

THE BOOK REVIEW

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Tamil

மொழிபெயர்ப்பில் தமிழ்

Malayalam

പരിഭാഷയിൽ മലയാളം

Telugu

అనువాదంలో తెలుగు

Kannada

ಅನುವಾದದಲ್ಲಿದ್ದನ್ನಡ

Marathi

मराठी भाषांतरात

Bengali

বাংলা অনুবাদে

Hindi

हिंदी अनुवाद में

English

Odia

ଅନୁବାଦରେ ଓଡ଼ିଆ ।

Persian

فارسی در ترجمه

Urdu

اردو ترجمہ میں

German

Deutsch in der Übersetzung

Santali

ଓଡ଼ିଆରେ ଓଡ଼ିଆର ଅନୁବାଦ

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Her stories, it can be said, show the aspirations of young women against the norms imposed from the past, thereby hinting at the need to question them, but her characters seldom step out of the roles assigned to them.

some stories that stand apart for their unusual narrative and ending. While 'He Was Gone!', about inter-religious love, has a mysterious ending, 'Four Incidents' presents different episodes not apparently connected to one another, making the reader speculate on the mysteries of life. The story, far ahead of its time in both its form and content, can easily belong to the modernist phase that made its entry in the late 60s. One wonders what she would have experimented with, had she lived longer.

Her stories are set in the familiar milieu of a small town, and most of her characters are usually from upper caste, middle class families, except in rare cases. The men aspire to go to big towns or even abroad for studies whereas the women are educated, but caught in conservative families. Larger questions of caste and class are conspicuously absent. The place she lived in and the community to which she belonged use a particular kind of dialect depending on their class background, but such distinctions are not brought out. They speak the literary Kannada of the Mysore region, as it was the standard language of literature then. The translation reads effortlessly and uses some of the cultural expressions without resorting to embedded glossing, which gives it a local colour. Above all, Deepa Bhashti has managed to retain the freshness of Gouramma's narrative intact and the liveliness permeates the translation very well. However, there are some awkward expressions like 'It won't do to not go meet them' (p. 44), '...even if the cold is such that it births shivers in the boy, there is an enthusiasm in working in the fields...' (p. 52), 'In both beauty and raga, she is Vani itself, a beautiful angel' (p. 127). Sometimes, in bringing out a local proverb or idiom in English, the changes made do not convey the intended effect ('by the time the merchant finally got ready, his exalted authority had been looted, as the saying goes' (p. 65)). But they are a few and far between and do not impede communication.

Gouramma's stories are a welcome addition to early women's writing in India and merit comparison with similar such writing from other languages.

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Translating Displacement, Translating Devastation

Umesh Kumar

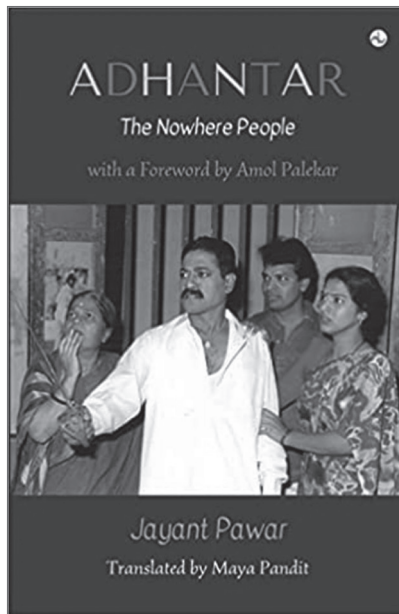
ADHANTAR: THE NOWHERE PEOPLE

By Jayant Pawar. Translated from the original Marathi by Maya Pandit with a Foreword by Amol Palekar
Dhauli Books, 2022, pp. 106, ₹ 395.00

RINGAAN: THE FULL CIRCLE

By Krishnat Khot. Translated from the original Marathi by Maya Pandit with an Introduction by Mitra Mukherjee-Parikh
Shabd Publication, 2022, pp. 288, ₹ 499.00

