

Gachak Andharee by Ashok Mankar &

Deenu's Bill by Prahlad Keshav Atre

Translated by UMESH KUMAR

Translator's Note

I must begin with a confession that I never had any interest in children's literature. My entry into the discipline is true serendipity! However, I am not the first and might not be the last either –to have had such an experience. One is reminded of Mary Wollstonecraft –the radical author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* –undergoing a similar experience. When Wollstonecraft began to learn German, she accidentally fell upon Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Moralisches Elementarbuch*. She translated the book into English as *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children*. In her translator's preface of the said book, Wollstonecraft considers her translation effort to be a mere exercise (in the German language) of language learning. I carry a similar experience. Though in my case, Marathi replaced German.

Learning a language is not just restricted to mastering *subject*, *object*, *predicate*, or its other formal features alone. One cannot deviate from what one reads through language –its semantic and cultural context. It is while negotiating Marathi children's fiction as a component of language pedagogy that I began to reflect and examine my own 'naturalized biases' towards children's literature. Further, it is during the course of co-translating a selection of Marathi children's literature into Hindi that I really began to appreciate the genre.

It is not uncommon for adults to have a trivialized view of children's literature. How paradoxical it is, then, that one of the most fascinating fields of adult inquiry –psychoanalysis – foregrounds the child and childhood as core specifics! Likewise, children's literature is normatively termed innocent;

taking the readers away from reality; conservative and an inevitable follower of resolution and redemption in its depictions. However, there are occasions where such stereotypes are challenged in children's literature. Contextualizing American children's fiction in the post-Columbus USA, Pattanaik (2002) calls such tendencies to be examples of *subversive innocence*. Employing select American writings as a trope, Pattanaik passionately argues to lay bare the 'adultist' agenda that attempts to conveniently push aside 'children's literature' and therefore, not worthy of attention. Pushing the traditional boundaries of 'innocence' factor in children's literature towards a subversive paradigm, Pattanaik, in fact, further foregrounds it to be a 'safety-valve' through which the mainstream writers present a critique of the dominant culture and its values.

Two of Marathi children's fiction presented here can be cited as instances of subversive innocence in the Indian context. *Gachak Andharee* is a highly subversive story. The word *Gachak Andharee* is a value-free word and carries no meaning. It is an adult's (Sada's) invention to scare the child (Gajanan). It is very likely that in the Indian context, adults have been playing these tricks on children from times immemorial. In my language Haryanvi, we have a word called *haaboo*. It will be a rewarding exercise to explore all such 'tricky' words across Indian languages and see if there is a common thread among them. I guess, in the absence of meaning, all such words rely on visual, aural, olfactory and animations effects embedded in them by their inventors. It is the senses, sounds and images that create the effect on the readers and thereby generate meanings.

Coming back to the story, *Gachak Andharee* comes into being to unsettle Sada's young son Gaja but ends up haunting Sada – her inventor. Very quickly, the focus of the story shifts from

the world of children to that of adults. Through his trick of imaginary *Gachak Andharee*, Sada wishes to befool and frighten Gaja but he himself ends up becoming helpless and terrified instead. Children's stories like *Gachak Andharee* lay bare the helplessness of adults in a world they themselves seem to control and dominate. With the hilarious turning of tables, the story subversively fractures 'adultist' agenda – unleashed against the child. Cashing on Sada's stupidity for a considerable time, the story amply demonstrates how adults can be implicated in their own tricks.

Deenu's Bill, on the surface, reads like a clichéd children's story dipped in didactic agenda of the adults for children. Generations of readers have loved the story for Deenu's innocence. However, frequent readings of the story before the translation made me realise that Deenu's innocence is not innate. In fact, he fights for his innocence and claims it by implicating the adults (his father and mother) in his quest to understand the concept of bill devised by the adult world. Notwithstanding the mother-child bond, the story eventually exposes the gendered division of labour in the adult world, though in a subtle manner. *Deenu's Bill* is strongly rooted in reality. It does not take children away from reality but to reality.

The child characters in both the stories are inquisitive –a quality that implicates their 'superior' adults. However, the readers will not take much time to discern that the child characters are themselves defacto implicated in the world they seek to subvert. Deenu and Gajanan both belong to the world they inhabit but in a fractured way. The curiosity element in both Gajanan and Deenu, perhaps, is an attempt to 'own' the (adult) world –the way their parents do. The stories display how language is a crucial power channel for both children and adults. Imitating the language of the bill –an adult activity,

Deenu attempts to get closer to the world of adults. Sada, with his linguistic coinage of *Gachak Andharee*, attempts to shut the adult world for Gajanan.

