Realizing a Subaltern *Dream*: The Politics of Language and Translation in Habib Tanvir's *Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*

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Introduction

Shakespeare's texts first came to India with the British East India Company in the eighteenth century as entertainment for its employees.[1] Given that education was an important part of the colonial apparatus, writers like Shakespeare and Milton became "standard fare" in government schools in India by the mid-nineteenth century (Viswanathan 54). Since the mid-nineteenth century Shakespeare's work has been translated and adapted into several Indian languages. Many of these adaptations, especially of *Dream*, "understand language to be riddled with conflicts that are the legacy of colonialism and class or communal conflict" (Harris 64). This is true of Habib Tanvir's 1993 translation/adaptation *Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*,[2] hereinafter *Kamdev*. It begins thus: the stage is bare apart from a man in a white dhoti[3] wearing garlands of marigold flowers around his neck, wrists, and forearms. He is wearing what seems to be a traditional hat and playing a tune on a snake charmer's pipe. He begins in a seated

[1] See Poonam Trivedi's introduction to the volume *India's Shakespeare* for a detailed account.

[2] Harris translates the title as "The Love-God's Own Springtime Dream" (56). The MIT Global Shakespeares Archive translates the title as "The Love God's Own, A Springtime Dream."

[3] A kind of sarong worn by men and tied in a fashion that resembles loose trousers.

position, moves onto his knees, then stands up. After three minutes of his solo performance he exits,[4] and his tune is replaced by vibrant music starting offstage heralding the entrance of Duke Theseus, Hippolyta, and the Duke's entourage amid raucous laughter. They discuss the plans for their wedding and then leave. A member of the company enters with two small wooden boxes, the only props on the bare stage, marking the transition to the first scene of Quince, Bottom, and company.

The use of the snake charmer's pipe and the bare stage are a sign of things to come—a blend of folk traditions and a minimalist aesthetic. This visual framing sets the stage for a production that adopts a range of translational strategies and uses different languages to reflect and challenge class-based hierarchies in postcolonial India. While many translations of Shakespeare's plays Indianize locations and names of characters, Tanvir retains the Athenian location and names. He does not, however, translate the entire play. In Shakespeare's play there are mainly three groups of characters – the Athenian elite; the fairies; and the "rude mechanicals" (3.2.9).[5] In Tanvir's translation the forest adventures of the young Athenians are omitted, with Lysander and Demetrius only appearing in the last scene. Instead, most of the plot shifts between the mechanicals–presented as local Athenians who speak in a local Chattisgarhi

[4] Poonam Trivedi notes that "the performance began with the keening of the snake charmer's pipe, and successive audiences have agreed that a veritable enchantment was enacted" ("Folk Shakespeare" 181).

[5] All citations from *Dream* are from the Folger Digital Edition of the play edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine.

dialect–and the fairies, who speak in Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani.[6] In postcolonial India, Shakespeare in English or indeed Shakespeare's English, is the purview of the elite. Hindi is an official language, and Chattisgarhi is neither an elite nor an official language.[7] Examining the interplay between these three languages in Tanvir's version, I show how Tanvir taps into the subversive potential of *Dream* in order to bring to the fore and question the inequalities present in post-independence India.

An important aspect of Tanvir's intervention is the framing of the rude mechanicals, who are members of a subaltern class, as artists.[8] A clear instance of this is when they first arrive on stage. In Tanvir's translation of "Here is the scroll of every man's name" (1.2.4), Quince says: "yeh mor list hai. Aima ek-ek kalakar ke naam likhay hai" [This is my list. In it the name of each

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[6] Different critics describe the language spoken by the fairies as Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani, which speaks to the slipperiness of the boundary between these languages. The published text I use has been printed in the Devanagari script (the script that languages like Sanskrit and Hindi use).

[7] See recent work by Chatterjee and Mookherjee on the relationship between accents, Indian English, and Shakespearean productions. Chatterjee in particular highlights the value ascribed to different English accents in India.