Two important Marathi texts—*Adhantar: The Nowhere People* (a play, 1999) by Jayant Pawar and *Ringaan: The Full Circle* (a novel, 2017) by Krishnat Khot are now available in English. Both these texts are translated (*Adhantar* is, in fact, a retranslation) by Maya Pandit with a lot of care and empathy. Notwithstanding the difference in genre, the universes of *Adhantar* and *Ringaan* have a powerful literary parallel: displacement and devastation. *Adhantar* is a provocative and realistic exploration of the destruction of the world of textile workers in Mumbai in the 1980s. The trueness of Pawar's realism in the play can be inferred from Vijay Tendulkar's reaction after he watched the play, 'All my pride of having been a playwright for more than three decades had evaporated. I was a spectator, and Jayant was the playwright' (p. xxiii). On the other hand, *Ringaan* is a tour de force narrative that documents human-Nature conflict. At the centre of this conflict are Devappa, a tribal man and his community—displaced and dehumanized by the project of 'development'. *Ringaan* critiques the darker sides of 'progress' and 'development' by following the plight of a forest-dwelling tribal community displaced during the construction of a dam. The novel not only talks about the displacement of humans but also non-humans—an abandoned buffalo in this case. In fact, Devappa's return to the forest in order to retrieve the abandoned animal heralds a monumental shift in the narrative. *Adhantar* and *Ringaan* share an identical vision and have identical enemies: development, displacement, devastation, and



dehumanization among others. Let us discuss them one by one.

First premiered in 1997, the plot of *Adhantar* is focused on the collapse of the textile industry in Mumbai—at one point, the largest in Asia. The year 1982 was a watershed moment in the history of the Mumbai textile industry. Led by Dr. Datta Samant, the

mill workers staged a prolonged strike for greater pay and better working conditions. However, the unholy nexus between the real-estate developers, the world of organized crime, and opportunistic political forces ensured that even a long-drawn-out battle could not obtain any concessions for the workers. The resultant closure of most of the textile mills had a devastating effect on the mill workers. According to a rough estimate, more than 2.5 lakh mill workers and their families were badly impacted by this human catastrophe. We witness this pain and agony in the outburst of Rane, the protesting worker, ‘Our fucking workers were taken in...Shove the workers’ politics up the arse! The worker is great! No! The worker is vile. He pisses on the leaders’ slogans and spits on the banners. (His voice almost breaks down)’ (p. 91).

Like Tendulkar’s *Gidhade* (*The Vultures*, 1970), *Adhantar*’s focal point is the structure of ‘family’. The playwright employs family as a unit of analysis to investigate the devastating aftermath of the closing of mills on society. In other words, the disintegration of the family is the disintegration of society; the violence in the family is a metonymy for the structural violence in society. The blackmail that goes on in the family represents the social and economic blackmail that exists outside. And yet the play manages to showcase the indomitable spirit of (Mumbai’s) working class, especially the women. The female characters: Aai, Manju and Mami are headstrong. They breathe life into an otherwise unforgiving, grim world. On another level, Manju and Mami are not apologetic about expressing their sexual desires. Aai’s predicament is to inhale everything that she has no control over. However, none of the characters in the play get what they desire. Their lives are in perpetual limbo. They are all *Trishankus*—suspended between two worlds—in *Adhantar*.

Finally, one must commend Maya Pandit’s informed translation of the text. In fact, a separate, full-length study

is required to lay bare the translation marvel that *Adhantar* eventually turns out to be. Over the years, Pandit has single-handedly created a corpus of significant Marathi texts in English, particularly those that are situated at the ‘margins’ (Kumar pp. 111-122). In a rare instance of self-retranslation, she has published two versions of *Adhantar* in English. Two translations of the same text, by the same translator, are also a pedagogical site for translation scholars to explore. Antoine Berman—the proposer of the ‘retranslation’ hypothesis—argues that the translation of literary texts is an incomplete act and it is only through retranslations that the texts become ‘self-aware’ (Deane-Cox p. 3). Readers can witness this self-awareness and evolution of *Adhantar* in its latest rendering. We have marked the latest translation in italics (pp. 41-42) whereas the earlier translation (Pawar, pp. 473-474) is quoted in standardized form.

Aai: That man was a father of three kids; was he going to marry you?/ *Your friend that Vani guy...that scoundrel ...a father of three kids...he wz going to marry you?*

Manju: I’d have lived without marriage./ *I didn’t give a fuck about marriage! I wud’ve done without it.*

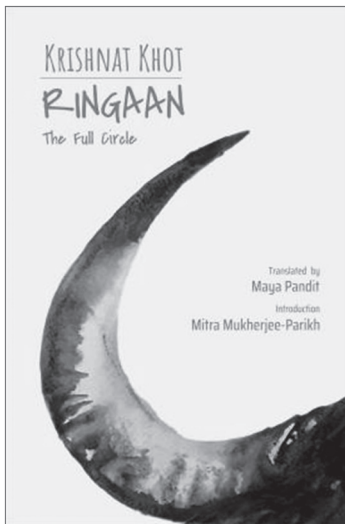
Aai: As that Vani’s keep?/ *As a rakheil?*

Manju: Living as a kept woman would have been loads better than this wretched life. Honour doesn’t help you survive. Money does./ *Life of a rakheil wud’ve bin loads better than this stupid life of a bloody wife. Ijjat don’t help you survive. Money does!*

The evolution of the text, here, is self-explanatory. One can discern that the latest version of *Adhantar* gets very close to the Marathi original, both in spirit and language. And that is no mean achievement! We can leave it to the judgement of the readers to live this transformation. Let us now move on to *Ringaan*.