Attempts of translation usually demand the closest reading of the text. I conducted close readings of the stories during the two-year Marathi language course that I did at Banaras Hindu University. Thereafter, I co-translated and published both the stories from Marathi into Hindi. While undertaking the English translation, I unfailingly felt the twining impact of Marathi and Hindi versions. However, for the sake of consistency, I have foregrounded the Hindi version as the source text here. It needs little explanation that while carrying the English version, the translator in me was (un) consciously guided by the content, style of narration and impact value of both the Marathi and Hindi versions.

With respect to the storyline, I have attempted to keep parallels with the original. With respect to language, my translation seeks to be similar but not identical to the source text(s). No two sets of languages can be identical. English as a language, like all others, has her own rhythm. To me, it is the rhythm that ensures the readability. Thus, to ensure a hassle-free reading, heavy diction is deliberately dispensed with. However, an occasional 'heavy' word is inducted consciously –with hope. Hope should be central to all our translation attempts. In the present context, it is hoped that stories like these also possess the potential and possibility to make it to the school textbooks. In such a scenario, the introduction of a few unfamiliar (but no less important) words in the text shall enhance the linguistic capabilities/vocabulary building of the students. Footnotes, glossary and italicisation of words are heavily resisted in translation unless absolutely necessary. Children have no respect and patience for such interventions within the texts! Children possess a strong 'make-believe' world. As a result,

the ‘Speaking Tiger’ and ‘*Gachak Andharee*’ are addressed with ‘he’ and ‘she’ pronouns in the English translation. While translating into Hindi, we were not able to look into the publication history of individual stories. I have attempted to fill the gap here by providing a detailed note about the publication timeline, at the end of translations.

Gachak Andharee

Gachak Andharee by Ashok Mankar^{*}

Translated by UMESH KUMAR

Once upon a time, there lived a happy couple called Sada and Sakhu in a village. They had a son named Gajanan. Sada was in the *Ghada-Matka*¹ business. He would sell his items in the nearby markets. Sada often carried his goods on the back of his Donkey. While returning from the market, the Donkey carried Sada on its back. If something remained unsold, he would keep those items in the houses of his friends, situated nearby the market.

All was going well. Little Gajanan now started to understand that his father visits the market twice-thrice a week. Gaja would insist to accompany his father to the market every time. It had become difficult for both Sada and Sakhu to convince him anymore.

One day, Sada decided to visit the market in the neighbourhood. Sakhu too woke up early and packed his lunch. Gajanan was in deep slumber all the while. Sada had already kept his stock for today’s business in his friend’s

¹ Refers to the pottery business – making and selling of earthenware in the present context.

house. The house was not far from the market place. He just needed to mount his Donkey. Sada had left the animal for grazing during the night. He was almost ready to go and find his Donkey. As soon as he got into his sleepers, Gajanan woke up.

Seeing his father walking away, little Gajanan jumped from the cot and started making noises –I am coming too! I am coming too! Sada became anxious.

There was heavy rain and hailstorm in Sada's neighbouring village in the night. Meanwhile a Tiger entered Sada's village in search of shelter. Trying to hide here and there, finally, the Tiger took shelter in the ruins behind Sada's house. He sat near the wall adjacent to his house.

The Tiger could clearly overhear the ongoing conversation in Sada's house. Sada was trying to convince Gajanan, "my boy, I would have taken you along but it is still night and quite dark."

Gaja reacted sharply, "doesn't matter, still, I will come, I will come with you."

"My child, the jackals venture out at this hour."

"No worries."

"But they take away little children."

"No problem. Let them do that. I will come, still."

"Wolves also come there!"

"Let them come. I am coming means I am coming."

"On the way ahead, there is a dark forest and it is the time the Tiger comes out from the jungle".

"Hmn! don't scare me *baba* –I am not scared of any Tiger-*Vaiger*."

The Tiger sitting at the back of the wall thought –

‘What a stubborn child this boy is!’

“What if the Tiger eats you,” –asked Sada.

Hearing this Gaja made faces and said, “If he will eat me, will you be spared? Nothing doing! I know you don't want me to come that's why you are scaring me.”

Sada glared into Gaja's eyes and said, “All right. But don't curse me later if the *Gachak Andharee* crosses our path in the dark.”

Gaja got startled now, “*Gachak Andharee?*”

“Yes, *Gachak Andharee.*”

“But what is this *Gachak Andharee?*”

“Oh! You don't know about *Gachak Andharee?*”

“*Bacchu!* *Gachak Andharee* can eat a full Tiger –just as a morsel of food. What if she meets us? There can't be a more dangerous animal than her.”

“Dangerous?” Gaja's courage went for a toss now.

He ran to his mother and said, “I am not coming. You go.”

Sada's trick had worked.

On the other side, the Tiger went into the jitters. He started to think –O Ghosh! What is this *Gachak Andharee* after all? What if she meets me? O No! I should leave this place at the first sight of the day's light.