[8] I want to acknowledge the immense impact the work of Subaltern Studies has had on South Asian Studies by "offering insights on subalternity and its critique of the colonial genealogy of the discourse of modernity" (Prakash 1490). I use the framework of subaltern and elite to mark class-based hierarchies of "domination" and "subordination" (Prakash 1477)

and every kalakar/artist/performer is written] (Tanvir, *Kamdev* 6).[9] "Every man" is translated as "ek ek kalakar" [each and every kalakar/artist/performer]. From our first introduction to the mechanicals, these characters identify themselves as artists. This self-representation is important because it offers a counterpoint to the manner in which members of subaltern communities are often seen.

In this essay, I analyze the published translation and a video recording of a performance of the play, directed by Tanvir, which is archived in the MIT Global Shakespeares Archive. While the adaptation was originally developed and performed in 1993, the printed edition of the play I am using was published in 2001. The performance available through the MIT Archive was filmed on 24 February 2001 at the Nataka Bharathi *Shakespeare on Indian Stage* – national theater festival and seminar at Kasargod, Kerala, India. Since Tanvir both translated and directed the play, I read the archived performance and the published text as extensions of each other and view them as existing in a "reciprocal relationship" with "the Shakespearean 'work'" (Kidnie 5). This approach allows me to move beyond existing scholarship on Tanvir's adaptation, which considers his work in tandem with other Indian productions, and focus on how Tanvir uses the specificities of the characters and plot of *Dream* to subvert the status quo.

Several scholars have discussed Tanvir's adaptation in relation to other twentieth century Indian productions and adaptations. In her essay on "Folk Shakespeare," Poonam Trivedi considers Tanvir's production alongside other post-Independence productions, including Utpal Dutt's *Macbeth* (1954), Vidyadhar Gokhale's Marathi adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, *Madanachi Manjari* (1965), B.V Karanth's *Barnam Vana* (*Macbeth* 1979), and two Kathakali versions of

[9] All translations and transliterations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Othello. Her essay is in dialogue with scholarship from the 1990s that saw certain kinds of adaptations as "producing 'a kind of pollution of Shakespeare'" (172). She argues for the "pollinating" effect of certain kinds of interculturalism and indigenization projects and goes on to advocate for these "local" productions being considered as a part of the "'Global' agenda" (172, 190).[10] Her analysis of Tanvir's production is based on watching the performance in the 1990s, an interview she conducted with him, and other published interviews. Vikram Singh Thakur also examines the published translation in a chapter titled "Performing Shakespeare in Post-Independence India," alongside work by other directors including Utpal Dutt and B. V. Karanth. Both Thakur and Trivedi situate the production within a post-Independence theatrical and translational context. Jonathan Gil Harris draws on work by Jyotsna Singh to discuss the language politics of this production in a chapter titled "Masala Languages" that focuses on adaptations of *Dream*. In sum, existing scholarship has aimed to trace broader trends by locating Tanvir's adaptation within the tradition of Indian Shakespeare.

I build on this scholarship – which highlights the language politics of the play and situates it within a larger Indian context – by focusing entirely on Tanvir's adaptation and looking at both the performance and the published translation. I do this to foreground the language and class politics of this particular translation and the way in which Tanvir engages with Shakespeare, as well as to think about the adaptation/translation in a manner that bridges the gap between the text and the performance. In section one of this article, I provide a contextual

[10] See Anna Stegh Camati's essay in this special issue for an analysis of a Brazilian version of *Dream* that invites a reassessment of the global local dichotomy so central to Global Shakespeares.

analysis of this version by foregrounding the translation terminology used, Tanvir's background and relationship to Shakespeare, and the linguistic context of postcolonial India in relation to the languages of *Kamdev*. In section two, I close-read the text and the performance to show how *Kamdev* succeeds in realizing a subaltern *Dream*. I conclude that reading the text and the performance in tandem allow us to see Tanvir's vision and the ways in which the performers exceed this vision to create a political, Indian version of *Dream*.

Section One: Theoretical and Historical Context

This section lays the groundwork for the close reading in section two by parsing certain Hindi terms associated with translation. It also outlines Tanvir's training, approach, and relationship to Shakespeare, as well as the linguistic contexts of *Kamdev*. While the close reading in section two helps make an argument about *Kamdev*, this context provided in this section allows me to use *Kamdev* to make a larger argument about translation and Tanvir's political project.

