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Research Article

Violence in Indian Plays in English Translation: A Cross-Cultural Literary Inquiry

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Abstract: Indian drama is mainly written and rooted in various regional languages of India. It presents us with diversified socio-cultural aspects of Indian society. Additionally, Indian drama often revolves around the theme of violence. It examines the prevalence of violence in Indian society from various perspectives and angles. As most of these plays have been translated into the English language, they have transcended the cultural and linguistic borders. They are now available for the international scrutiny of violence rooted in Indian socio-political, cultural, historical, structural, and domestic contexts. This paper aims to shed light on the portrayal of violence—political, physical, domestic, and psychological—in selected Indian plays translated into English. These plays were initially written in regional languages, which include Kannada, Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi. This paper emphasises that, in the translation process, linguistic meaning is transferred. However, along with the meaning, it also reshapes and rewrites the semiotics of the violence depicted in the original plays.

Keywords: Indian drama; violence; translation; regional literature; theatrical discourse

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Introduction

In the development of Indian theatre, violence has been at the core as a dramatic and cultural motif. Indian dramatists have been depicting the violence as a result of systematic or political oppression, cultural, gendered, or domestic subjugation, or personal vendetta in order to portray the tumultuous nature of Indian society. Sudhanva Deshpande says, "violence is not incidental in Indian drama—it is constitutive of its realism and its rage" (Deshpande 91). However, after the translation of these Indian dramas into English, this violence transcends its regional boundaries and context, presenting the international audience and reader with a visceral sense of India's socio-political turmoil. The paper explores how violence is depicted and reshaped in translated Indian plays. The paper draws on the works of prominent Indian playwrights, including Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Dharamvir Bharati, and Badal Sircar. This analysis navigates languages, cultures, regions, and histories to demonstrate that the process of translation is not a simple exercise, but a cultural act that negotiates the trauma and struggles of people belonging to two different cultures.

The Semiotics of Violence in Translation

Many translation theorists have argued that translation is a kind of transcreation. Because the exact and literal translation of a language is not possible. Susan Bassnett, a translation theorist, says, "Translation is not simply the rendering of text from one language to another; it is also a form of cultural communication" (Bassnett 54). Translation can also be referred to as the communication between two cultures. As both the source language and the target language are rooted in their respective cultures, translation in either of them either carries or changes the cultural aspects of the source language. Therefore, the portrayal of violence in Indian plays often undergoes semantic and emotional changes. Along with local valence, Indian languages carry sociolects and folk elements, whilst the target language, i.e., English, which is dissociated from lived reality, recreates the emotional force of violence. For example, Girish Karnad, in the English translation of Tughlaq (originally in Kannada), portrays the political cruelty and emotional and psychological torment in such a way that it aligns with the international themes of tyranny and paranoia. When Tughlaq says, "I kept the throne of Delhi warm with blood," (Karnad 35), the line exposes both his guilt and reveals his grandiosity—a duality highlighted more evidently in the recognised syntax of English than in the vernacular Kannada.

Political Violence in Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*

The renowned Indian playwright Girish Karnad originally wrote his famous play Tughlaq in the Kannada language (1964). Later, he translated the play into English himself. The play dramatises the political impracticality and ultimate disillusionment of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. It examines state-sponsored violence and the subsequent decline of ideal governance. The play contains many scenes of physical violence. In one of these scenes, we get to see the public executions ordered by the Sultan. Tughlaq tries to justify his heinous act when he says that "Tonight I shall offer prayers for the souls of those whom I have been forced to destroy in the interest of the

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state" (Karnad 52). Here, the English translation has rationalised the violence through political expediency. English poses itself as the language of governance, which has successfully masked the brutality. In other words, the English translation amplifies the ironic disinterest, making it more frightening and allowing a worldwide audience to confront the common dilemma of idealism gone awry.

