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Ageing in Bachchan's Shakespeare: Reading *Macbeth* and *Othello* through Translations of Omar, Yeats, and the Poet's Autobiography

MANISH PRASAD

ABSTRACT

Harivansh Rai Bachchan, the famous Hindi poet is one of the first translators in Hindi who translated the poetic dialogues of the four tragedies of Shakespeare into poetic form and prose dialogues into prose form. He also translated them into his own contexts and those contexts had been different from the original. He thought upon his own translation theory and discussed it in the prefaces of his translated works. Bachchan's translation theory has something to say in terms of form and content. When a Source Language Text is translated into a Target Language Text it has to go through a process of transformation since the contexts which defines the form and content varies from one culture to another. In my proposed paper I shall focus on the decisions Bachchan had to take while translating in search of an equivalent form and content from his own culture in relation to the original. The conflict between time and the protagonist is one of the major themes in Shakespeare's tragedies. This conflict also leads to the concept of ageing and the struggle between youth and old age. In my proposed paper I would try to find out how this tension between youth and old age is rendered by Bachchan in his translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Bachchan translated Omar Khayyam and W.B. Yeats much earlier than Shakespeare. Both Omar and Yeats are known for their interest in ageing. Hence the proposed paper shall also focus on how Bachchan's translations of Shakespeare are influenced by or related with his early translations of Omar and Yeats. And how Bachchan himself responded to the tension between youth and old age in his original composition, both prose and verse. Does Omar and Yeats

and finally Shakespeare influence his personal notions of ageing with his own sense of growing old?

Keywords: Bachchan, Translation theory, Time, Youth, Old age

INTRODUCTION

The famous Hindi poet and translator Harivansh Rai Bachchan, translated into his tongue the four tragedies of Shakespeare alongside the verses of Omar Khayyam from Fitzgerald's English translation, and also selected poems of W.B. Yeats. As he has noted in his multivolume autobiography, these translations mark different phases of his career as a poet cum translator. Conventionally, Omar's poems speak about the importance of youth chiefly in a *carpe-diem* tone, and Yeats has also been a noted voice for musing on the complex relation between youth and old age. Bachchan did translate these two poets much earlier, and then took the significant project of translating Shakespeare. Considering this fact, the aim of the present essay would be to focus on the tension between youth and old age in Bachchan's translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Othello*, treating his renderings of Omar and Yeats as co-texts. I would like to point out that Bachchan's pre-occupation as a translator with the issue of ageing cannot be particularly located in his Shakespeare-translation, for the ground of interest was prepared beforehand when he did like to read Omar and Yeats. Maurice Charney observes that Shakespeare's own preoccupation with the several issues relates with ageing had an acute relation with his own sense of growing old. We do not know much about Omar, though in case of W. B. Yeats, Charney's observation fits seamlessly. This is the point of departure for another discussion in this paper. As Shakespeare's translation beside Omar's and Yeats', how much Bachchan himself had been motivated by his personal sense ageing? In the final section of this essay we thus try to probe into his autobiographical accounts. The texts of his autobiographical narratives, poems, prose-pieces etc. are again to be treated as co-texts of his translations of Shakespeare, Omar

and Yeats. But the poets' life in itself is seen here as a context, and a very crucial one, in reading the translations.

MACBETH AND OTHELLO: BACHCHAN'S TRANSLATIONS

In his translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the preface written by Bachchan speaks a great deal on the beginning of his journey as an important translator of the Elizabethan poetic drama. He has noted that the famous Hindi film actor Balraj Sahani and his wife Mrs Santosh Sahani made him aware of the possibilities of his own poetic language for effective translation of Shakespeare. Till then no translation of Shakespeare's plays were available in Hindi which had the quality of a poetic drama. Though Bachchan has been a professor of English Literature, he realised that one should understand the performance text of a play as well for an acceptable translation of its play text. Some other compulsions had also been on Bachchan at the time of translating *Macbeth* into modern Hindi. On one hand the Sahitya Academy wanted to get a Shakespeare play translated into Hindi. And on the other hand the Foreign Ministry did employ Bachchan to supervise the Governmental scheme of the promotion of Hindi language, and a translation of Shakespeare could be a special training for Bachchan to work better in this project. (Bachchan, 2006: 16)