Previously in this essay, I have used the English terms "translation," "version," "adaptation," and even "translation/adaptation"[11] to refer to Tanvir's play. Similarly, Indian languages offer us a multiplicity of ways of thinking about the movement of texts between languages and cultures. In her introduction to the collection *Poetics of Modernity*, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker argues that:

> there is a fundamental theoretical distinction to be made between two forms of exchange: interlingual translation, and intercultural or transcultural appropriation. The most

[11] In her introduction to the volume *Shakespeare/Text*, Claire M. L. Bourne makes the case for the versatility of the slash as an alternative to "and", "or", "versus," etc.

> common Indian terms for interlingual translation are *bhashantar* or *bhashanataran* (literally, the 'difference' or 'movement' of language) and *anuvad* (repetition or emulation). From the beginning of the modern period, however, the 'translation' of Western and world drama into Indian languages has consisted mainly in a form of transculturation for which the general Indian terms are *rupantar* or *rupantaran* (the 'difference' or 'movement' of form; 'changed or new form, transformation; version, rendering, adaptation') and *anuyojan* (the remaking of ancient narratives or unfamiliar forms of expression through a new artistic consciousness). (lxvi-lxvii)

The important distinction Dharwadker makes is analogous to the one between adaptation and translation, except that rupantar and anuvad have more specific connotations than their English counterparts. In my work I usually adopt the terminology used by the translator. In this instance, the question of translation versus adaptation is central when one looks at the published version of the play. The cover page of the published version of the text proclaims it "natya rupantar va nirdeshan Habib Tanvir" [rupantar of the play and direction by Habib Tanvir] while inside the book calls it "anuvad Habib Tanvir" [anuvad by Habib Tanvir]. In this instance, two different words that have been used to translate "translation"—rupantar and anuvad.

Thinking through Habib Tanvir's play as both a rupantar and an anuvad means a focus both on difference in form, as the term "rupantar" suggests, and on emulation, repetition, or explanatory repetition implied by anuvad. This production blurs the distinctions between these various kinds or arts of translation. In English, I will be using the word "translation" to encompass both rupantar and anuvad and the processes in between. Mark Fortier highlights the fact that translation is not limited to linguistic exchange in the play-text of Shakespeare's *Dream* but rather used in its most "expansive" sense - one where linguistic change signals a complete

transformation (1046). In act three, scene one, when Bottom appears with an ass's head, Peter Quince says to Bottom, "Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated!" (3.1.120). The notes in most modern editions of the play explain Shakespeare's "translated" as "transformed." With its emphasis on *form* this notion of translation is close to a rupantar*;* indeed, Bottom's rup or form changes on stage. In Tanvir's play, Quince says, "Bhagwan tor raksha kare Bottom, bhagwan tor raksha kare dost, te bilkul parivartit hoge ha bhaiya" (May god protect you Bottom, god protect you friend, you are completely changed brother) (*Kamdev* 30). Translation in the sense of transformation or rupantar is translated as "parivartit" or "completely changed." I see this phrasing as suggesting that *Kamdev* builds on the expansive use of translation in *Dream*. In Tanvir's case, this expansiveness means transforming Shakespeare - considered elite in India - into a vehicle of subaltern artistry and comradeship. In the example above, while Bottom transforms physically on stage via an ass's head, Quince still refers to him as dost (friend) and bhaiya (brother). Despite the change in form Bottom remains a friend, a brother, comrade in translation. Adopting such an approach allows Tanvir to use Shakespeare in a way best suited to his artistic and political project.

This translation needs to be situated within both the history of Indian translations of Shakespeare and Tanvir's oeuvre. With Shakespeare coming to India through British colonialism, the relationship between Indian theater and Shakespeare is always complicated. Vikram Singh Thakur notes that "Shakespeare has evoked at least three kinds of responses in post-colonial societies: one, a rejection as a representative of colonialism; two, of value as a 'universal' writer and a 'touchstone' of greatness; and three, of appropriation to suit the local socio-political-cultural purposes" (187). For Thakur, Tanvir's version belongs to the third category. While I agree with him in seeing Tanvir's production as an "appropriation," Tanvir's

own words about the performance hint at the discourse of the "universal" greatness of Shakespeare as reflected in the second category. Perhaps Shakespeare's canonical and mythic status makes this inevitable.

