How Does Translation Work? Abhijnanasakuntalam Translated Text Comparison

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ABSTRACT

The dramas of Kalidas, particularly Abhijnanasakuntalam, have mesmerised western culture. Numerous translations have brought this tale to the western reader. However, each translation has been unique, reflecting the translators' efforts to acquire the language of the original text as well as their own leanings, which frequently result from their normative perspective. In the end, each translation proves to be a true representation of the translator's mental image and amply demonstrates their own cultural and intellectual preferences. It also brings to light the challenges—and frequently impossibility—of translating between different eras, tongues, and civilizations.

INTRODUCTION

Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam, one of the most widely read Sanskrit translations, is a brilliant illustration of the Western world's ongoing fascination with the timeless Sanskrit masterpieces. Intense research to find the "gold in Sanskrit" led Sir William Jones, the first translator of Kalidasa's masterwork, to produce this ground-breaking translation in 1789. Since then, a number of translators have attempted to translate this drama. This translation had a significant impact on not just the revival of Indian literature but also on the literary traditions of Europe. The most well-known translations of Shakuntala are those by Monier Williams, M.R. Kale, Arthur Ryder, K.V. Sundaram, Barbara Miller, and Chandra Rajan, who translated it into prose and verse in 1855.

The translations of William Jones' "Sacontala or The Fatal Ring" (1789) and Chandra Rajan's "The Recognition of Sakuntala" are the two I seek to compare among Shakuntala's works (1889). However, my research is not limited to just these translations; I have also made an effort to quickly review Ryder and Miller's translations, paying particular attention to the emotional underpinnings of various Shlokas expressing love and eroticism and how deeply they have penetrated the character, setting, and central sensibility of the drama. And the attempt is to ascertain how far these translators could imbibe the atmosphere of hermitage, the pastoral imagery and the sacraments of ancient India, to bring out a living picture of Kalidasa’s age. Kalidasa is known for his treatment of nature and of its expatiation in similes and imagery. The problems faced by the translators are formidable, particularly while working with English and Sanskrit. With all the tremendous powers that the English language has, it is still not fully capable of coping with the subtlety and hidden dimensions that are found in Sanskrit. It is manifestly a difficult language to translate- so it is necessary to evaluate how far they are successfully transferred into English.

THE MAGIC OF SHAKUNTALA

Sakuntala was in fact an eye-opener for the West when it first appeared and served to change the impression of India as a backward, superstitious “land of darkness”. It became a favourite with the Orientalist. To the Orientalist of the nineteenth century, it was not only a delightful experience but a duty of a westerner to know all about the
literary pursuits, the opinions, prejudices, fables, the religious beliefs, metaphysical thinking and amusements reflected in oriental dramas and poetry. Hones contributed to make Europe acquaint, acknowledge and appreciate India as a civilized country with a literature dating back to more than two thousand years and a land that was not alien in aesthetics of love, beauty and nature for the European mind. Schegal in his lecture on dramatic literature says:

“Sakuntala not withstanding the coloring of a foreign clime, bears in its general structure a striking resemblance to our romantic drama.” (M.Williams xxi) Humboldt observes: “Kalidasa, the celebrated author of Sakuntala is a masterly describer of the nature. Tenderness in the expression of feeling and richness of creative fancy, have assigned to him his lofty place among poets of all nations.” (M.Williams xii).

Jones calls Sakuntala “the celebrated drama from Shakespeare of India.” Hundreds of years back, he had already claimed Kalidas as “our illustrious poet this Shakespeare of India.” The impact of ‘Sacontala’ was soon felt in Europe when Edwards London editions appeared in 1790 and 1792. By 1791, Sacontala was translated into German by Forster and by 1792 into Russian by Karamsin. Translations in Danish (1793), French (1803) and Italian (1815) appeared soon after. In particular, Goethe was deeply influenced by the play to the extent that the prologue of Faust was inspired by that of ‘Sacontala’. So inspired was he by the play that he wrote in 1791:

"Wouldst thou the earth and heaven
Itself in one soul name combine?
I name thee, O Sakuntala, and all at once is said.”