Gendered and Judicial Violence: Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session*

The play, *Silence! The Court is in Session* is initially written in the Marathi language. It has been translated into English by Priya Adarkar. This play cross-examines gender-based violence. In addition, it also exposes moral hypocrisy and public humiliation faced by a woman. Vijay Tendulkar has successfully explored this through a mock trial. Leela Benare is made to suffer a patriarchal attack carried out through the trial. "You damned woman, have you ever loved anyone sincerely? Ever?" (Tendulkar 60). However, the trial takes a sinister turn in the end. The translation of Tendulkar's Marathi idiom is changed into intense English dialogues, which transport both cultural and universal chauvinism. In this way, the audience observes how language can be both a tool of justice and injustice, particularly when directed at a female in a male-dominated society. As Ananda Lal says, "Translation becomes a form of feminist intervention when it reveals what was suppressed in the original cultural context" (Lal 108).

Structural Violence and Absurdity: Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*

Sircar reveals the existential cruelty of modernity, middle-class boredom, and pointless social cycles in his Bengali original novel, Evam Indrajit, which he translated into English. The play depicts internalised violence, or the gradual loss of identity and purpose, as opposed to overt physical hostility. Indrajit's repetition of "and so it goes on..." reflects a cyclical trap: "There is no war, no peace, only routine... endless, timeless, shapeless routine" (Sircar 47). Behind the scenes, structural violence takes place when social standards, bureaucratic delays, class dysfunction, and hypocrisy suppress choice and an authentic life. This structure is embodied by Amal, Kamal, and Vimal, who are preoccupied with comfort, status, and advancement but never with existential coherence. Indrajit points to the cost of confronting norms: "One invites unrest by breaking the norm." (Sircar 5). However, in the end, he too has to give in to the structural forces; he muses over the futility of walking. Structural violence is reflected in Sircar's use of absurdist form, which employs a cyclical framework that lacks a definitive conclusion. The system itself guarantees that characters are unable to break free from their positions or undergo significant change. Indrajit is reabsorbed by the social order even when he tries to rebel. Absurdity is ultimately experienced: structural limitations make transcendence or revolution all but impossible.

Mythic and Religious Violence: Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug*

Andha Yug, which was written in Hindi and translated into English by Alok Bhalla, recounts the events that followed the Mahabharata. The play is a reflection on the cyclical nature of human devastation, moral blindness, and legendary violence.

ISSN 2349-4948

Dharamvir Bharati uses the aftermath of the Mahabharata battle in Andha Yug (1954) to illustrate how holy duty can be perverted into unending revenge and to portray the catastrophic cycle of legendary and religious violence. The drama is set on the last day of the Kurukshetra War and takes place in a morally ruined world where both the victor and the defeated have lost their spiritual sight. When Ashwatthama unleashes the Brahmastra in a fruitless attempt to exact revenge for Drona's murder, turning a heavenly weapon into a tool of indiscriminate annihilation, Bharati emphasises how religious ideals—dharma, dedication, and sacrifice—are evoked to justify brutality. The irony is heightened by Krishna's silence during the slaughter: the divine charioteer, who previously advocated for moral behaviour, now stands by and watches as the morals of both sides crumble. The voice of Krishna declares: "When man's inner blindness matches the outer, Andha Yug begins" (Bharati 12). In this instance, blindness turns into a metaphor for moral collapse, and the English translation accentuates the original's philosophical weight. Bhalla's translation enables audiences around the world to recognise the universal sadness in a uniquely Indian story, while Bharati uses myth to critique contemporary warfare.

Comparative Reflections: Translation as Testimony

Every play under discussion depicts a distinct form of violence, ranging from spiritual crises and psychiatric breakdown to state tyranny and gender persecution. Their English versions function as intercultural testimonials. As Paul St-Pierre emphasises, "Translation brings the readers, writers, and critics of one nation into contact with those of others, not only in literature but in all areas of human development" (St-Pierre 102). These plays' translations not only protect India's theatrical legacy but also reinterpret violence as a universal human experience that is amenable to discussion, empathy, and criticism.

Conclusion

In Indian play, violence serves as a means of resistance as well as a mirror of reality. English translations of Indian plays broaden their audience by reinterpreting violent deeds in ways that encourage participation from people worldwide, whether it is the gendered victimisation in Silence or the political terror of Tughlaq! These plays—The Court is in Session, Evam Indrajit's existential anguish, and Andha Yug's legendary trauma—emphasise how violence, despite its local roots, communicates to a universal audience. In this sense, translation is an act of cultural memory and witness, rather than just a matter of language.

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