First things first, Krishnat Khot’s *Ringaan* is a painful and agonizing experience. Narrating the tale of a dispossessed tribal community, the novel confronts its readers with a ‘provoking axe’ that threatens to cut through their frozen conscience. On the one hand, it questions modern man’s obsession with development and on the other, the novel can also be read as a historical and materialistic account of human-Nature conflict. The novel begins on somewhat predictable lines. The construction of a new dam forces Devappa—the protagonist and his tribe to relocate to an alien location. The new location

Notwithstanding the difference in genre, the universes of *Adhantar* and *Ringaan* have a powerful literary parallel: displacement and devastation.



is absolutely hostile to them. Devappa and his tribe lose their identity, are branded as thieves and Junglis, and are shown as victims of state apathy. In the early part of the novel, readers will witness how the state power—the *sarkar* and its ‘rampaging dragon’ called development can gobble up a peaceful and living community. As Devappa clarifies, ‘We were picked up from the

village under the pretext of the threat wild animals posed to us. Then we got dumped up here among worse animals in human form! The government keeps telling us that we need to learn to live like human beings. But as they wiped the village off the map, they wiped us off from human civilization’ (p. 25).

The ‘real’ narrative, however, begins when Devappa enters the forest to reclaim the Ringed One—the abandoned buffalo. Allegorically, Devappa’s journey to recover the Ringed One is also a journey to recover his own lost habitat. From the narrative point of view, this change of track is crucial. From hereon, the narrative turns inward-looking. It is not hard to imagine that Devappa intends to understand the present predicament of his community by going into its past. But as the narrative reveals, going back and handholding whatever the community has conceded is now impossible. This impossibility is deftly narrated through the encounter between the human (Devappa) and the non-human (the Ringed One). The Ringed One’s antagonism towards her erstwhile master is an elegy that documents the demise of a familiar and humane world. See for instance, ‘The Ringed One was dancing a ferocious dance of death around him as if some evil spirit possessed her. She kept rushing at him at a great speed. Her dance struck terror in his heart. When he hit her with a stone, she would temporarily move backward, but then rush at him again, dancing in circles with renewed vigour and raging fury. If Devappa were not careful, he would be crushed to death and reduced to a pulp’ (p. 263).

The Ringed One refuses to recognize Devappa, for he is no longer the Devappa of the wild. He is now a transformed Devappa—driven by the modern human madness for control and possession. A series of combats in the wild, coupled with heartbreaking internal monologues make Devappa realize that he is no longer the master of the wild. Employing the lens available in animal studies, the relationship between Devappa and the Ringed One could be read on more complex terrain.

Ringaan critiques the darker sides of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ by following the plight of a forest-dwelling tribal community displaced during the construction of a dam.

The text is populated with ‘new knowledge’. The geography, landscape, flora-fauna, and tribal habitat, among others, will be an absolute treat for the readers. Credit goes to Maya Pandit’s spirited effort that an outstanding piece of Marathi literature is made available to a wider audience. Her translation is smooth, empathetic, and it will have an absolutely lasting impact on the readers. However, there are a few inadvertent typos (p. 56, 69, 77, 88, 133, 139 and 158), which, hopefully, will be addressed in the next edition. The text is aptly supplemented by a translator’s note, glosses, and a rich introduction by Mitra Mukherjee-Parikh. Parikh’s critique of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic tendencies is spot on.

In her translator’s note, Pandit is a bit apprehensive, in spite of her rigorous efforts, unsure ‘if the voice of the local rings out loud and clear’ in her translation. To that one can only say: it does. Krishnat Khot’s restlessness for the dispossessed is empathetically and emphatically transported to the English reader.

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Book News

Book News



A City Full of Sirens by Sanket Mhatre sprawls into the undercurrent of people, things, and places while the sirens whiz like a warning. Marathi being Mhatre’s mother tongue, allows him to transform the thought that mutates into English.

Hawakal, Kolkata/New Delhi, 2023, pp. 86, ₹ 350.00