Tanvir's background, and his relationship to Shakespeare and translation, frame the politics of *Kamdev*. He was born in Raipur (in the present-day state of Chattisgarh) in 1923 and completed his education in Raipur and Nagpur. Then in 1945, he moved to Bombay, to pursue a career in acting in the movies. However, once he got there, he joined IPTA (the Indian People's Theatre Association).[12] Trivedi notes that both Tanvir and Utpal Dutt were members of IPTA and that Dutt's time with IPTA "converted him to the need to do relevant theater that would speak to the masses" ("Folk Shakespeare" 178). Such an influence can be seen in Tanvir's work too. After a time in Bombay and Delhi, he went to England and studied at RADA (the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) in the UK, where Shakespeare was a part of the curriculum. On his return to India, Tanvir gave a great deal of thought to what it means to do theater, and what theater should be in post Independence India. Indeed, Tanvir writes in his 1962 essay, "Waiting for the Playwright," "What in fact has to be consciously attempted is the use of our dying folk cultures and feudal classical cultures as well as assimilated ideas from the experience of other countries in the making of a new urban culture where none as yet exists" (217). He is advocating for an investment in folk forms and expressing a desire to create a new form of theater which would speak to the post Independence peoples of India. Eventually, this desire came to be firmly rooted in Chattisgarh, the state of Tanvir's birth in Central India, and linked to the Chattisgarhi

[12] The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), was "a nationwide cultural movement launched by the Communist Party of India" (Dharwadker, "The Really Poor Theatre" 119)

actors who formed a part of Tanvir's Naya Theatre company. In his work with Naya Theatre Tanvir combined Hindi theater with Chattisgarhi "folk" forms, a move that prompts Anjum Katyal to term Tanvir's work as "inclusive theatre." By using this term, Katyal suggests that Tanvir's theater broke down distinctions between the elite and the subaltern and was "not premised on imitation and exclusion but incorporated the tribal, the rural, the folk, the subaltern, in a fundamental and meaningful way while addressing important contemporary social and political issues, to form a truly original, indigenous theatre for today's India" (155). If this is indeed the case, what does it mean when such an inclusive theater, with its investment in originality and indigeneity, takes on Shakespeare?

One way to answer this question is to consider Tanvir's relationship to translating Shakespeare. Tanvir was interviewed, along with several other Indian theater practitioners, for an article titled "The Relevance of Shakespeare in India." This article was published in 1989, four years before Tanvir undertook the translation of *Dream*. He notes that "Shakespeare's translations are always dated. In Europe too. And each period demands a fresh translation" (Paul 10). He is suggesting that every translation is grounded in the socio-cultural context that produces it; a sentiment that is echoed by Mark Fortier in his discussion of Quebecois "tradaptations," which, as he remarks, are "very much tied to a specific place and time" (1049). In the instance of *Kamdev*, the specific context is the politics of language in post-Independence India and, given the themes of the play, the relationship between the elite and subaltern groups in the country.

In order to depict the hierarchies between elite and subaltern groups, Tanvir mobilizes the context of postcolonial India where language and politics are intertwined. For my purposes there

are three points I want to foreground. First, English education was introduced by the British in order to create an elite "class who may be interpreters between us [the British] and the millions whom we govern," to quote Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute of 1835 that dealt with English Education (359). English was and still is, in many ways, an elite language in India. Second, there was much debate and contestation from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century about what ought to be the "national" language of India. Chapter 1 of Part XVII of the Constitution of India states that "The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script" (Government of India, *Constitution* 212). As Javed Majeed notes, the term used is not "national" but "official" (44). I parse the politics of this development elsewhere,[13] but I want to highlight that in post-Independence India Hindi symbolizes the state and officialdom.[14] Third, Chattisgarhi is a dialect of Hindi.[15] If Hindi represents the standard, the official, then vis-à-vis Hindi Chattisgarhi represents the vernacular, the everyday, an "'impure' variant on a Hindi norm" (Harris 57). English, Hindi, and Chattisgarhi, therefore, represent different classes, different access to education, and a different relationship to the state and officialdom.

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[13] See chapter three of my PhD dissertation "In the Name of Shakespeare: (En)Gendering India through Translation," University of California, Irvine, 2020.

