CHAPTER – IV

CONTEMPORANEITY OF

SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGEDIES

“Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant
never taste of death but once.”

William Shakespeare
CHAPTER - IV
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SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGEDIES

This chapter is a significant one in the study as it forms the core of the research along with the previous chapter. This chapter analyses the various criticisms made on the women characters of Shakespeare and tries to come to an appropriate conclusion. The main focus of the chapter is to highlight the relevance of Shakespearean women characters and his dramas in the current scenario, specifically in the Kannada theatre. Apart from the criticism on Shakespeare, opinions expressed by theatre artistes, practitioners and Shakespearean experts are taken into account. Exclusive interviews were held with select dignitaries for the sake of this study itself.

The opinions expressed in the interviews are analysed and used in the chapter as and when required. The literature generated upon Shakespeare in Kannada is also taken into consideration and made use of in the study as it gives an insight and rationale for the contemporaneity of Shakespeare in the emerging Kannada literature.
Shakespeare would be the last person to portray or deal only with stereotyped characters. One of the glorious facts about Shakespeare is that he individualizes his characters. No two characters are alike, no two men are alike, no two women are alike, no two heroes are alike and no two heroines are alike. In fact, Shakespeare infests each character with distinctive differences and personality of his/her own. Therefore it would be unacceptable to say that he represents only stereotyped characters. In fact in the various characters and the various plays which have been chosen for this research, each character is different from the other. There has been a variety of characters in his tragedies as well as in his comedies. But since only tragedies have been chosen for this study, there will not be an elaborate study of the women characters in Shakespeare’s comedies. There is sufficient kind of variety even within the tragedies. But if the women characters in his tragedies are compared with the characters in his comedies, it is obvious that the characters in the tragedies are of a greater variety, depth and complexity.

Shakespeare’s women characters are wise, witty and represent good, whereas men are rather foolish and are interested more in their bravado rather than anything else. In fact they submit themselves to
women in order to learn from them, for example Portia a character in comedies is very influential and possesses a great control over the men in the play *The Merchant of Venice*. In fact she saves the situation by appearing as a man and she does marvelous things to save her husband. In *As you Like It*, Rosalind the lead woman character is very positive, whereas men are bubbling fools. That is the little amount of stereotype that can be found in Shakespeare as far as comedies are concerned.

In Shakespeare’s tragedies, each tragic heroine is different from the other but it can be seen that the hero is more important than the heroine. Involuntarily, women take a second role and are as powerfully presented as some of the comic characters in the play. Therefore it would be wrong to say that Shakespeare does not individualize. It is quite obvious that each of the character has her own or his own personality.

Another interesting aspect that can be dealt with at this stage is whether Shakespeare portrayed only good or only bad characters in his plays. A closer examination of his plays makes it clear that his characters were neither good nor bad. They were never in black and white. In *King Lear*, as John Ruskin makes an exception for women.
characters in the play, Shakespeare praises women to the skies. If a question is raised regarding Goneril and Regan and it is pointed out that they are plain black characters it can be argued that they are presented as a contrast to Cordelia. Therefore, of the three daughters, Goneril and Regan are represented as evil not so much of evil as much as greed, selfishness and power mongering. They simply want to take possession of the kingdom and King Lear is foolish. As the saying goes, “there is no fool than the old fool”, King Lear wants praise and these two women, Goneril and Regan, praise him to the skies. King Lear is already passed 80 by the time he divides the kingdom. If he had divided the kingdom much earlier probably he would be less foolish, but as it can be understood, he wants praise and whoever praises him, he gives them the kingdom. And these two characters are in contrast as they praise him to the sky, but Cordelia’s praise, when she says “I do love you as a daughter loves her father if I love the same what about my husband” it is a very practical and truthful question. Therefore, as far as King Lear is concerned, the characters of Goneril, Regan and Cordelia make an interesting study in contrast.
It is the mistake that King Lear himself realizes later. He admits that he has made a mistake. This is the whole point in Shakespearean tragedy.

Shakespeare’s tragedy is about characters largely good, which have a number of good qualities but one defect, as a result of which he stoops down, puts himself down. That is, the character is destined. It is what is said to be the ‘tragic flaw’. Each tragic character suffers not because of his fate, but because of his own fault. This is the difference between Shakespearean tragedy and Greek tragedy. In Greek Tragedy King Oedipus is compelled by fate to kill his own father. When Oedipus marries his own mother, he knew his fate, and tries his best to avoid that destiny, but the tragic irony is that the more he avoids his destiny, he runs into it. Such a thing does not happen in Shakespearean tragedy. There is a tragic flaw called a fatal flaw. The four tragic flaws of the four heroes or heroines in his tragedies can be considered as follows; King Lear’s tragic flaw is his foolish hankerings after his own glorification and want of praises. Great tragic heroes have tragic flaws. Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Othello, Caesar all have a tragic flaw, one defect which pulls them down.
As far as women are concerned they take a second position in Shakespearean tragedies. A. C. Bradley talks about heroes in *Shakespearean tragedies* and comments that women are livelier. For e.g. in *Julius Ceaser*, a historical play and also a tragedy, it is a men’s play and hardly any women characters can be found. Calpurnia, Julius Ceaser’s wife, and Portia, Brutus’ wife, appear in only one scene and disappear. As far as the heroines are concerned, Calpurnia, wife of Julius Ceaser, asks her husband not to go to the Senate because she had a bad dream. A soothsayer has already told Julius Ceaser “Beware the Ides of March”. Julius Ceaser sees the soothsayer telling him “Ides of March are here”.

