TRANSLATION REVIEW

BETRAYAL
An English Translation by Basavaraj Naikar
of the Kannada folkplay
Sangya-Balya by Rayappa Pattar
New Delhi and London: Minerva Publications, 2004

The tradition of Indian folk theatre - both religious and secular - reaches back to distant antiquity. In Karnataka, folk theatre comprises an array of fascinating forms, the most important among them being the *Bayalata,* or open air theatre, which includes types such as *Dasarata, Sannata, Doddata, Parijatha and Yakshagana.* Prof. Basavaraj Naikar's rendition of Rayappa Pattar's original text from Kannada into English brings to life a well-known *Sannata* text from North Karnataka: *Sangya-Balya.* Indeed, as the translator clarifies in his introduction (ix), *Sangya-Balya* is a *dappinata*, in which songs (sung to the accompaniment of a small, flat drum called *dappu*) play an important part.

Unlike many a translator who takes his sources for granted, Dr. Naikar has acknowledged in his introduction both the composer and the minstrels who recorded the text. The play was originally composed by Rayappa Pattar (1860-1950), endearingly known as Patter master, who was a native of Shapurpet of Gadag bur resided in the Bailawada village of Bailahongala taluk of Belgaum district in Northern Karnataka. The oral composition of Patter master was recorded by Basavanagouda Patil, Gangappam Mulimani and Fakritappa Madiwalar of Mutanala village and published by Dr. Mallikarjun Latthe, in 1991. Prof. Naikar's translation of the play into English in based on this secondary tantalization.

Oral narratives, by definition, are simple straightforward tales that employ a colloquial language. They have a strong regional flavour both in terms of their setting and in terms of their

embodiment of the beliefs and practices, aspirations and fears, of local people. Appropriately subtitled, *Betrayal* the play deals with the elemental passions of love and betrayal as they interweave with the destinies of ordinary mortals.

The plot of the play is straight forward: Sangappa (or Sangya) is a rich landlord of Bailahongala village who falls in love with Ganga (or Gangi), the wife of Virabhadra (or Irya), a trader, at the annual fair of Lord Basavanna. He presses his bosom friend, Balappa (or Balya), into service in order to enlist the love of Ganga. The reluctant Balya, forced because of his indigence into doing his master's bidding, is insulted by Ganga, who also spurns the illicit love of Sangya. On the advice of a *koravanji,* or fortune-teller, the services of Paramma, an old woman who is Sangya's aunt and Ganga's neighbour are procured on the promise of money, gold and bungalows. As a result, Ganga is trapped and she agrees to receive Sangya in her bed in the absence of her husband, who is away on a long business trip to Bellary. Meanwhile, as the love between the two blossoms, and becomes the topic of village gossip, Virabhadra returns from Bellary and catches the two in the act. Furious at the turn of events, he confiscates Ganga's jewelry and sends her away to her parental home at Bailawada. He then persuades Balya to betray his friend/master and proceeds cold-bloodedly, despite Ganga's best efforts to pre-empt him, to murder Sangya, after which he surrenders to the *mamledar* or magistrate at Belgaum. Thus, as the translator rightly says, 'illicit sex, crushing poverty, and betrayal happen to be the main thematic concerns of the play" (introduction, x).

The translation throws light upon a unique feature of the *sannata* play, which is the supposed preponderance of music and songs. The play starts conventionally with a prayer to Lord Ganapati, the god who wards off evil and makes beginnings auspicious. The first song of the play after the choral ode is the one that Sangya sings dolefully, for he has not seen his childhood friend Balya for some time. A prose dialogue containing a summary of the

song follows almost every song. In his introduction, the translator points out that this may seem redundant to Western readers, but rightly adds that this feature derives from the live presentation of the play before an audience, and must be understood as such (xiii). Prof. Naikar's decision to retain the songs along with their summaries speaks of a wholesome approach to keeping the translation faithful to the original text/form.

In the play, there is a masculinist bias. While it is true that the violation of chastity is the cause of the tragedy in this play, it is also true that Ganga's own sensibilities do not find much scope. As her husband Virabhadra gets ready to go on his long trip, Ganga pines for his love: "I am a young lady who cannot stay alone here. My body and youth will go waste, what shall I do?" (28) Ganga's plaintive pleas fall on deaf ears, and her frustration is intensified when she understands from Paramma that her husband now mistrusts her. This aspect of the play is perhaps attributable to the fact that Rayappa Pattar, or Pattar master, belonged to the *Haradesi* tradition of singing (which upheld male superiority) as against the *Nagesi* tradition (which upheld female superiority). It may also be ascribed to the times in which the play was written and the moral code of the folk culture.

Indeed, the moral vision of the play is closely tied to its folk origins, and this feature has been retained in Prof. Naikar's translation. Folk plays that paint the play of love magnify its dangerous aspects and assert the working of justice. In this sense, anything excessive has to meet a punishment in the traditional outlook of the folk, and hence murder and retribution become inevitable. The presence of the policeman in the play is a symbol of this world-view, but also an index to the changing times under the British regime. *Sannata* is an operatic performance that, unlike the other types of *Bayalata*, brings folk theatre to the social plane. It is

essentially a social play, which takes up issues, and concerns that are central to the society.

Humour, or *hasya rasa*, is inextricably associated with theatre. The point of reference here is not merely the exigencies of dramatic presentation, but also the fun-loving audience with their crude language of humour. Prof. Naikar's translation brings out the complexities of the native language well, even though he has confessed to the impossibility of translating the flavour and rhythm of the original. The rough and ready give and take of folk life are presented with great gusto, as in the scenes between the Marwari and Sangya-Balya in the first act, and between Paramma and her husband in the second act, and even between Ganga and Balya in the third act.

The translator confesses that he undertook the translation because he felt that the elemental theme ingrained in it has universal appeal. Whether the purpose of translation is to reinvigorate the playwright's psyche and create a coherent bridge between the native and the foreign languages/cultures, or whether it is to translate the non-native reader into a native one, there is no doubt that Prof. Naikar's translation is a notable contribution to the field.

Coming as it does at a time when there is a wider interest in translations from native languages into English, it is a timely attempt.

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