Sada left his home in a hurry and started to search his Donkey –which he left alone during the night –for grazing. It was still dark. Roaming different lanes, Sada reached near the walls of the ruins.

The Tiger was stranded there near the wall. Looking at the hazy figure, Sada told himself, "I went round and round all through the village and the Donkey is here!".

In spontaneity, Sada got hold of the Tiger's ears and mounted on him in frenzy. With a kick, he swung his body –as if to signal the *go* for the animal.

The Tiger felt immensely terrified. "O my god! This is *Gachak Andharee*, surely" He started to shudder. Meanwhile, Sada planted another kick on the flanks of the Tiger. Frightened, the Tiger started to move silently carrying his rider.

Surprised at the speed of the Tiger, Sada thought, "Wow! Today the Donkey is flying! What a pleasure! The day has started rather well. Here, the Donkey is on a high and there I befooled Gaja! I must finish my work as early as possible.

By now, Sada had crossed the boundaries of his village. It was still dark and the stars were shining in the sky. The subtle morning breeze was moving swiftly. Sada was feeling light and enchanted. But the Tiger's situation was pathetic. "O, God! Please have mercy on me! Save me from this curse sitting on my back."

Now, a few sunrays started to emerge from the East. All of a sudden, Sada's ecstatic eyes went on the back of the Tiger. Instead of the usual colour, he got suspicious to see his Donkey spotting the yellow colour and black spots. "Ah! What has happened to it?" In shock, he lowered his head to have a clear view. "Tiger!" Sada went out of his senses. His body began to tremble. Fearing the excessive movement of the rider, the Tiger increased his speed. He thought, "*Gachak Andharee* is jerking now. She has made her mind to eat me now."

Sada too had his heart in the mouth by now. He looked up in the sky to pray, "O, God! My senses! How did I mount a Tiger instead of the Donkey? And this Tiger is also carrying me on

its back like a Donkey...what if it sees me? ...It will definitely kill me. O, God! Please save me from this danger.” Sada started to sweat heavily even in such cool weather. The sweat started to fall on the Tiger’s back. The Tiger got further horrified. “Here we go! *Gachak Andharee* is now even slobbering in anticipation of my flesh” –he thought.

Extremely anxious to save his life, Sada was thinking to find a way. At some distance, he could see a Bunyan tree now. The tree had many aerially hanging roots and the way used to pass through them. At last, Sada felt a bit relieved.

As soon as the Tiger came near the aerial roots, Sada showed his presence of mind and clever attitude. Getting hold of the hanging roots, he quickly climbed up the tree.

Relieved suddenly from Sada’s body weight, the Tiger thought, “I am saved at last. Nothing is precious than life. O, God! You are great!” With lightning speed, the Tiger vanished into the jungle.

Deenu’s Bill

Deenuche Bill by Prahlad Keshav Atre**

Translated by UMESH KUMAR

Deenu’s father was a doctor. Quite often, he would visit his father’s hospital. Several people visited the hospital on a daily basis. Some would come to get their ailments checked; a few others would turn up for the medicines. One would say, “Doctor *Sahab* my stomach is going crazy. Please do something”. And the other would say, “Doctor, please let me know my bill.”

Sitting on a small chair, Deenu would watch these proceedings silently. He started to understand quite a lot of hospital vocabulary now. However, he was listening to the word 'bill' for the first time.

One day, Deenu asked his father, "Baba, what is a bill?"

Father picked up a bill and said, "This is how a bill looks like. Can you read what's written there?"

Ignoring what was written at the top, Deenu started to read the bill...

BILL PARTICULARS			
Service		Rupees	Paise
1	Diagnostic Charges	100	00
2	Home Visits (twice)	300	00
3	Medicines (twice)	100	00
Total		500	00

Deenu continued to read the bill for a while. Suddenly, he laughed his heart out. It was not easy to tell what made him laugh. But surely a thought must have crossed his mind.

After reaching home, Deenu picked up a paper and prepared a bill for his mother...

BILL PARTICULARS			
Service		Rupees	Paise
1	Picking up flowers from the garden	10	00
2	Taking care of the younger sibling for two hours	50	00

3 .	For carrying a message to the neighbourhood	40	00
4 .	For bringing Sugar from the grocery shop	20	00
Total		120	00

He placed the bill in his mother's room quietly. Next day, after waking up, Deenu found 120/- rupees beside his cot. As soon as he picked up the money, a paper came out of it. He picked it up quickly. Mother too had prepared a bill for Deenu ...

BILL PARTICULARS			
Service		Rupees	Paise
1 .	Nurturing from birth – to date	00	00
2 .	Care during illness without a wink of sleep (four times)	00	00
3 .	Providing entertainment by narrating stories at bedtime	00	00
4 .	For education and quite a few other things	00	00
Total		Nil	Nil

Deenu had tears in his eyes. He felt heavy. The paper fell down from his hands. Having the money in hand, he ran to his mother, hurriedly.