*Julius Ceaser’s* women characters account is given only to drive home a point of how Julius Ceaser has to resist the temptation of yielding to bad dream that his wife dreamt. That is why, Julius Ceaser, being a dictator, ultimately says, “he is not well, shall I send a false word, no I cannot”. It is insulting for him to scare away from the facts as the senate will think he was being coward and tells his wife, “I will not come because my wife had a bad dream”. Pride, which Julius Ceaser had is his fall, which he assumes too many things about for eg: about
Cassius he says “yond lean and hungry look thinks too much such men are dangerous”. (ibid) In the entire play *Julius Ceaser*, Calpurnia narrates her dream and asks her husband not to go to the senate and that is all one hears about Calpurnia. What about Portia in the same play? She is not like Calpurnia. She is an opposite woman character. In *Julius Ceaser* there is no stereotyping. Both characters are different.

Portia says “I am Cato’s daughter. You can tell me any secret. I am not just a woman. I know how to handle it”. (ibid) That is the reason why when the narration comes later on in a dialogue the famous quarrel scene between Cassius and Brutus, Brutus mentions “Porita is no more”. Then Cassiaus asks “how is it that I escaped killing when I tried to kill you, criticize you”. (ibid) One finds Portia is held in very high esteem not only by Cassius but by everybody and that is very positive character one finds as a contrast between two women characters in the same tragedy.

The next issue that can be taken up for discussion is that whether there is any semblance of Shakespeare’s women characters to the modern women from any respect. Shakespeare is a writer who believes in ‘universals’ and universal by definition it is very good for all time, it
is not stereotyped, it is not time bound. Human nature has not changed since the time of the Greeks. Elemental passions like anger, love, hate etc have all remained the same without much change in the human minds and hearts. It is said that hate is the only emotion stronger than love.

Shakespeare’s tragedies are all concerned about eternal values. Even today people are angry, they love and they hate each other. Everything that happened in Shakespeare is happening today too. As long as human nature does not change Shakespeare’s plays will hold a semblance to the characters in life. There is no particular way in which one can say that this is modern in Shakespeare and this is not.

The modern interpretation of Shakespeare in 20th century:

A critic called Stephen Greenbalt takes up new Historicism 20th century. A new way of looking at Shakespeare has evolved since then. A lot of theory in the English literary scenario too has taken place. There is a modern interpretation of Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello. They have been made into ballads. Shakespeare is a great writer from whom one can derive as much as one can and make his/her own. Modern Shakespearean women characters are amidst us. Even modern women
are fundamentally women, with all the feminine qualities, however modern they are. To an extent it may seem to be an over simplification, but there are characters like Goneril and Regan even today. Property quarrels go on in modern world as they did earlier. Scheming in modern times happens as much as it happened during Shakespeare's time. To counter balance Goneril and Regan, even in the 20th century we find good women like Cordelia around. There are still Desdemonas and Ophelias. In that way there is no specific way in which it can be related to modern women. There is a universal strategy in all of them.

For e.g. *Tempest* is a comedy interpreted in 20th century as a post colonial reading. Cannibal is a native and Prospero is a white man. Native versus invader is the theme that the modern critics are interested in when they deal with the play from a modern perspective. Marxist interpretation of Shakespeare was produced in Soviet Union. In production one can certainly do whatever one wants to. A completely modern and contemporary interpretation can be given to Shakespeare on stage.

**Shakespeare in Kannada**
There is a 100 years of history in translation of Shakespeare plays into Kannada. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and many early translators had different approaches to translation and really were concerned with the production of the play.

But translating drama is different from translating poetry. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and Ramachandra Deva, a stage critic, have translated the same text with modern approach. They saw drama as both literature and as a performing art.

Modern productions of Shakespeare especially portray women from a modern angle. For eg; Ophelia is an honest little green girl. Interesting question is whole thing is about production. MC Brad Brooks, a Drama Critic contends it is about production criticism including tragedies. Interpretation of drama depends on production – modern approaches as much as the technical and experimental advancement gained over the years.

In the New globe theatre there was no lighting, no front cut and no willing suspension of disbelief. Modernity, contemporaneity can be brought on stage through various means. Old plays can be represented on stage differently and can be done into modern. Tragedies can be
converted into comedies or comedies into tragedies. Instead of making Cordelia die one can make her live happily ever after. Such alterations have been happening on stage in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. England’s Richard Burton writes on *Hamlet* “...is about Denmark and not England. They are not British. Othello is a moor.”

Another question that can be taken up for debate is how modern play wrights have drawn source from Shakespeare. One particular play *Hamlet* has been a favourite among modern creative minds. ‘Hamlet’s complex’, that is not being able to make up one’s mind, is one tragic flaw – too much of thinking results in too little action. But in *King Lear* it is the opposite i.e. action without thought. Procrastination is the tragic flaw in Hamlet while wanting of praise is King Lear’s. In *Othello* it is a tragedy of a person who loved too well but not wisely. In *Macbeth* it is over vaulting ambition which leaps from over and falls on other. Eternal Procrastination, the postponement of things, in Hamlet is one defect. This has been the main point on which many plays have been written.

