that the intention behind this exercise was to make the readers aware of the conventions of the genre of tragedy and to equip them with sensibilities so that they can appreciate it. In particular, it is the way that '*khalanayakas*' like Duryodhana have been elevated to the level of the tragic hero and the death of *Asvatthama*, who otherwise does not have a death, which appears to have threatened to disturb the world-order ('*niyati*') and caused concerns in the mind of the so called conservative critics. The very fact that the source for such experimentations were non-native in their origin and was coming from a foreign source might have been another strong reason for such resentments. We have already seen earlier in the first category of activities, how through delivering lectures and writing articles, the advocates of the tragedy made their attempts to establish a long standing tradition of tragic elements in Indian literature. In the second category of activities, the critics tried to demonstrate how these new tragedies can be understood and appreciated. In fact, it was an effort to create an awareness among the readers and viewers regarding the characteristics and conventions of the Greek tragedy, so that they can learn to appreciate them not only as literary texts but also as performances. The very fact that many of these plays were written specifically for stage performances and the fact that the critical evaluations included both the literary and theatrical aspect of the plays, suggests a consolidated effort made by the critics in this regard. Two such critical evaluations, appreciating the significance of *Asvatthaman* have been published by Anantharangachar and Sitharamaiya. They have contributed significantly towards a better understanding and reception of *Asvatthaman* as a tragic play on the one hand, and tragedy as a genre on the other. Later on, Sitharamaiya himself wrote two tragedies *Agraha* and *Sohrab-Rustum* to further substantiate his points. Similarly, Rajaratnam wrote a critical evaluation of Samsa's *Vigadavikramaraya*, a historical tragedy based on the history of the Wodeyar dynasty of Mysore. It has been convincingly argued here,

how Vigadavikrama, a '*dhiroddhata*' character, akin to Ravana, Duryodhana, Karna and Ashvatthama, provides an opportunity and scope for the complete exposition of '*dhirodatta*' and '*dhiralalita*' heroes. Rajaratnam (n.d) has also done a similar type of evaluation of T.P. Kailasam's tragedy on *Kicaka*. This attempt is highly interesting for two reasons. First of all, it provides an idea of how the play was conceived in its English original as it is not available to us today. Secondly, the Kannada translation and the critical evaluation of the play provide insightful arguments in justification of transforming *Kicaka* as a tragic hero.

It is interesting to note here that attempts to consider Bhasa's *Urubangha* as a tragedy and there by to establish a historical link between the modern Kannada tragedies and the Sanskrit drama have also been apparently made. The fact that T.N. Srikanthaiya seems to have been clearly aware of such attempts is clearly evident in his work. However, he is also aware of the fact that scholars like A.B. Keith are not really inclined to consider such a possibility. In subsequent years, though this did not prevent the Kannada scholars from postulating the possibility of establishing a link between modern Kannada tragedy and *Urubangha*. However, it appears that rather than the classical Sanskrit drama, it is the folk theatre which had several tragic plays. In addition, it also has plays which have a structure like that of *Urubangha*. The third category of activities consists of exploring the possibilities of providing evidences for the existence of tragedies in Kannada folk theatre. Though not much work has been done in this direction, it can be pointed out that despite the absence of a tradition. At the same time, demonstration of the availability of '*dhiroddhata*' characters in the folk plays in abundance can make the claim of this position more strong and convincing. Moreover, the existence of well-definable tragedies in folk theatre (c.f. *Sangya-balya*) adds further justification to this position. Although the study of Kannada folk theatre started much later (post 1970s), and a systematic attempt has not yet been made in this regard, its possibilities had been hinted during the early phase of the tragedy controversy itself. Poddara observes that among many folk plays that are performed in Kannada, '*Kumararamana ata*' ('*ata*' = play, fame; Kumararama is a historical hero, well-depicted in Kannada literature and folklore),

'*Dakshabrahmana ata*' and '*Sangya-balyana ata*' can be considered as tragedies ('*rudranataka*'). Apart from this suggestion no serious subsequent attempt was made to undertake a systematic study to explore this possibility. By the time the folklore studies started in Kannada the issue of establishing a folk link for the tragedy was no more a serious necessity.

Literary historians over the subsequent years have either tended to forget the strong resentments expressed over Sri's thematic transformations or have taken them for granted. This is evident from the conspicuous absence of discussions about this issue in the subsequent period. In fact, both the writing of these tragedies and the resentments as well as defences that followed it were confined to the romantic phase of modern Kannada literature, the *Navodaya* period. The modernist (*Navya*) critics, mostly anti-*navodaya* on the one hand and anti-traditional on the other, did not seem to have bothered over the thematic transformations. Marulusiddhappa in his survey article, 'the tragic theme design in Kannada dramas' observes that through his three tragedies Sri attempted to provide three different modes of strategies for the Kannada drama.