(Roychaudhuri: 75-76)

Monnier Williams, in the introduction of ‘Sakuntala the Lost Ring’ (1885) wrote that about a century had elapsed since then great English orientalist, Sir Williams Jones astonished the learned world by the discovery of a universally acclaimed drama ‘Sacontala’.

Now, two centuries have elapsed and is celebrated with a rally of English translations of Abhijnanasakuntalam. Evidently, throughout the centuries, the grandeur of Kalidasa’s poetic art and dramatic craft has attracted many a western and eastern translations of his art in the languages of the world. There were no fewer than forty-six translations in twelve different languages in the century after Sir William Jones' groundbreaking first translation.

In 1989, Chandra Rajan's translation of Kalidasa's Sakuntala ‘The Recognition of Sakuntala’ appeared in the Penguin (India) edition of The Loom of Time, which also includes two of Kalidasa's poems.

“It had an immediate and enthusiastic reception in Germany, France and Italy and announced the birth of orientalist.” (Figueira 9)

Significantly when the translation of Jones is compared with Rajan’s translation, both the translators face the problem of complicated imagery, vocabulary, compactness and order of the subtlety of Kalidasa’s poetry. Whether it is the discourse on the character and conduct of the play or the character and function of his translation, Jones with a modest attitude, measures his power of translation and the beauty of the text in his preface to ‘Sacontala.’
“I then turned it word for word into English, and afterwards, without adding or suppressing any material sentence, disengaged from the stiffness of a foreign idiom, and prepared the faithful translation of the Indian drama.” (Jones 367)

The nature of the reception of Sakuntala in nineteenth century and 20th century might be different because of trends and patterns of literary expression and tastes have changed but the two translations on the poles of two centuries give to both orientalist and general scholars a comparative view revealing the encounter of European thought and their cultural ethos of East and West.

TRANSLATION BY SIR WILLIAM JONES

The problem of Indian expression and the difficulty of transmuting them into intelligible Western equivalents hover over them. On the one hand, we have the first translator of Sakuntala in English, who is a British-an unprejudiced Orientalist and on the other is an Indian translator who tries to amalgamate the Indian idea with the western way of thinking.

Jones first came to hear about Indian ‘Natakas’, during his sojourn in Europe, in 1787. These ‘Natakas’ were then considered to be Brahmanical histories with a mixture of fables and myths. His interest aroused, Jones began to investigate them on his return to Calcutta and was soon convinced that these were popular works far removed from being ‘histories’. Jones was given a Bengali recension of ‘Sacontala’.

Ramlochan, a Sanskrit teacher at the University of Nadia, helped Jones read the play. Jones had taken pains to learn Sanskrit, simply to understand the national mind and vigor of ancient India, have access to the authentic cultural tradition and Hindu manners and satisfy his desire to know the real position of India before the western conquest.

TRANSLATION BY RAJAN

Rajan has an edge over Jones in learning Sanskrit language and literature. She explored the fascinating world of Kalidas through her grandfather P. S. Iyer and the teacher Sir Ram Setu at an early age of nine. They pointed out to her varied beauties and subtleties of the Kalidasa’s language and poetic craft. She could easily prepare the ground for translation by selecting the text of Bengali recension.

Kanjilal had facilitated her task of determining the right recension arguing for its authenticity in his critical edition-'Reconstruction of Abhijnanasakuntalam.' It is critically constructed on the basis of the old manuscripts which were not so easily available to Jones. She also consulted the Devanagri recension with the commentary of Raghav Bhatt. It is the most authentic interpretation and probably was not available to Jones. Rajan feels that the Bengali text is more satisfying.

DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH

Courtship

Jones after the publication of the translation devotes less space for courtship in Act 3: “It must be for it must be confessed that the whole of Dushyanta's conversation with his buffoon, and great part of his courtship in the hermitage might be omitted without any injury to the drama.” (Jones 372).
Dr Rajan says that it presents the courtship as well as the conflict of Shakuntala’s mind in some detail. The stanza at the end of act three reveals something of the complexity of the king’s character. To Rajan again, it was a window to peep into west with the eyes of eastern cross-cultural translation. It is but natural to encounter with the problem of cross-cultural translation with the hybrid understanding of colonial and post-colonial romantic ideas.