Taking the text of *Hamlet* and looking at various approaches adopted by various modern playwrights, Brad brook in his book “Shakespeare as the craftsman” he talks of *Hamlet* based texts of which
he mentions two plays.

One is called “yupar war” by Alfred Harry and two plays “Rose and guild are dead” by Dom Stoppard, a modern contemporary British writer’s play written in 1996 based on *Hamlet*. An existentialist interpretation of *Hamlet*’s philosophy in modern terms takes place in the play. What is different in this play from Shakespeare’s is that Hamlet is portrayed as a modern existential hero. What is important is that they are dead, they are sent to death by Hamlet. How do they die in *Hamlet*? “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were carrying the letter against Hamlet; Hamlet discovers the letter on the way, rubs off his name and writes the names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sent along with Hamlet. Hamlet was supposed to be killed in England. Death is the main spell of existentialism philosophy. It believes in absurdity of life, no choice, liberty, freedom. One is the master of one’s own destiny and not fate.

Julius Ceaser talks “Brutus under links”. So there is no contrast of fate with divinity. Shakespeare was a believer in free will. The same cannot be said about ‘fate’ with certainty. We know only about his characters. Shakespeare says this when, why, in which context is important what Brutus says is necessarily what Shakespeare says.
Shakespeare is speaking through these characters. Therefore that is the glory of Shakespeare. He has created so many – maximum number of characters so “life like” which accounts for his greatness.

Each character of Shakespeare is so identifiable with his own personality. No two characters are alike, no two clowns are alike, no two comic characters are alike, and no two tragic characters are alike. Each person has a total personality.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a modern contemporary play making Hamlet a minor character and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as major characters. The language of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is extremely modern. A play within the play. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is poetry in old English. The old man representing Polonius warns his daughter in modern English “you are in love with Hamlet. Beware, he is a prince and is to be married to princess alone. Beware of your status. *Hamlet is a boy friend, a pop singer.*”iv Grave diggers also represent working class in sixteenth century. In modern times Polonius belongs to working class, but Hamlet is an aristocrat.

*Mouse trap* is another play made into an original play. It is a play within the play in *Hamlet*. Hamlet says “*I’ll catch the conscience*
"of the king". The play is shown to Cladius to expose his guilt where the poison is poured into the ears of the King. When Cladius sees this, he has to react, if he is guilty - Cladius immediately shouts 'lights'. Hamlet says he is guilty. If he is innocent he need not have to object for the continuation of the play. "so you are guilty, uncle". In twentieth century any part of Shakespeare's play can be taken up by a modern playwright and any single part can be interpreted into a comedy or anything they like. In Bernard Curpse's Hamlet, Hamlet is an American singer with a mike and singing popular songs. The amount of liberty taken in Shakespeare's characters is almost like a free license to everybody. The same is also said about Shakespeare, that he took freedom in altering the characters and settings in his plays in such a way that they looked completely different from their original source. He is above criticism. Everybody takes liberty with Shakespeare's characters and there are bad interpretations of Hamlet. Whether Hamlet was mad or not, it is a difficult question. That is one level of interpretation of Hamlet.

Henriko by Parrandello is a re-interpretation of Henry IV. Hamlet is reworked in Italian terms. There have been various modern interpretations of Hamlet. To some extent other tragedies also have
been variously interpreted. *Othello* is transformed into a Ballad. In Italian opera, even in modern times, drama, dance and music go together. In our concept of drama, as in Bharata’s *Natyashastra*, “there is no art which is not represented in drama/stage”. “Natyah bhinna ruchihi”\(^\text{vii}\) In the modern productions of Shakespeare, in London open air theatre, there are lights in trees and mikes also in trees. One can find that it sings like a ballad. *As you like it* and *Tempest* are set in the woods. In Bangalore too, *Chitra kala parishat* did a marvelous job in open air theatre staging Shakespeare.

It can be examined whether Shakespeare was an anti-feminist or not. Shakespeare cannot be labeled as anything. Shakespeare is neither feminist nor anti-feminist. It would be a serious accusation to call Shakespeare as anti-feminist. The heroines of Shakespeare are positive, wise and sane whereas men are stupid foolish, idiotic. They go to war, women put men in their sane place. So Shakespeare is a feminist. For e.g. *The Taming of the Shrew* translated as *Bahadur Gandu*\(^\text{viii}\) into Kannada by Parvatavani is a marvelous production and a great success.

The glory of Shakespeare is that one has to read all the thirty seven plays and one cannot say whatever they want about Shakespeare
and get away with it. People who have read just a few plays of Shakespeare cannot be treated as the authorities on Shakespeare. One cannot arrive at a conclusion by studying one or two plays of Shakespeare. To make a comprehensive judgment of Shakespeare a thorough reading of all his plays is required.

Goneril and Lady Macbeth are extraordinary heroines. Lady Macbeth is something phenomenal. "unsex me here", "are you a man? Bring me the daggers". She is fiendish and frightening. "I know nipple dash brains out". (ibid) What kind of a woman is she? She is most unwomanly when she says those things. Lady Macbeth is selfless. She becomes selfish only for the sake of her husband. If he becomes king, what is her gain? No person is totally good or evil. All are a mixture of both good and bad. Both streaks can be found in Lady Macbeth.