[14] There has been a long history of opposition to the imposition of Hindi as a national or pan-Indian language especially by the four states of Southern India. The BJP government that came to power in 2014 under the leadership of Narendra Modi has "an ideological agenda in making Hindi compulsory" (Sengupta)

[15] The Russian linguist G.A Zograph describes Chattisgarhi, Awadhi, and Bagheli as dialects of "Eastern Hindi" (31).

This background is important because from its conception, the issue of language was at the forefront for Tanvir, who was asked by a British theater company to translate Shakespeare in 1992. From the get-go, he envisioned a bilingual production that would incorporate his company as well as the English actors, settling on *Dream* "because it offered him the best way to work out the strategy of bilingualism. The Duke and his entourage would speak English; the people of the woods would converse in Urdu and the artisans would opt for their dialect" (Padmanabhan 10). The funded collaboration with the British company fell through, and with it did most of the plot surrounding the Duke's entourage that was originally conceived in English. What remained was the dichotomy of Hindi/Urdu and Chattisgarhi (Trivedi 181; Thakur 164; Harris 57). Not only does this division mark a class distinction, but it also allows for an exploration of the inequities and the power differentials between the various groups.

As a translation of a play that is as much about translation as it is about anything else, *Kamdev* is a version that seeks to reflect – and challenge – the socio-politics of the time. In it, the politics are equally about language and about valuing subaltern knowledges and artistry. Discussing the role of translation in the play, David Lucking says, "When Shakespeare seems to be transforming Ovid he is actually transforming another author who transformed Ovid: his English translator Arthur Golding" (142). In turn, Tanvir is transforming Shakespeare's transformation of Golding's transformation of Ovid in his Chattisgarhi presentation of Pyramus and Thisbe. Lucking also notes that "though they are ostensibly preparing their sketch for performance before a sophisticated Athenian palace, what Bottom and his companions are actually doing is Englishing the text just as Golding had Englished his" (47). The implication is that English is less sophisticated than the classical languages of Greek and Latin, but also that the mechanicals are making the text their own. Tanvir's Bottom, Quince, and company do just this

when they transform Ovid's tale in a Chattisgarhi vein. Margaret Tudeau-Clayton notes that the linguistic wordplay in the play undermines "definitions of the 'proper' character of English as of the collective national identity that goes with it" (15). Tanvir's use of Hindi and Chattisgarhi, peppered with English, puts pressure on Hindi as the language of the state and the national language. It envisions Chattisgarhi not as merely a dialect of Hindi that needs to be purified, whose speakers need to be assimilated into the nation, but as a language of artistry, and its speakers as artists with rich repertoires of knowledges. This is achieved through an expansive translational practice that helps us reconsider both translational terminology as well as elite assumptions of what counts as art and what languages produce art. In the next section I show how Tanvir achieves this vision in the text and performance of *Kamdev*.

Section 2: The Text and the Performance

In this section, I focus on three moments in the translation that best illustrate how Tanvir's text and performance use *Dream* to show and challenge the linguistic and class-based status quo. The first of these highlights the hierarchical relationship between Hindi and Chattisgarhi. The second focuses on the way subaltern peoples are depicted. The third explores how the translation negotiates the paternalistic attitude the elite have toward the subaltern within the play. I will discuss these in the broader established context of Tanvir's relationship with his performers. Together these three moments demonstrate that Tanvir is using Shakespeare, often considered "elite" culture in India, to transform *Dream* into a platform for subaltern artistry. Throughout, I will consider the unsettling implications of viewing *Dream* and its translation through this lens. I will ask to what extent the relationship between Tanvir–the elite director–and

his subaltern actors can be seen as paternalistic and whether *Kamdev* can rise above paternalism through its language politics and depiction of artistry.