Jones has accepted in the preface that the scholars of diverse philosophical religious trends and inhabitants of the various nations of Europe and India can read and misread the text according to their own sensibility. “I am convinced that the tastes of men differ as much as their sentiments and passions, and that, in feeling the beauties of art, as in smelling flowers, tasting fruits, viewing prospects, and hearing melody, every individual must be guided by his own sensations and the incommunicable associations of his own ideas.” (Jones 371)

Yet, it will remain a fine study of the confluence of cultural and literary studies, which without coming to a conclusive established interpretation will always remain in flux as Kalidas says the old is not completely gold nor the new is made of a baser metal. Their amalgamation would dispel the alien sense of diversity from the Indian mind as Rajan says Kalidas uses such phrases as always have a specific significance both in ancient and modern context. ‘Indra’ is called the breaker of dark clouds: “The breaker of Dark Clouds (dark forces) to let light shine through suggests in the context that the dark delusion clouding the King’s memory is destroyed through Indra’s power or compassion.” (Rajan 19)

It has an implication that the concept of translator is not limited to the imposition of a literary, linguistic or cultural current. The need is to present trends and patterns without any cultural distortion. In this perspective, it becomes necessary to examine the directions of both the translators to understand their sources of inspiration and translated method which can be apprehended to some extent with their own view on the mythology, linguistic, cultural and sociological levels in their transformed pattern without any distortion by English and Indian readers. The quest is how far it is intelligible to both the readers and how the differences between eastern and western can be mitigated by removing the linguistic and cultural complexities.

### PREFACE

Thus, Jones implicitly suggests in his preface that western and Indian readers can only be delighted by their reciprocity of understanding and enjoying each other literary manners. Rajan hasn’t mentioned in acknowledgement, preface and bibliography (except some stray opinion of Jones in the context of Kalidasa’s dates) that she has perceived the translation of Jones and was benefited by it at any stage. Rajan doesn’t give any hint of the achievements and limitations of Jones translation but discusses on the matter of translation and the traits of Kalidasa’s text specifically and accepts that:

“We endeavor to provide the best approximation to the original not only within the limitations set by our own abilities but more so within those set by the receiving language.” (Rajan 17)

### METHODOLOGY OF TRANSLATION

We now encounter the matter and methodology of translation. Both the languages have different semantic and syntactical structures. According to Figueira:
“Sanskrit verses have very strict and definite metrical forms, complex patterns of assonance and alliteration and qualities of rhythm and musicality, it is difficult to render them directly into another language.” (M Williams xiii)

To bring appropriateness into the text, Jones resorts to prose translations and avoids adding any verified expression. M Williams laments on his occasionally weakened substitution for bold and vivacious phrases. “His delicate expression of refined love and idea grand in their simplicity his diluted by repetition and amplification.” (M Williams 23).

To render the Sanskrit text in a modern language in an interlinear version, Jones first translates it into Latin because of its close resemblance to Sanskrit language. In his article published in 1786 as entitled ‘The Sanscrit Language’ he writes: “The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have spring from some common source.” (Jones 301)

From Latin he rendered into English word for word:

“I then turned it word for word into English, and afterwards, without adding or suppressing any material sentence, disengaged from the stiffness of a foreign idiom, and prepared the faithful translation of the Indian drama.” (Jones 367)

Dr Rajan also strives to provide the best of approximation of the original within the limitations set by the receiving language. She enumerates the various points of dissimilarities in the patterns of Sanskrit language which create hurdle in an authentic translation. Its distinctive features are its highly inflected language:

“The extensive use of compound words and an array of synonyms with slight nuances of meanings that color the expression of what is being said. The in flexional structure and the use of compound words give the language a tightly knit compactness which is of importance in poetry; this compactness suffers from some disillusion in translation.” (Rajan 17)

It is a creditable for William Jones that with the help of minimal source material of the times, he traces the history of Sanskrit drama and dramaturgy though he does not mention the early Sanskrit Drama the ‘Mrichhkatikam’ The Clay Cart which was later on mentioned by M. Williams in his Preface.