Gertrude marries Cladius. A pschoanalysis of the play reveals that it is the Odepius complex to say that Hamlet is in love with his mother. Earnest Jones' *Hamlet* takes to task Gerturde. Is she wicked? Like Lady Macbeth? Weak woman who is only interested in sex? How old is she? Hamlet is 30 years so gertrude is 50. A close reading of the grave digger tells that Hamlet is 30 years old.
Similarities between Desdemona and Ophelia: Desdemona is as innocent as Ophelia. They are silent sufferers. Ophelia in her madness falls into water. Desdemona is not a green girl like Ophelia, not a weak character. She is very trusting and honest. She genuinely falls into love with Othello. Othello is a moor, is an African Asian moor. Where does he come from? Desdemona is Italian white and he a black. Desdemona falls victim. Evil character Iago is malignant, not so evil. They are so good that they cannot be tolerated. Othello is a simpleton but a great warrior. Shakespeare individualises his characters. Iago and Othello are deceived by the same person. They know that each other like her. Othello asks Desdemona “*have you prayed tonight*”.

Dramas in general in Kannada focused on Mythological stories. These mythological stories glorified gods and heaven. Playwrights tried to make their plays more attractive and entertaining by including music and dance. The actors wore rich costume which were heavy colorful and gaudy sets on the stage was in vogue. All these elements were far from reality. The stories included stories of Suras and Asuras through which principles and morals were promoted to the audience. Gradually, the contemporaneity in the theme was introduced with reference to their
kings and their achievements. Hence, there was a blend of mythology and history. The same pattern was continued with in the adaptations of Shakespeare too.

The plays of William Shakespeare were a great find for educated people all over India from the commencement of the colonial rule by England and India was no exception. Three generations of writers have tried to appropriate Shakespeare’s works into their own literary culture through translation and adaptation, though their particular objectives and approaches have differed from time to time.

The major concern of the first generation, roughly from 1870 to 1920, was to introduce the works of the greatest of English writers for elevating their own language and theatre and they usually preferred the method of adaptation to literal translation. (Amur. GS)\textsuperscript{xi}

The approach of the second generation to Shakespeare was liberal and humanist. They sought to present his works in Kannada objectively and without much deviation from the original. The mode they adopted for this purpose was literal transfer. They avoided the influence of the native culture to the minimum. The period between 1930 and 1960 may be accepted as the time during which this generation worked.
The interest of the contemporary generation of Shakespeare translators has been to deal with the existential problems relating to their own time and they have turned to Shakespeare for creative self expression. However, these are broad generalisations with exceptions. Apart from personal motivations, the translators have been influenced considerably by the changing condition of the theatre.

Channabasappa Basavalingappa Dharwad, a well-known educational administrator, has been credited with the earliest translations from Shakespeare on the authority of Rev. Ferdinand Kittel who has written that Channabasappa had published his version of *The Comedy of Errors* as early as 1871. Between 1871 and 1929, the date of publication of *Suratanagarada Shresthi*, an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Keruru Vasudevacharya, a wide range of Shakespeare’s plays was brought to Kannada including *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear* and *Othello* among the tragedies, *The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* among the comedies, *All’s Well That Ends Well* among the problem plays and *Cymbeline, A Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* from his last plays. Some of these, *The Comedy*
of Errors, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth and Othello for example were translated more than once during this period.

Two names stand out from the first generation of translators, M.L. Srikanthegowda and M.S. Puttanna, not only for the quality of their adaptations but also for the clarity with which they visualised the specific problems involved in appropriating creative work from alien cultures into Indian languages like Kannada. In his introduction to Prataparudradeva (1895), a version of Macbeth, Srikantesha Gowda argues that the model of translation from Sanskrit into Kannada was not of much use in rendering works from English. Sanskrit and Kannada shared history, geography, mythology, poetics and metrical forms and someone with commensurate poetic ability could succeed in transferring a Sanskrit work to Kannada. The only problem he faced, in Srikantesha Gowda’s thinking, was that of diction. In the case of English, however, apart from diction, metre too posed problems. Srikantesha Gowda was right in emphasising the common cultural and literary heritage of Kannada and Sanskrit but the task of translating from Sanskrit into Kannada was more difficult than he assumed it to be.
The two successful translations of the time of Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, Churmuri’s *Shakuntala Natakavu* and Basavappa Shastri’s *Karnataka Shakuntala Natakam* can be considered. Though both these translations are faithful to the original, they differ in their approach to dramatic style and use of language. Churmuri, familiar with the folk dramatic forms of North Karnataka, elaborated the verse part of the original, using not only the Sanskrit metrical forms *Vrittas* and the Kannada *Shatpadi* and *Kanda* but also a variety of musical forms borrowed from Hindustani and Marathi. His use of dialects to distinguish among the characters also followed the North Karnataka linguistic pattern. His translation is more in the nature of adaptation. Basavappa Shastri, who was himself a poet both in Sanskrit and Kannada, is more precise and literary in his translation which was meant to be read as well as enacted. While he followed the Sanskrit scheme of *Vrittas* for the literary version, for the stage version he provided songs set to ragas of Karnataka style of music. Thus even when they were translating from Sanskrit they had to bear in mind the theatrical tradition to which they belonged and make vital decisions in the use of linguistic styles.
The first generation of Kannada translators of Shakespeare chose the mode of adaptation because their main concern was their own culture in which they were firmly rooted and they aimed at enriching it by deriving the best from other cultures. They made detailed alterations in places, names of characters and historical and cultural environment of the originals to acclimatise them to local conditions. This preference was motivated by two important considerations. They were conscious of the fact that their adaptations were aimed at readers most of whom did not know English. The translators themselves did not have expert knowledge of English. Gundo Krishna Churmari who translated *Othello* worked in a mill in Hubli and Basavappa Shastri who also translated the same play depended on C. Subbarao’s prose version of the play as he was brought up in the native scholarly tradition and lacked English education. Secondly, since their versions were often commissioned for the stage they had to make sure of cultural communication and acceptance. Srikantesha Gowda’s *Pramilarjuniyam* provides a thorough going example of the mode of adaptation. Srikantesha Gowda borrows his structural plan from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* but brings about a total cultural conversion in the content. The story of Theseus and Hyppolita is substituted by the story of Arjuna and Pramila.
and Greece is shifted to Kerala. The Fairy king and queen are replaced by Manmatha and Rathi and the Elizabethan artisans are replaced by Mayachari and his friends who obviously belong to Karnataka. Interestingly enough the Pyramus and Thisbe interlude finds a parallel in Ramavarma and Lilavati, the name under which Romeo and Juliet had been translated into Kannada. The beginning of the play, in the form of a dialogue between Sutradhara and Nati, follows the conventions of Sanskrit drama. For all his admiration for Shakespeare, however, he lacked the equipment of successful translator and adapter. Moreover, he was too committed to traditional Kannada poetic style to be able to grasp the rhythm and flow of Shakespeare’s blank verse. It is difficult even to recognise the original in the translation. The transformation is so complete.