The hierarchical relationship between Hindi and Chattisgarhi manifests most clearly through the interaction between Puck and the mechanicals in act three, scene one. In explaining why both Hindi/Urdu and Chattisgarhi are used in the translation, Tanvir has remarked that "the harassment of the artisans by Puck on a physical level would get reinforced by the use of a foreign tongue and that could be fun" (quoted in Padmanabhan 10). Despite being the "official" language—or perhaps because of this—Hindi is seen as a "foreign" language for the artisans. It is not benignly foreign but rather is a tool of harassment. In act three, scene one, Puck sees Quince, Bottom, and company rehearsing, and proceeds to put an ass's head on Bottom. In Shakespeare's play-text, Puck asks, as he sees the company rehearsing, "What hempen homespuns have we swagg'ring here?" (3.1.76). Tanvir translates this question as "yeh kaun hai? are yeh gram udyog ke do-char taane-baane" (Who are these [people]? Oh they are two or four taane-baane[16] of the Village/Cottage Industry) (*Kamdev* 28). The Folger Shakespeare Library Edition of the *Dream* glosses "hempen homespuns" as "country bumpkins, wearing homespun clothes woven from hemp" (72). Puck's characterization of these men as "hempen homespuns" has a patronizing air to it. In translation, however, the notion of home-spinning and Gram Udyog (village industry) has a different connotation. During the freedom movements, Gandhi, famously, spun cotton himself as a symbol of Indian sovereignty and protest against British

[16] *Taana Baana* literally means "warp and woof," the terms used in weaving to describe the longitudinal and latitudinal cross-hatching threads. The metaphor of weaving present in the English is carried through in translation.

colonialism. Since 1956—when the Khadi and Village Industries Commission was created—the government has supported village industries, and in cities products produced by the Gram Udyogs are often sold as "artisanal" products. On the other hand, with globalization and the markets opening up in the early 1990s, these products were often seen as "rustic" and looked down on. Depending on the audience member's perspective, their relationship to the Gram Udyog may be different, and Puck's insulting and patronizing tone might land in a different way. The tone could reflect the paternalistic attitude of the elite, or indeed the state, towards "helping" the "poor."[17]

If Puck and the standardized Hindi he speaks are reflective of the state and its programs, like the policies on the Gram Udyog, his words later in this scene can seem more ominous, or at the very least more political. Puck says, "I'll follow you. I'll lead you about a round" (3.1.107). Tanvir translates this as "main tumhare peeche hun, main tumhe kudaoonga, laakh tum chalo seedhe, gol main ghumaunga" (I am behind you, I will make you jump, as much as you try to go straight, I'll make you go around) (*Kamdev* 30). As Tanvir has noted in his interview, Puck harasses the artisans both physically and linguistically. While Tanvir says performing this linguistic harassment could be "fun," it also reflects the tension between the local and the state.

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[17] The website of the Commission states its "broad objectives" as "the social objective of providing employment," "the economic objective of producing saleable articles" and "the wider objective of creating self-reliance amongst the poor and building up of a strong rural community spirit" (Government of India, *KVIC*). With the opening up of the markets there are also corporations like FabIndia that markets handicrafts and handloom products in cities in India as well as overseas. See Lynch for more information.

The image of Puck following or being behind Bottom becomes further politically charged when in the performance Puck says these two lines in a menacing tone and then exits the stage. The chorus then comes on and sings these lines as well as the rest of the passage, while Puck is absent from the stage. This absence makes the two lines that he does say, and his tone while saying them, even more significant. I read this staging as suggesting that the state is herding the people in the village through the power of standard Hindi and the officialdom it represents. While this may be true, in the translation Chattisgarhi stands strong and its speakers are also depicted as being well-versed in different cultural traditions.

Furthermore, the Chattisgarhi-speaking mechanicals display cultural knowledge and authority elsewhere in Tanvir's adaptation. In act one, scene two, when the players are beginning their rehearsals for the play within the play, Quince says to Bottom: "You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day, a most lovely gentlemanlike man" (1.2.81-83). In Tanvir's version, Quince says, "tola pyramus ke siva au koi dusar part nahi mile, ka bhai pyramus ek gabru jawan hai. Thikana ke aadmi hai, jaise raanjha, farhad, punnu, Romeo aisan admi hai. Ek sharif, khubsurat aadmi" (you won't get any other part but Pyramus. Brother, Pyramus is a youthful man, a good kind of man, like Raanjha, Farhad, Punnu, Romeo-like man, A noble, beautiful man) (edited based on the performance, *Kamdev* 10). It is significant that the translation references both tragic romances from South Asia – *Heer Ranjha, Shirin Farhad, Sassi Punnu* – and Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Articulated not by the elite—fairy or otherwise—but by the mechanicals, the metatheatrical reference to Shakespeare as canon suggests an awareness of British colonial traditions and elite culture. It also emphasizes the mechanicals' ability to perform, translate, and transform Shakespeare's play. By highlighting their awareness of different canons and