**TITLE**

Clearly the translators perform their job of rendering the title according to their intent and their understanding of the main sensibility of the drama. All the titles may be divided according to the emphasis on ring (the thing) and recognition (the person).

Jones Translates it as ‘The fatal Ring (1789)’, Rajan translates it as ‘Recognition of Sakuntala’ (1989). From 1789 to 1989 some other titles came up summarizing –Sakuntala or the Lost Ring (1855) M. Williams, Shakuntala or the recovered Ring (1894) A. Hjalmar Edgreen, Sakuntala and the Ring of Recollection (1984) Barbara Stolen Miller.

The translators have to establish the relative importance of the thing of recognition, the signet ring, the person of recognition and the act of recognition. The dramatist has explicitly suggested at places that ring will play an auspicious part in reinstating the lover in their former position. Their destiny of ‘Chakravak” is a transitory phase.
“The spell which it raised shall be wholly removed when her lord shall see the ring.” (M. Williams 58)

“Madh. Do not despair: the fatal ring itself an example that the lost may be found. Events which were foredoomed by Heaven must not be lamented.” (Jones 6.104)

From the source text Jones replaces the word “see” the expression denoting ‘recognition’, and later the word remembers is interchanged to “recognize”. Rajan retains the very word recognition for “Abhijyan” in Durvasha’s speech and later on in Priyamvada’s speech “he stripped the signet ring with name inscribed on it on her finger as remembrance. Both the usages are according to the order of the text but contrary to the order of Jones. It is most probably due to prerogative power of the translator as the ring is not only the reverential sign of recognition as it failed to produce evidence at the right time in the court.

NAVAN ANGUKIEA MEV

At another stage when Shakuntala sees the ring on Dushyanta’s finger she says “ah that fatal ring.” (Jones132).

It appears as it is disastrous, deadly ring that played havoc with their lives and decided the fate of lovers, creating much hue and cry about the fatal proof of their self-evident love and marriage. The entire perspective of translation of Abhigyan Sakuntalm by Jones is centered on the sense of ‘fatality.’ Apparently, it looks like the title of a gothic novel of a forlorn lover with a perilous magical ring. No doubt at many places, the King, the Clown and Sakuntala call it a fatal ring. Translator allows himself to be attached to its own tragic interpretation relying on the implications of the succeeding Shlokas. The epithet fatal seems to have been accepted by Jones as the power of fate which is beyond “controlling everything that happens in a way that human being can’t control”. (Collins 520.)

Chandra Rajan doesn’t see the significance of adding adjectives to fatal ring. Though both the lines in form and content run parallel, but an ironic contrast conveys different senses of both renderings. “No, don’t talk like this that the ring itself proves that reunion that is destined to happen can come about in the most unexpected manner.” (Rajan 253.)

Though in Source Text no word for fatal is used though suggestive indication is there, in other translations the concept of fatal is only suggested and predestined or intended nor preordained. But Sakuntala also praises the controlling power of fate when she hears that the recovery of the ring has restored his memory. “Its influence has been great, since it brought back the lost confidence of my husband.” (Rajan 132).

Here the expression (Vishmam) (odd) creates trouble, but positively, it means the ring didn’t appear at the right time to give a clear proof of their marriage, but later he did a just thing.

“When I failed in convincing my Lord the thing has succeeded and done just thing”.

Here the suggestion of reshaping the destiny of the couple is not evident as the text doesn’t give much help in this regard.

The ring is mischievous and untrustworthy in other translations. “The ring was to blame in allowing itself to be lost at the very time”. (M. Williams.) Some of the problems can be guessed at from the explanation that Miller offers about the play’s title in the notes ‘Sakuntala and the Ring of Recollection.’ This is not a literal rendering of the Sanskrit compound Abhijnanasakuntalam.
In the title the term ‘Abhigyan’ means recognition, recollection and remembrance. It also implies sign or token of recognition. The dramatic effect could only be caused by not recognizing Shakuntala by the King under the influence of a curse which could only be dispelled on perceiving the signet ring by the king but as she dropped it while bathing in the river.