The closest approaches to literal translation during this period are those of Basavappashastri and M.S. Puttanna who made prose renderings of Othello and King Lear respectively, with new titles, Shurasenacharitre\(^{xvii}\) and Hemachandravrajvilasa\(^{xviii}\). Commenting on the strategy he followed for his translation Puttana wrote:
“The characters have been given Indian names in order to make
the play appear natural to Kannada readers. There are two important
changes in the translation. The first relates to English customs and
habits for which substitutes have found deliberately to suit the genius of
the Kannada language and facilitate understanding by the Kannada
people. The other is a result of misreading or imperfect knowledge of
the text.” (ibid)

Puttanna’s conscious goal was to create in his Kannada readers
an awareness of Shakespeare’s rare mind and art and he was convinced
that this could be achieved through a prose rendering. Both Puttanna
and Basavappashastri worked within their limits but their loyalty to the
original and the selection of modern prose for translation provided a
model for the next generation. Similarly, however crude Srikantesha
Gowda’s adaptations may appear now, they showed the way to highly
gifted poets like K.V. Puttappa and led to a more improved attempts of
translating Shakespeare.

If the preferred mode of the first generation of the Shakespeare’s
plays was by and large adaptation, that of the second generation led by
D.V. Gundappa was literal translation. In his introduction to his rendering of *Macbeth*, D.V. Gundappa clearly defines his approach:

"My intention is to show Shakespeare’s world as objectively as I can. My endeavour is to reproduce not only the story but the descriptions, the syntax and the historical content – in short, the image of Shakespeare’s world."^{xix}

As a liberal thinker D.V.Gundappa believed that a wider world view and exposure to life in other cultures were necessary to update our thinking. He rejected Srikanthesha Gowda’s model of adaptation and refused to make changes in the names, the places, the periods and the atmosphere of the original plays. He knew that no translator, however, faithful he was to the original, could achieve total success in transferring the wealth of emotion (Bhavavaibhava) or the tonal richness (Shravanasaundarya) of Shakespeare’s plays and opted for the golden mean. He said that his aim was to be close enough to Shakespeare to achieve correspondence without completely alienating the Kannada reader or offending his ear for language.
But probably influenced by B.M. Srikantaiah’s adaptations of Greek plays, he chose old Kannada as his medium. But unlike Srikantaiah, D.V.Gundappa was not dependable in his linguistic practice and was often blamed of mixing up dictions and styles.

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar also adapted a similar approach to the problem of translating Shakespeare’s plays which was essentially the same as that of D.V.Gundappa but it differed from it in two important ways. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar rejected D.V.Gundappa’s model in the use of language and preferred to follow M.S. Puttanna who had used the Kannada spoken in his time in his translation of *King Lear*. Secondly, he paid greater attention to Shakespeare’s poetry. “It is the duty of the translator, to reproduce not just the meaning or the emotion but to the cast of mind behind the poetry.” Masti Venkatesha Iyengar translated four full plays — *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* besides scenes from several other plays.

There were many translations and adaptions of Shakespeare’s plays in Kannada. The translations stuck loyalty to the original plays, changing only the names and places in the play. The plot and themes were not altered much. But the adaptations of the Shakespearean plays
were quite independent from the originals. The playwrights took as much liberty as they could to suit their requirements. It was almost like the translators had borrowed as much they wanted from the Shakespearean plays and wrote the adaptations as if it was their own work, just like Shakespeare borrowed from various sources to create masterpieces. In this respect, K.V. Puttappa’s (Kuvempu) *Rakthakshi* is a very significant attempt. Hence it would be appropriate to make a special study of the play *Rakthakshi* in relation to *Hamlet* and examine how K.V. Puttappa deviates from the original, why and how it affects the adaptation.