"The three tragic plays that Sri wrote provided three different models for Kannada plays. *Ashvatthaman* is an attempt towards adaptation of *Ajax*. *Parasikaru* is an attempt towards translation and *Gadayuddhanataka* is an attempt to render Ranna's epic into a tragedy based on the model of the Greek tragedy."

In this connection it is interesting to point out that Kurthukoti, who earlier in 1957 had expressed serious concerns that 'the villains of our *Puranas* (*khalas*) are becoming dignified and getting elevated as '*udatta*' characters', endorsed a much more moderate position and that too wholeheartedly over a period of time. Consider this statement from his recent criticism:

"A literary work like *Asvatthaman* might have been a controversial one. Some scholars might have expressed whether it was appropriate to make Ashvatthama die for the sake of tragedy? But if someone questions like that, then it implies that he is a conservative. In fact, during those years of controversy, the conservative position was one of the

verge of loosing its battle. Controversy in this sense, is actually is a progressive step. Now the controversy does not exist any more. Be it the *Puranic 'ciranjivatava'* of Ashvatthama or his death in the tragedy have today remained only as problems of art and literature. Moreover, after the realization that if Ashvatthama dies in a tragedy it is not obligatory that he also has to die in *Mahabharata*, the controversy surrounding his death has become virtually irrelevant today."

The culmination point of heat and interest generated by tragedy is demonstrated in an exhaustive survey of Western tragedy undertaken by Ranganna under the title *Pascatya gambhira natakagalu*. This monumental work, started as early as 1958 in the form of three lectures to be delivered subsequently grew into a huge volume running into nearly 1250 pages. The book in six parts consists of an extensive survey of tragedies right from Aeschylus to Beckett. In his preface Ranganna states as follows:

"The purpose of the book is to introduce the experimentations done by different tragedy writers and an outline of the different conceptualizations of tragedy that they had."

Murthirao's survey of Shakespeare and Balurao's edited volume on Shakespeare appeared around this time. This is not to suggest that the assimilation of tragedy in Kannada literature was complete and uniform. On the other hand, it was quite the contrary to it and differences continued for a long time. The Kannada terms given in Nagabhushanaswamy will act as an indicator as to how the tragedy was perceived differently and at variance: Where as Sri preferred the term '*rudranataka*' for it, Bendre wanted to use the term like '*aviddhanataka*'. Ranganna, who did an extensive survey of Western tragedies choose '*gambhiranataka*' as the appropriate term. Despite such heated debates, scholars tend to use '*durantanataka*' as the standard term for tragedy now a days.

1. Theatre tradition and tragedy

In the beginning of the paper, I briefly touched upon the issue of a lacuna of written plays and that the practice of writing plays in

Indian languages started with the influence of the Parasi theatre companies. Like other written plays, tragedies too have a close association with the theatre movements in Kannada. Hence, it would be appropriate to understand the development of tragedy in the context of theatre movements, professional, amateur and folk theatre movements.

A folk theatre performing troop (*Yakshagana*) has been claimed to have been associated with the royal court of Mysore from 1812 itself. Similarly the visit of the *Yakshagana* troop from Karki to the royal court of Baroda suggests the prevailing practices of the eighteenth century, where the folk performing traditions from one region use to visit the neighboring regions and that the royal courts played a significant role in the emergence of the new genres. However, the historians of Kannada theatre have pointed out that it was the visits of the Sangali Nataka Mandali and Victoria Parasi Company from the Marathi speaking regions during the period 1877-78, that the new type of theatre activity started in the princely state of Mysore and North Karnataka. Accordingly, to cater to the needs of the new theatre troop at the royal court of Mysore (which subsequently became Sri Chamarajendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha), the early Kannada plays were written. Basavappa Shastri's *Sakuntala* (1881) and *Surasena carite* (1895), an adaptation of *Othello*, were thus specifically written for the purpose of performing them on the stage. Similarly, in the North Karnataka region, frequently visiting Marathi theater companies had triggered the new theater activity as well as the writing of plays in Kannada. Thus Shantakavi's Karnataka Nataka Company started its activities in 1874.

As Parsi theatre companies and the Marathi theatre companies were performing the adaptations of Shakespearean tragedies, the Kannada theatre companies initially attempted to adapt them into Kannada. This is why in which, for the first time, the Kannada audience community was exposed to Western tragedy as a genre. If we look at the number of adaptations of Shakespearean tragedies undertaken during this early phase (1880-1900), the following interesting figures emerge (information based on Balurao 1966): *Romeo and Juliet* four times; *Othello* and *Macbeth* twice each. Apart from the numbers, what is interesting in these adaptations is

that many of them, in their Kannada adaptations, did not possess a tragic ending at all. *Ramavarma-lilavati caritre* (*Romeo and Juliet*) by Ananadarao and Jayarajacharya had an ending in which at the end (similar to '*mangalacarane*' of the folk theatre), every one prayed to God requesting him to bring back to life both Ramavarma and Lilavati. The play ends in their marriage. Similarly, Basavappa Shastri's adaptation of *Othello, Surasena caritre* (1895) also had a happy ending.