The entire action of the drama moves on the wheels of recognition. The signet ring as lost and found plays the major role. But the significance of recognition does not end here. The more attractive part of the drama is the recognition of the heroine through the recognition of the son. Even in Act 1 she is recognized by the King as his perfect wife, through the recognition as establishment of her caste. Thus, the whole play is the sequence of recognition which also carries a philosophical importance in Shaivite fate. A more exact translation of the title might be where the entire compound refers to the implied word Natakas (drama), and a word like smrita (remembered) may be supplied according to a rule of Sanskrit grammar governing elision in compound verbs.

MYTHOLOGICAL ALLUSIONS

English translators both from West and East sometimes attempt to bring about the whole sequence of mythical allusion in a particular context either through a bunch of words or through improper attributive names of gods. The lack of proper detail and the otherness of myth present only the figurative expression before the reader, mostly western as a mode of simile and not as a symbolized myth; both the translators Jones and Rajan fail to grasp this mythical significance.

A good deal of the usages in Abhigyan Sakuntalam are in the form of epithets of deities and mythical figure who can be recognized only by devotees and scholars. (Trisotram) 7/3 Ganga, (Neellohit) Shiva7/35, SaptSapti (Sun), Shatkratu (Indra), Purush Kesari (Narshingha) are such usages. Jones is very eager to explain the allegorical significance of these deities. There are characters Marichi, Kashyap, Aditi and Diti in the drama. He speaks about the patterns and allegories in the Preface.

As they are in a play for theatrical performance only the most informed linguistic or scholar audience can understand, but there is some author’s intent or contextual constraints which an ideal reader knows and want to know. So the translator is obliged to retain the form of epithets allied with theistic etymology and expand it to incorporate the name of the deity. Trisotram or triple streamed Ganga has been translated by various translators incorporating both functional and symbolic representations. Sir Jones’ translation is the typical example of a transposition of epithets without naming the unexpressed deity. However, Rajan does name the deity and follows it in notes “her home and resting place the firmament”:

“The path of the wind Pravaha, hallowed
By Vishnu’s wide stepping second stride,
And free of all worldly taints:
Its current bears along the Triple- streamed Ganga.” (Rajan 4.267)

A more noteworthy point is the “untranslatability” of function of the word ‘Parivah’ which can only be explained in commentaries. M.R. Kale in his long commentary on the word ‘Parivah’ doesn’t give any synonyms in English.
Nearly all the translators fail in this aspect. They call this ‘the way of the wind’ (Parivah).” This they call the path of the wind. (Parivah). (M.R.Kale)

Hazalmer takes a long course to give a tentative synonym:

“The pathway of the coursing wind which moves the triple Ganges” (M. R. Kale 270).

The main point in this quatrain remains “The triple coursed river”, “The path way of the wind named Parivah”, “Vishnu’s second stride”, “The situation of sky” and “The movement of stars in their proper courses”.

The word ‘Pratitshta’ is misleading. It is generally translated as prestige, dignity, respectability but here it means “Situated in heaven.”

Raghai Bhatt comments:

Monnier Williams leaves the expression untranslated only as “reveals heaven as spanned by Vishnu.” This is also the case with Hazalmer who neglects it but William Jones provides dignity to this expression. He remolds the quatrain to translate it in his own way.

“This is the way which leads along the triple river, heaven’s brightest ornament, and causes you luminaries to roll in a circle with diffused beams, it is the course of a gentle breeze which supports the floating forms of gods; and this path was the second step of Vishnu, when he confounded the proud Vali.” (Jones 7.121)

Nitamaskam

“Nitamaskam” is not altogether uncomplicated expression as it has been translated variously on symbolic and denotative levels. Jones explains various myths and allegories as of the second step of Vishnu when he confounded the proud Vali. He concentrates only on second step of Vishnu and leaves here the phrase Nitamaskam which is translated by Rajan as free of all worldly taints.

There is a mention of Vali’s legend in the original quatrain but he does not lose any important feature of the allusion imported in this translation.

The word “Nitamaskam” might have confounded him also. The word is absent in his rendering connotes free from darkness and sin. Rajan delimits it to include all worldly taints. According to Miller it is “freed from the darkness by Vishnu’s second stride. “Dispelling the darkness and worldly sins” are blended in the single expression by Monnier Williams. It is the same path which once was sanctified by the divine impressions of the foot of the Vishnu. (M. Williams 177) One need not be confounded as every translation has its own singular charm.