traditions—folk and western—Tanvir depicts them as being, in their own way, cultured rather than merely "rude mechanicals." While Shakespeare's *Dream* mechanicals are also cultured, insofar that they are performing an Ovidian adaptation, Tanvir's addition of these tragic romances represents the inclusive and diverse repertoire of his own company. The theatrical knowledge expressed in Quince's words reflects this inclusivity, with the space it gives to different traditions – Punjabi (Ranjha), Persian (Farhad), Sindhi (Punnu), and British (Romeo). Katyal remarks that, "For Habib, his production was about 'different kinds of speech, different kinds of poetry, and different kinds of people within the same milieu.' This was an inclusive society, in other words, with space in it for everyone" (104). The inclusive society is not just a meld of South Asian/indigenous and British/colonial, but also reflects the diversity and heterogeneity within that which is indigenous or South Asian.

Critics applauded this inclusive vision, but this praise also throws the elite/subaltern relationship between the director and the performers into sharp relief. For instance, Deshpande writes, "If there is one theme that runs consistently through all his [Tanvir's] creative output it is the celebration of the plebian. The culture, beliefs, practices, rituals of the Chattisgarhi peasants and tribals,[18] their humor, songs, and stories have all given his theatre its vitality" (77). While I do think Deshpande is using the term "plebian" neutrally, comments like these instill a sense of discomfort. This feeling is tied to writing about the relationship between a relatively elite and

[18] There are different ethnicities in India, and the "tribals" were historically disparaged because of their ethnic background and customs. While this paper focuses mainly on the issue of language and class, and the question of ethnicity is beyond the scope of this paper, it is one that I want to flag as significant.

renowned theater director working and collaborating with Chattisgarhi nach[19] performers, who are, relative to Tanvir at least, subaltern. *Kamdev* lends itself to sitting with this discomfort as it explores directly the paternalistic attitude that the elite have with reference to the subaltern.

Tanvir's translation directly engages with this paternalism and stages a subaltern resistance through its treatment of the mechanicals' interlude. In act five, scene one, Theseus and Philostrate have a conversation before the staging of the play within the play by Bottom, Quince and Company. In response to Theseus' query about who the players are, Philostrate says: "Hard-handed men that work in Athens here, / Which never labored in their minds till now, / And now have toiled their unbreathed memories / With this same play, against your nuptial" (5.1.76-79). In Tanvir's translation, Philostrate says: "Athens ke kuch majdoor, jinke haathon me mahnat karte karte gatte pad gaye hai. Jinhone apni zindagi me kabhi dimagi kaam nahi kiya. Aur ab pahli baar us kalpana se jo unke paas hai hi nahi, unhone yeh natak tayyar kiya hai. Taki aaj yahan shaadi kii khushi me use pesh kar sake" (Some laborers from Athens, whose hands have got calluses from working so hard. Who have never in their life done intellectual work. And now for the first time, using their imagination – which they do not have – they have prepared this play. So that they can present it today on the happy occasion of the wedding) (Tanvir, *Kamdev* 48). The assumption behind Philostrate's lines, in translation, is that the company does not have "imagination" or access to imaginative works. This is despite the fact that the performance up to that point undermines this characterization, since the mechanicals have access to a diverse repertoire of tragic romances, as well as describe themselves throughout the translation as

[19] The local theater tradition of the "tribal actors from Chattisgarh" (Trivedi, "Folk Shakespeare" 180).

"*kalakar*" (artist/artisan/performer). Perhaps Philostrate is articulating an elite perspective where only certain kinds of genres and performances - performed by members of a certain class - count as art and as expressions of imaginative practice.