Without uttering a word, he handed over the money to his mother. In his mother's arms Deenu was sobbing inconsolably. Putting her hands on Deenu's head, mother said, "Today, I got my bill paid."

References

PATTANAIAK, DIPTIRANJAN. 2002. *Subversive Innocence: A Study of American Children's Fiction*. Cuttack: Friends' Publishers.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to my friend –who did not wish to be named, for reading the initial draft of the introduction. His sharp and incisive comments/queries have improved the draft. My heartfelt thanks to Dr. Abdul Halim for reading the English translations and suggesting constructive changes. I am indebted to Diptiranjana Pattanaik for continuously sharing his reflections on children's literature. I borrow from him here and elsewhere, freely.

Note

* Ashok Mankar (1959 –): As a writer, Ashok Mankar thrives on his combinations of humour and satire –inspired from the rural hinterlands of Marathi culture. He has been quite active in Marathi Cinema and Television for the past few decades – writing screenplays, serial plots for the small screen, including stories on moral awareness and so on. *Hembalpanthi*, *Huner*, *Ganpat Family in New York* and *Gachak Andharee* are some of his important short story collections.

Ashok Mankar published a volume of short stories titled *Gachak Andharee* in 2016. It contains nine short stories including the title story presented here in English translation. At the end of the *contents* page in that volume, the author claims that all the stories were published earlier in *Aawaaz*, *Jatra*, *Maharashtra Times*, *Tarun Bharat*, *Vishal Vita*, *Raanwara*, *Deshonnati* (all Diwali special issues) –without bothering to provide the specifics of individual stories. See, Ashok Mankar, *Gachak Andharee*, (Pune: Menaka Prakashan, 2016), pp. 7-21. The Marathi language textbook, *Baal Bharti*,

later included *Gachak Andharee* in the seventh grade with significant alterations –including the omission of caste specific names mentioned in the original. See, *Marathi Baal Bharti, Iyatta Saatvi*, (Pune: Maharashtra Rajya Pathypustak Nirmiti aani Abhyashkram Sanshodhan Mandal, 2017), pp. 33-35. Thereafter, Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar used the *Baal Bharti* version of *Gachak Andharee* for their Hindi translation. See, Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar (Eds. and Trans.), *Kisson Ki Duniya: Marathi Baal Kahaniyon Ka Pratinidhi Sankalan*, (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2019), pp. 22-26. © Marathi Original: Director, Maharashtra Rajya Pathypustak Nirmiti Aani Abhyashkram Sanshodhan Mandal, © Hindi Translation: Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar. Permissions for individual language translations are obtained. The moral right of Ashok Mankar to be identified as the author of the above short story has been asserted.

** Prahlad Keshav Atre (1898-1969): Popularly known as Acharya Atre, Prahlad Keshav Atre was a well-known figure in Marathi literary and public sphere. He also had a productive film and theatre career. *Moruchi Mawashi*, *To Mi Navheech*, *Sashtang Namaskar* are some of his best-known plays and have been staged innumerable times.

While attempting to trace the publication history of *Deenuche Bill*, I came to know that after obtaining a Teacher's Diploma in teaching from University of London, Prahlad Keshav Atre returned to Maharashtra and started teaching in a school. In the 1930s, he published *Navyug Vachanmala* (Modern Reading Series) for children. *Deenuche Bill* too was part of this collection. However, it has not been possible for me to verify the entry first hand. The purpose of Atre's publication efforts was not only to enrich the Marathi language but also provide indigenous pedagogical options to local teachers and students. *Navyug Vachanmala* has been in print ever since in multiple

volumes. For its modern avatar, see for instance, *Navyug Vachanmala*, (Mumbai: Parchure Prakashan, 2017), 4 vols. *Deenuche Bill* appears in volume 4 here. The Marathi language textbook, *Baal Bharti*, later included *Deenuche Bill* in the second grade with some alterations. See, *Marathi Baal Bharti, Iyatta Dusri*, (Pune: Maharashtra Rajya Pathypustak Nirmitti aani Abhyashkram Sanshodhan Mandal, 2013), pp. 18-20. Thereafter, Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar used the *Baal Bharti* version of *Deenuche Bill* for their Hindi translation. See, Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar (Eds. and Trans.), *Kisson Ki Duniya: Marathi Baal Kahaniyon Ka Pratinidhi Sankalan*, (Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2019), pp. 56-58. © Marathi Original: Director, Maharashtra Rajya Pathypustak Nirmitti Aani Abhyashkram Sanshodhan Mandal, © Hindi Translation: Pramod Padwal and Umesh Kumar. Permissions for individual language translations are obtained. The moral right of Prahlad Keshav Atre to be identified as the author of the above short story has been asserted.