Though a younger contemporary of D.V. Gundappa and Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, K.V. Puttappa, was too strong a poet to follow Shakespeare literally and preferred the mode of adaptation to that of literal translation. Though his *Raktakshi* (1930) was inspired by *Hamlet*, it is better to judge it as an independent composition. The following comparative study of *Hamlet* and *Rakthakshi*, an adaptation in Kannada, is an ample example of how Shakespeare continues to be the master and an inspiration to many extraordinary minds of the subsequent centuries.
Hamlet and Raktakshi

Kuvempu, one of the National Poets and the well-known Kannada writers, poet and dramatist, wrote Raktakshi (1932), a tragedy based on William Shakespeare’s Hamlet. According to Bhagavan.KS, Raktakshi received many tributes as well as descriptive articles. But it never got a critical analysis nor a comparative criticism.

Frailty and Revenge

Hamlet and Raktakshi are tragedies based on revenge and misogynist. Hamlet, the young prince comes to Denmark to attend his father’s funeral. He is shocked to find his mother Gertrude already remarried to his uncle Claudius. He has the ardent faith in love. His shock is seen in Act I Sc II. The remarriage is more painful and hurting to him than the death of his father. It makes him say “Frailty, thy name Women”

Hamlet is in love with Ophelia, whose father and brother were the obstacles to their pure love, prevent her from uniting with the prince whom she is in love with. The reason given is that Hamlet is the prince and she, a common girl and no love is possible between them. Ophelia
is like an innocent flower having no strong personality who fails to take her own decision. Finally, obeying her father, she returns all the gifts given by the prince and makes him even more agonized and strengthens his belief in his judgment ‘Frailty, thy name women’.

Prince Hamlet depends more on his mother and Ophelia and wants solace from them as he has lost his father. But the step taken by his lover makes him to think that all women are bitches. To him sex is dirt. He forgets that sex is the base of life. If sex is denied that means the centre of life is refused.

In *Raktakshi*, Basavaiah, the protagonist of the play basically is a dreamy person. All neglect him because of which Chaluvamba, the step-mother of Basavaiah poisons Basava Nayaka, her husband and the king of Bidanur just for the love of Nimbaiah, the Commander of Bidnur Army. Knowing this Basavaiah laments for his dead father. His grief is though near to that of Hamlet but fails to give the heart rending feeling of *Hamlet*. No man under deep feeling of either joy or sorrow can articulate words continuously. In *Rakthakshi*, Basavaiah does exactly that. Hence Basavaiah does not have the same effect as Hamlet.
Basavaiah hates women folk because of his step-mother’s bad conduct. His lover Rudrambe, the real hero of the tragedy, has pure love for him. In her there is no word like triviality. Minister Linganna supports her love. She has a strong character and does not think of any other man even after the death of Basavaiah. In this connection Basavaiah’s words ‘Woman, thy name Frailty’ holds neither relevance nor value. Moreover in Rakthakshi, Chaluvambe is Basavaiah’s step-mother. Hence her act is not so painful for him as it might have been if the same is done by his own mother. A real mother’s meanness is more hurting to a sensitive son than that of his step-mother.

If the identity of parents is proved false to a son or a daughter then it hurts more. If they children come to know that the identity of parents or their birth is false they are hurt very badly. In this connection it becomes only blame but not a universal experience. Revenge is the base of both tragedies. Hamlet doubts his healthy father’s sudden death. He wants revenge when the ghost of his father appears and reveals everything. His enmity on women grows. This is artistically represented by William Shakespeare.
In *Rakthakshi* Basava nayaka, king of Bidnur appears as a ghost to his son Basavaiah and reveals how Chaluvambe and Nimbaiah join together to poison him and ask Basavaiah to avenge. But in the end Basavaiah is also killed and fails to take revenge by the trickery of Shivaiah, who is the aspirant of throne which was assured by Hyder Ali.

Basavaiah tells everything of his meeting with his father’s ghost to Chaluvambe and Honnaiah and seeks their help to avenge, but all are thrown to death by the cunning Nimbaiah. Shivaiah helps them all to escape. While going in the forest he pushes Basavaiah into a deep valley. Linganna and Hombaiah bring him up from that valley. He reveals everything and orders them to take revenge and dies. Honnaiah cremates him by saying that he killed him to safeguard the kingdom and was stabbed by Rudrambe without knowing the truth. By revealing the truth he not only stops her from suicide but also encourages her to take revenge.

Thus the personal tragedy of Basavaiah becomes public and his personal revenge changes to public revenge. Ghost asks him to avenge his death and he in turn orders Honnaiah to take revenge as he was
dying without taking the revenge. When Honnaiah fails, before his
death, he transfers the same responsibility to the shoulders of
Rudrambe.

There is a lot of difference between revenge taken by a son for his
father and the same revenge taken by others. The pain, grief felt by a
son may not be felt by others and it become artificial if somebody else
avenges. In this regard Kuvempu failed to make Raktakshi equal to
Hamlet. He failed to imitate even the style and imagination of Hamlet.
Kuvempu did not succeed in bringing frailty and revenge theoretically.
So it failed even artistically. Raktakshi is neither a complete replica of
Hamlet nor an independent work. It is a mixture of both. It is not up to
the standard of Hamlet in anyway.