The transformation of the textual myth operates in distant form at various stages. William Jones accepts the limits of such translations in his preface. The machinery of the drama is taken from the system of mythology and which it would require a volume to explain.

Let us see other myths. Jones explains the myths to provide information about Indian myths and allegories to western readers. Sometimes he speaks of their derivations and sometimes about the story attached to them. There is no good reason to discard them but citing them as part of the text may create confusion while their absence destroys the poeticism of drama.
“Could Aruna dispel the shades of night if the deity with a thousand beams had not placed him before the car of the
day?” (Jones 7.120)

“Could Aruna dispel darkness if the thousand rayed sun Did not place him in the forefront as his charioteer?”
(Rajan Loom of time 7.267)

No doubt Saptasapti is an epithet of the Sun but here he is the master of the chariot driven by seven horses and he is
not attributed here as a deity with thousands beams. It’s proper epithet is Sastrarashmi.

The expression ‘Pina’ is a proper name of Shiva with a bow. He is chasing the Daksha’s yagya impersonated as a
deer. Shiva is in an enraged mood which does not befit the term Mahesh associated with his beneficent gesture.
Rajan though renders it as ‘Pinaki the Lord’, but does not exhibit the function of the allusion either in translation or
in glossary.

“Suta, I seem to see before my very eyes
Pinaki, the lord, chasing the deer.” (Rajan 1.6.172)

“Dushyant, I see before me, as it were, the God Mahesha chasing a hart,
With his bow, named Pinaka, braced on his left hand.” (1.1)

If the Greek or the western mythology is imposed upon Sanskrit imagery it seems like a paradox. There are
allusions of ‘Danu’ or Danav at many places which Rajan replaces with ‘Titan’ which is Greek in origin. In the
Encyclopedia of Gods Titans is clearly sated as: “A race of gods. Greek. The secondary group of deities in the
pre-Hellenic pantheon.” (307)

“The Titans, by the fierce claws of godhead descended lion-like.” (Rajan 7.3.266)

“The Titans are your arrow’s target by Indra ordained.” (Rajan 6.34.264)

In the same way:

“O Lord Love! O dolphin-banne red God! I bow before you.” (Rajan 6.3.248)

Kaamdev the god of love who bears an emblem of fish in his banner has been made out to be a peculiar
expression of Dolphin, an emblem of a different culture altogether. It is neither adequate nor acceptable in this context. The
dictionary equivalent listed for Dolphin is ‘porpoise-like sea animal’ but this dolphin is not at all a fish described in
the original text.

TRISHANKU

Some rendering adheres only to the literal aspect of the text. But Jones feels that by adding a phase of mythical
content, the allusive or allegorical significance and its dramatic beauty could be represented. A few mythical
metaphors or allusions are figurative expressions of irony. Here Jones explains the allegory to an extent but Rajan is
satisfied only with an ambiguous hint. (‘Between mid-air is not attached with the myth.’)

“Madhava (laughingly): Stay suspended between them, both like king Trishanku between heaven and earth, when
the pious man said rise and the god of Swarga said Fall.” (Rajan 2.33-34)
“Madhava (laughingly): “Hang in between, suspended in mid-air like Trishanku.” (Jones 2.197)

PRAKRITI

A cross cultural translation becomes a more complex phenomenon, if the various layers of mythical religious allusions and sentiments connotations stem from individual words of source language. For instance, the word Prakriti has a number of connotations which are exploited by Kalidas in Abhigyanasakuntalam at various stages and contexts. They have been summed up through ambivalence in its valedictory benediction.