Kamdev challenges this through its portrayal of the mechanicals and the manner in which they express themselves. There are numerous instances when the generic "man" or "every man" is translated and transformed into "kalakar." For instance, in act four, scene two, when the company is bemoaning Bottom's absence, Quince says: "It is not possible. You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge Pyramus but he" (4.2.8-9). Tanvir translates this as "asambhav, pura shahr me koi kalakar haich nai, jon ha pyramus ke part kar liha" (Impossible, there is no kalakar in the entire city who can play the part of Pyramus) (*Kamdev* 44). Furthermore, Bottom even has a song where he exclaims "aisi kala hun main" (lit. "such an art am I"; or "I have such artistry"). In *Dream* Bottom asks Quince whether he is to play a "lover or a tyrant" (1.2.21). After being told that Pyramus is a gallant lover, Bottom extols his acting abilities and, remarking that his "chief humor is for a tyrant," delivers a monologue to showcase his talents, beginning with the line "The raging rocks" (1.2.29). Peter Womack points out that this monologue is "Bottom's memory, or Shakespeare's parody, of John Studley's translation of the pseudo-Senecan tragedy *Hercules Oetaeus*" (62). Womack calls Bottom a "fool" for reducing tyranny to "a style of performance" but suggests that, in Shakespeare, "it is always possible that the fool sees something wisdom overlooks" (62). In *Kamdev*'s act one, scene two, this monologue is translated as a song. The lyrics to the song - I have edited the text of the published version to reflect how the song was performed - are as follows:

Parvat garjan lage	the mountain thunders
Dar se sab jan bhage	Out of fear everyone runs

Do peeche dus aage.	Two behind ten forward
Aisi kala hun main	Such art am I
Main shankar ke pujari	I am Shankar's priest
Suraj meri savari	The sun is my ride
Thar thar sab nar nari	All men and women shudder/shiver/tremor
Kaisi bala hun main.	Such strength am I
Aisi kala hun main[20]	Such art am I (Tanvir, *Kamdev* 8)

This translation is not a direct translation of the parody: it is a transformation, a rupantar. It attempts to convey the point about tyranny as a style of performance, but this is done in a more direct and less parodic manner. Bottom's misremembering of a translation is transformed into a song, which the entire company sings in the performance. Bottom is at the front of the stage, and his voice stands out. However, the rest of the company is standing behind him towards the back of the stage, and it is clear that they are singing the song too. In the performance, the line, "aisi kala hun main" (such art am I), is repeated twice, an addition that is not in the printed version. The repetition emphasizes that these men see themselves as artists and performers, with the repetition forming a statement of who they are. This portrayal and the articulation of this self-image by actors who are not members of the elite is significant. Even if the relationship between Tanvir and the company is laced with paternalism, the moment when the company stands on stage and sings, "aisi kala hun main," to an audience who may well be elite is a moment that

[20] Vikram Singh Thakur cites this song in his analysis of the play. He notes, "The substitution for Phibbus (Phoebus) as *Shankar* (Lord Shiva) and his chariot as *suraj* (sun) is a little awkward," but does not remark on the framing of Bottom as a kalakar (163).

challenges us. It challenges us – audience, viewers, critics, reader – to consider what our notions of artistry are, and what Shakespeare means to us in relation to this production. In this moment Shakespeare is transformed, translated into a subaltern artistic practice.

Coda: Thou art transformed!

At the start of this paper, I began with the relationship between translation/adaptation, and through the analysis I have ended at transformation, translation. The comma for me is significant in that it signals a relationship between the two concepts - that translation can be a transformation, and that interlingual and intercultural transformation entails translation. Translation and transformation are connected and iterative yet separated from one another by the comma, signaling that they are not quite synonyms. This also evokes the relationship between anuvad and rupantar – the former conjuring both translation and (re)iteration and the latter both translation and transformation. Thinking about translation through the lens of both anuvad and rupantar, as Tanvir's translation invites us to do, can help us destabilize the source-centered fidelity-focused impulses of asking whether something is a translation. A close reading of both the performance and published text demonstrates how within *Kamdev* the translation itself engages and further challenges class and language-based hierarchies in postcolonial India. This is even more important when the source is Shakespeare, with all that his name evokes. Tanvir's textual metatheatrical reference to Shakespeare through Romeo does not just give characterization and artistic credibility to the mechanicals but highlights the relationship between the source and the translation/adaptation. This "reciprocal" relationship, to borrow from Kidnie, is deeply political when the source is Shakespeare. *Kamdev* affords its actors the space to make Shakespeare, once a tool of colonization, a tool to resist neo-colonial cultural and linguistic hegemonies.

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