The beginning scene of Raktakshi looks similar to the opening
scene of Hamlet. Hamlet begins in the dark where as Raktakshi opens
in semi-dark. Honnaiah enquires sentinel Kenchanna about the
appearance of ghost which he says looks like the dead king Basava
nayaka. The way he enquires is similar to Horatio’s finding of Hamlet’s
ghost with Bernardo and Marcellus. The conversation between
Honnaiah and the ghost is similar to that of Horatio’s words with the
ghost. Honnaiah has doubts about the reality of the ghost and generalizes it, but not in the origin of God because he utters the words ‘swear on Shiva’ (Shivanane). But Horatio had doubt on the origin of both god and ghost.

Honnaiah feels the appearance of ghost is an indication of danger to the kingdom. Horatio feels ghost is the indication of danger to the nation. But he also thinks it could be to show the hidden wealth. Thus he makes it complex by representing the blind belief of common people of any country. Honnaiah’s words with Kenchanna are literal translation of Horatio’s words with Bernardo and Marcellus. “This bodies some….”Act I -69. Raktakshi’s almost all night scenes had moon light in the background and so the words of Kenchanna got fear and the Nature is not relevant to it. But in Hamlet the opening scene begins in dark and cold. Raktakshi’s second scene is in palace. Kuvempu seems to be in a dilemma while writing this drama. He neither completely translates Hamlet nor makes Hamlet as model to his Raktakshi. ‘Universal’ Hamlet is greater in front of ‘regional’ Raktakshi. Kuvempu fails in bringing universal theme and conflict, quality and complexity into regional atmosphere. In Raktakshi appearance is
greater than reality. He tried to imitate William Shakespeare but succeeds only as a regional writer. His *Raktakshi* is independent in Act I Sc 3, 4 and 5. Act II Sc I is a word to word translation of Hamlet’s words when he eagerly comes with Honnaiah to talk with the ghost. The conversation between Basavaiah, Honnaiah and Kenchanna is similar to the talk of Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus. Kuvempu’s language is also sharp having short questions, which rises deep thought and feeling. Madness of Hamlet gives momentum and this is the soul of the play. But in *Raktakshi* there is no such element.

Act II Sc 4 is the transformation of *Hamlet’s* Act I Sc 5 where Basavaiah talks about ghost to Rudrambe and Linganna. The killing of Basava nayaka by Chaluvambe with the help of Nimbaiah seem preplanned and makes one to feel it is forethought. Both of them make the king to drink poison in the name of medicine. In *Hamlet*, Cladius who seeks no help from anyone kills his brother by putting poison into his ears when the latter is taking siesta in the fruit garden, then he makes believe everybody that he was bitten by a poisonous snake. It seems natural and nobody suspects him, not even his lover Gertude, the queen.
From Act II last scene to the end of the play *Raktakshi* is independent in all respects from that of *Hamlet*.

**Chaluvambe and Gertrude**

Chaluvambe is the queen of Bidnur, young wife of dead king Basavanayaka and step-mother of Basavaiah. She has an affair with Nimbaiah even before marriage. She agreed to help Nimbaiah to kill the king thinking he is an obstacle to her love/lust. She even agrees to adopt Somaiah, son of Nimbaiah, for the throne. She skillfully manages all and never falls prey to suspicion of others. She feels that it was sinful only in the end when Rudrambe and her false madness make both Chaluvambe and Nimbaiah pray to the palace fire. She remembers the past king and repents for her sin and thinks it is the punishment. All her deeds seem to be the centre of fear of death but not morally ethical.

Gertrude marries Claudius after the death of her husband. She is innocent to the killing act of Claudius on her husband. She has affair even when Hamlet is alive she falls to her lust though she has crossed her middle age. She acts humbly according to the wants and wishes of Claudius as she has faith and trust in love. She meets her tragic death by drinking poisonous solution without her knowledge.
She wins the heart as a mother to a noble son though she is bad and unethical. She never passes a comment while her son Hamlet uses foul language on her. She does not think otherwise except love for him. Her lustful love is the root cause of Hamlet’s ruin and his faith in marriage, love, friendship and such qualities are demolished by her.

Rudrambe and Ophelia

Rudrambe represents the people of Bidnur in deadly sins. All their wish and want is fulfilled by her through her act of killing the enemies of the State. The revenge is fulfilled through her awaken madness. But the way she avenges is not fit to a noble one. It is like a cunning act.

Ophelia is not an able daughter. She is not mould by her own character. She acts according to her father’s wish and want. She does not even think that love is a private affair. In leaving Hamlet she does not think otherwise. Her father is everything to her. In this connection Hamlet’s words ‘frailty, thy name woman’ got force. Instead of consoling Hamlet she rejects him. This in turn made him more furious and his hate more strong. Ophelia becomes mad after her father’s tragic death by Hamlet’s words and her failure of love. The hidden unsatisfied
feelings push her to madness. Her feeling is heart rending and arouses pity on her.