At the end of the play, Kashyap asks Dushyanta what other blessing can be granted him to be fulfilled. Dushyanta says in the altruistic mode:

“Kashyap, Let Saraswati, the goddess of liberal arts, be adored by all readers of the Veda; and may Shiva, with an azure neck and red locks, eternally potent and self-existing, avert from me the pain of another birth in this perishable world, the seat of crimes and of punishments.” (Jones 7.139)

“May the Self- Existent Lord who unites in Himself
The dark and the light,
Whose Infinite Power pervades this Universe
Annihilate forever the round of my births.” (Rajan 7.35.281)

The word Prakriti is a panacea for all that is wanted by the protagonist and his lady love. The play begins with the benediction containing the word Prakriti, earth the natural parent of all. M. Williams translates it as: “The earth by sages called the place of birth of all material essences and things.”

Rajan’s rendering is clear:

“The first Creation of the Creator:
That Bearer of Oblations offered with holy Rites:
That which is proclaimed the universal womb of seeds:
That which fills all forms that breathe
With the breath of life.” (Rajan 169).

Nature the elemental force is the crux of the play. Dushyanta is attracted to Shakuntala as he intuitively likes a life in the lap of nature more than urban society, “the forest vines excel the garden vines in charm.”

Shakuntala is nurtured by nature. At the time of her departure, the trees of the forest family bless her. Grazing deer drop grass peacock stop dancing. There is the King who resides in the royal palace which according to Sharadvad “is like a house in flame” and the city submerged in pleasures and the result is King’s longing for an empty mirage (Mrigtrishnika). So Dushyanta asks that the King should see in nature “that is ours” beyond materialistic pursuits.

All the protagonists in Kalidas’ dramas and poems indicate their communion with nature. Dilip, Shiva, Gauri, Puru and Yaksha all regain their identity in the lap of nature.
Prakriti also means ‘minister’ i.e. councilor; the king should remain in constant communion with his councilors and ministers. Had the king cherished this attitude the tragedy would not have occurred, says Sharangav “A willful act unchecked always causes pain thus does unbridled impulse destroy a person.” (240).

There are other connotations of nature: propriety, natural grace and ‘natural behavior’.

A few other translators have amalgamated such derivations but it is difficult to bring all the images and the specific features of drama in a single word in English. The word ‘nature’ which reminds us of the dictum ‘back to nature’ can help little in this respect. Nature also means the sum total of forces at work in the universe but this also is an ambiguous concept. Still in some translations the word ‘nature’ appears in its original sense.

‘May the king serve nature’s good”. (Barbara S. Miller 176).

VICHINTAMANSA

Vichintamansa has been translated by S. Radhakrishana long after Jones in the same explicit phrase. Jones and Radhakrishnan both are close to the text. As “it is an echo of Gita Meditating on me alone” (S. Radhakrishana) “He on whom thou art meditating, on whom alone thy heart is now fixed, while thou neglectest a pure gem of devotion who demands hospitality, shall forget thee when thou seest him.” (Jones 4.57)

Sage, You who do not notice me,
A hoard of holy merit
Standing at the door,
Because you lost in thoughts of one
To the exclusion of all else,
You shall be lost in his thoughts:
Though you goad his memory hard,
He shall fail to remember you. (4.1.215)

The word meditating is most significant as it is by a spiritual union, through the experience of which the devotee or aspirant mentioned in Bhagavad-Gita attains security from all cares and sorrows. This occurs when the lord takes up all burdens and cares of his devotees.

But in Sakuntala the approach is paradoxical. It is in form of an antithesis related with the theme of the play on a complex way. An intertextual appropriation in modern literary theory based on the absorption and transformation of the echoes of the earlier texts determines the main concept in a different rather parodic or ironical ways. The reader who is acquainted with Gita will recognize this discourse in a different universe of deceit, conceit and fatal irony. He sees in identical frames of Gita and Sakuntala the ironic contrast as shown in Eliot’s Wasteland as it is of disintegration of human Faith. The translator’s ability is in vivifying the recurrences of the image in them.

The impossibility of absolute fidelity in translation along with the related connotations of literary theory arises to a large extent in the case of translating Abhijnanasakuntalam. For the translation has to contend not only with the
theme and plot that does not outwardly amount to much, but also deal with terms and nuances that hide an entire process. Firmly lodged in the cultural context, these render the task almost impossible by being perfectly translatable in either language, yet hiding its meaning in both. The difficulties in fact prove to be a perfect illustration of the reader response theory that lays so much emphasis on subjectivity.

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