Although it is not possible here for me to go through all the cases of the tragedies which were made to end with a happy ending during the phase of the company theatres, it however suggests the nature of reception that these tragedies had during the early phase. As the performances of theatre companies were tuned to the masses rather than the educated ones, both the audience and writers were not in a position to appreciate and internalize the characteristics of the genre of tragedy. This aspect obviously must have necessitated the tragic ending being transformed to a happy ending, in conformity with the then prevailing local theatre traditions. However, with the emergence of the amateur theatre groups, which constituted mostly the English educated middle class, an awareness had already been created for the reception of the tragedy. In fact, it was these amateur theatre groups who undertook the responsibility of staging the early experimental tragedies. In this connection, we should note here that Sri's *Gadayuddha natakam* was written specifically for the purpose of staging it as a performance. Subsequently the tragedies appear to have become popular, even among the company theatre groups and some of the leading actors like Ramaraya, Varadacharaya, Mahammad Peer use to perform highly popular tragic roles. Moreover, the translations and adaptations during the early part of twentieth century, be it for company theatres or for amateur theatre groups, have been undertaken by the popular and acclaimed Kannada writers of that period. Most importantly, as both the writers and audience were active participants of the controversy discussed in section 2 and 3, the genre of tragedy was able to find its acceptance both in the literary and theatre worlds. The acceptance went to the extent, as noted by Kurtukoti "the controversy surrounding his (Ashvatthama) death has become irrelevant today."

Apart from its acceptance, the tragedy also appears to have trained both the performers and audience to be receptive to tragic characters like Duryodhana, Ravana, Harishchandra and Karna. It is important to note here that these characters were transformed from their mythological shield to become tragic heroes. It has already pointed out that such '*dhiroddhata*' characters are found frequently in the Jaina epics and that a Ravana in the Jaina epic is also one among the revered sixty-three '*Salakapurusa*'. If one looks at the folk theatre of Karnataka and Yaksahgana, the importance in terms of costumes, characterizations, and the popularity that these characters have been enjoying, in particularly, Ravana, Duryodhana, Karna and Harishchandra, makes this point further clear. The head gear and the costume that these character wear (*kedige mundasu* and *raksasa vesa*) are suggestive of the importance that these characters command in *Yaksagana* performances. The visual documentation of *Yaksagana* performance that is available to us from the early part of the twentieth century suggests that it did not possess many of the spectacular aspect that it posses today. In which case, there is possibility for exploring the role of newly introduced tragic performing traditions in such transformations. In this connection, it is interesting to point out that a majority of the *Yakshagana* performances consists of themes which end in the '*vadha*' of a '*dhiroddhata*' character or consists of a '*kalaga*' (battle) of a '*dhiroddhata*' character. As many as 27/69 titles which Karantha mentions constitutes either a '*kalaga*' or a '*vadha*' of the '*dhiroddhata pratinayaka*'. On the other hand, the plays celebrating the '*vijaya*' of the heroes are conspicuously absent.

This suggests that the folk theatre of *Yakshagana* has contributed in its own way towards the emergence of the concept of tragedy in *Yakashagana* performance. However, some of the performances of company theatres too might have added their own contribution such an impact. In fact, *Danasurakarna*, a play in which Karna has been depicted as a tragic hero has continued to remain as one the most popular company plays and is being performed even to this day. In particular, Kotturappa's performance as Karna has been considered to be a highly memorable experience. He was so popular, that during pre-T.V. and video days, the

gramophone disks of *Danasurakarna* use to be heard in the village fairs all over Karnataka. Whether Sri is directly responsible for all these changes or not is not relevant here. The early translations of tragedies. The role played by Sri and his associates, the literary critics who took part in the controversy, the advocates of tragedy who attempted to write about the plays and about tragedy itself, thus refining the sensibilities of the public, the performing traditions that were in currency at that time all appears to have taken part in the process of change. However, the elements of tragedy appear to have diffused across the social and spatial dimensions of Karnataka, by making use of all the possible components of performing traditions, the local and the western but at the same time enriching the taste of the performers and audience alike, ultimately to become an integral part of the new world view. Thus the change in sensibilities is a highly complex process and is multi-directional and as long as we do not consider these absorptions as contagious and polluting, the emergence of new forms like tragedy could also be seen as continually evolving systems. The processes of change and adjustments are not thus in the literary text but at the level of culture where people of diverse background take part in such changes. It is in this sense that we need to understand translation as a process of cultural production and consumption rather than as a literary one.

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