Life’s truth which one learns after studying *Hamlet* may not be experienced in *Raktakshi* of Kuvempu. Hamlet struggles to get an order in life. He is eager to show the truth hidden to the world in angry mood and wants to avenge. In that he loses the faith on women and calls them as frail. But nowhere can such equals be found in *Raktakshi* when compared to *Hamlet*. It is just an ordinary effort to imitate an epic that is extraordinary without any material or knowledge.

Like Kuvempu, Parvatavani also chose the method of adaptation in his translation of plays like *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Bahaddura Ganda*) but, as Ramachandra Deva has pointed out, has cast them in the mould of the drawing room comedy."xxii

The seventies and the eighties have seen the rise of a new generation of Shakespeare translators. Many prominent writers can be mentioned. Some of them are Ramachandra Deva, K.S. Nissar Ahmad and H.S. Shivaprakash. Their choice of plays has been more or less the same but there are new additions like K.V. Rajagopal’s translation of *Coriolanus*, influenced probably by T.S. Eliot’s preferences.
The early generations had been motivated by the desire to enrich Kannada by appropriating the universally acknowledged dramatic genius of Shakespeare or to open out new worlds for exploration. The new generation is guided by considerations of relevance and self expression and the needs of the theatre. Commenting on his approach to Shakespeare Ramachandra Deva says:

“I was trying to bring Shakespeare to Kannada through myself, to understand myself and my times through Shakespeare!”

Creativity, and not exactness, was the quality he tried to achieve in his translations. The same impulse can be recognised behind Girish Karnad’s choice of Muslim history and the model of Caligula in his Tughlaq and K.V. Subbbanna’s Lokashakuntala. Subbanna has said that in presenting Kalidasa or Yakshagana he was trying to give shape to his own experience. To use a helpful phrase from Ashok Kelkar, the new approach to Shakespeare is for ‘recovery’, and not ‘discovery’ as it was with the earlier generations.

The third generation has had the advantage not only of the advances in Shakespeare criticism which have given new interpretations
of the plays but also of the modernist experimentation with language and metrical forms. This is very well reflected in Nissar Ahmad’s translation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1974)\textsuperscript{xxv} where he makes successful use of variations in metrical forms and linguistic styles.

All the three writers mentioned here – Nissar Ahmad, Ramachandra Deva and Shivaprakash – are eminent writers in Kannada and this has been their main strength as translators. In his preface to Nissar Ahmad’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar expresses his reservations whether Nissar Ahmad’s version is a translation. (He calls it a Chayanuvad) but frankly admits that the play was very successful on the stage.

Nissar Ahmad had obviously Masti Venkatesha Iyengar’s own translations in mind when he wrote:

“The formula of translating word by word and sentence by sentence may create the illusion of textual fidelity but it will fail to move the reader or spectator. In translating, a translator should try to establish contacts with the original writer on the same wavelength,
experience the work as a whole and find ways of recreating it in his own language.”

He defends calculated departures from the text preferring easy communication to fidelity.

Though we have had three generations of Shakespeare translators and several of Shakespeare’s plays have either been adapted or translated, some of them more than once, none of the versions have achieved success comparable to Bendre’s translation of Kalidasa’s *Meghadutam*. This probably is due to many reasons. First of all as Arnab Guha argues in his essay, ‘Theatre and the Thing’, there are basic differences in the concepts of theatrical space between the Western and the Indian traditions and it is not easy to capture the spirit of the one in another. Secondly, Shakespeare’s plays are poetic dramas and the translator needs to know the levels on which language functions in them. Thirdly, since interpretation is basic to translation, a thorough knowledge of the nuances of Elizabethan English and a precise knowledge of the cultural context are essential both for transfer and substitution. But scholarship by itself will not carry the translator far. As the limited attempts of Bendre and Adiga have shown, the translator
has to match his poetic talent and skill with those of the original writer and this is not easy with a writer like Shakespeare.

A study of Shakespearean translations and adaptations that have appeared in Kannada from the beginning of the twentieth century helps to arrive at a conclusion. Shakespeare has been an inspiration for many writers consistently. He has been an appealing writer to many since the beginning of the modern Kannada literary era. Though there have been many attempts by very eminent writers and translators in Kannada to appropriate Shakespeare, it can be said that none of the translations or adaptations come any close to the works of the master creator. It can be safely assumed, therefore, that Shakespeare will continue to intrigue the coming generations of the Kannada writers as well and hence more works based on him can be expected. Shakespeare continues to be an in exhaustive source to the contemporary writers.

At this stage it can be noted that though there have been many works based on Shakespearean plays in the form of translations, adaptations, performance plays, recently even movies, none of these works focus predominantly on any of the Shakespearean women characters. All these works based on Shakespearean plays focus on the
principal characters. Neither in the plays of Shakespeare nor in the works based on them are women brought to the forefront. They are given prominence only to the extent of their connection or relation with the male characters. Both Prof. S. Ramaswamy, a renowned Shakespearean scholar, and Mr. C. Basavalingaiah, a well-known Kannada theatre director and practitioner, agree that no literary work or stage performance based on Shakespeare’s works has been attempted in Kannada literature and Theatre with a woman character in its centre.

Though the writers and translators in Kannada have tried to contemporize the theme and plots of the Shakespearean plays, they have conspicuously avoided re-characterising any of his women characters. The modern feminist approach and attitude have been absent when they deal with Shakespearean plays.
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209