As Bachchan finally decided to take up *Macbeth* he reached the realisation that translating such a play in Hindi language, and that too in poetic stanzas could be an almost impossible task. But searching for the form which could match with Shakespeare's and would be appreciated by the readers was not easy. Every translation is a failure of exactly capturing the original, and simultaneously a success in creating something new, may be something original in the name of translation. Bachchan sort equivalent for Shakespeare's Iambic Pentameter in the popular 'Rola' chhand of the famous Medieval Hindi saint poet Tulshi Das. He started translating *Macbeth* in 'Rola' as an

experiment, and felt that inspite of certain similarities, these two meters represent different characters. While experimenting Bachchan did came to the conclusion that a single line in Iambic Pentameter had to be translated into almost one and half or two lines of 'Rola'. But in a play, the performance text is more important than the play text. And the failures of Bachchan's literal translation, as he understood could be compensated with the success of the play in performance. (Bachchan, 2006:17)

In his introduction to the second edition of the translation, Bachchan was convinced of his success. None other than his wife did inform him that the rhythm, diction and style of his translation of *Macbeth* had been performable. But meaning in translation seemed as important for Bachchan as style. In Indian Philosophical views concerning translation it is said that translation is an impossibility since the Source Language and the Target language and their cultures are different, and meaning is created by words no doubt, but always in specific context. Our proposition is that Bachchan also translated Shakespeare in certain context, and those context had been different from the original, or if we are allowed to take liberty – the academic context of Shakespeare's tragedies. As we shall try to locate in this essay Ageing in Shakespeare is translated by Bachchan in the context of his personal sense of growing old.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in the early acts of the play is certainly a fast runner, for time is one of the challenges he faces in his adventurous life, and in an age without aeroplanes, mobile phones, and internet how difficult had it been for this Bellona's bridegroom to stand against fleeting time. He is to be praised for accepting these challenge bravely:

... this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come.

(*Macbeth*, Act I, SC vii, l.l. 5-8)

He is praised for his youth and bravery by the three Witches, by the injured sergeant, by Ross and also by the king Duncan himself, and the very urge of becoming the King of Scotland becomes prominent after the premonitions and by receiving the title of Thane of Cawdor just after the supernatural creatures had vanished into the air. In Bachchan's translation, Macbeth tells Banquo at this crucial juncture "होनी हो सो हो, चिन्ता से क्या पाना है, / कठिन से कठिन घड़ीयों को भी कटजाना है। [honi ho so ho, chinta se kya pana hai, /Katin se katin ghario ko v kaat jana hai.]¹ But it is not all about passing the time merely, as it may ordinarily seem, the protagonist has decided to brave the tempestuous time waiting at hand. The very thought of becoming the King has entered so deeply into his mind, that he seeks to capture time itself and fulfil his ambition. When King Duncan announces Malcolm as the crowned-prince of Scotland, Macbeth in Bachchan's translation speaks to himself:

कंबरलैण्ड-कुमार – एक दिवार माग में,
जिसे फाँदकर अगर नहीं मैं निकल गया तो
उससे टकर खाकर निचे गिर जाऊँगा।

*Cumberland kumar – ek diwar marg mai,
Jise fand agar nhi mai nikal gya to
Usse takara kar niche gir jaunga*²

Malcolm is a wall he should jump over, lest they may clash leading Macbeth to a halt. This jump certainly resonates with 'jump the life to come': and Malcolm can be perceived as one of the many hurdles in Macbeth's race against time.

Considering Malcom as a representative of young age, Macbeth competes with him. On the other hand, King Duncan is after all an old man, about Macbeth's father's age, as Lady Macbeth has clearly proclaimed in Bachchan's translation, "सोते में वह अगर ना लगता जैसे मेरा / पिताह" [sotey mai wh agar nalagta, jaise mera/ Pitah...."]³, has been times other face, another aspect the protagonist has been competing with. It might be a strong

possibility in the play, whatever dignity Duncan has achieved and loyalty received from others, all has been endowed with afters years of struggle leading him to an enviable state of maturity. This worth in Duncan ignored by Macbeth, for in his battle with time, Duncan's throne is to be assumed by him without getting old. And hence the competition with Malcolm, another very strong youthful possibility.

Bachchan, at the time of translating *Macbeth* composed a poem 'Yatra aur Yatri', which may echo the same anxiety and possibility which seem to drive Macbeth at the hour of Killing Duncan. One may understand this particular drive as a sort of angst caused by the desire of achieving everything in youth. However, this drive, or angst or desire is beyond the control of the protagonist. Bachchan wrote:

साँस चलती है तुझे,
चलना पड़ेगा ही मुसाफिर।
चल रहा है तारकों का,
दल गगन में गीत गाता,
चल रहा आकाश भी,
शून्य में भ्रमता-भ्रमता,
पाँव के नीचे पड़ी,
अचल नहीं ये चंचला है
एक कण भी, एक क्षण भी
एक थल पर टिक न पाता।
शक्तियाँ गती की तुझे
सब ओर से घेरे हुए है
स्थान से अपने तुझे,
टलना पड़ेगा ही, मुसाफिर।
साँस चलती है तुझे,
चलना पड़ेगा ही मुसाफिर।

*Sans chalti hai tujhe
Chalna parega hi musafir
Chal rha hai tarako ka
Dal gagan mai geet gata,
Chal rha hai akash abhi
Sunya mai bharamta bharamta.*

*Panw ke niche parri,
Achla nhi ye chanchla hai,
Ek kan bhi, ek chan abhi,
Ek thal paar tik na pata.
Shaktiya gati ki tujhe
Sab aur se ghare hua hai,
Asthan se apne tujhe,
Talna parega hi musafir,
Sans chalti hai tujhe
Chalna parega hi musafir.*

("Yatra aur Yatri")⁴

Surely, Macbeth becomes the victim of this drive. After becoming the King of Scotland, he commits murder after murder, not merely because he wanted to conceal the murder of King Duncan, but also to secure his future. Knowing fully well that all human beings are subject to decay, future is conventionally secured through progeny. Macbeth laments that he has none. Referring to the Witches, he speaks in Bachchan's translation:

मेरे सिर पर रखा निष्फल राज-मुकुट यह
और मुट्ठी में राज-दण्ड निर्वीर्य कि जिसको
औरों की सन्तान छीन ले; मेरा कोई
पुत्र न हो उत्तराधिकारी।

*Mere sir par rakha nisfal raaj-mukut ye
Aur muthi mai raaaj-dand nirwaye ki jisko
Auro ki santaan chiin le; Mera koi
Putra na ho uttar adhikari!*⁵

Macbeth is afraid of his sceptre and crown to be snatched away by others in days to come. Though he is not physically old yet, he is mentally suffering from the visions of an unsafe old age. Once Bachchan wrote in his poem "Burah": "...दर्पण से तो मुझे ऐसा नहीं लगता है / बुढ़ापा कभी-कभी आँखों से भी उतरता है". [...darpan se to mujhe asa nhi lagta / burapa kabhi – kabhi ankho se bhi utarta hai.] (Bachchan, 2009: 68). The line means: after looking at the mirror it does not appear to me that I have become old. But

sometimes old age is often reflected through eyes. Macbeth is now getting old mentally, he understands that he would come to the end of his life without reaching the ripe old age in due course. Macbeth would come to the end of his life without reaching the age of maturity. The best fruits of old age, he would never able to gather in this life. As in his famous soliloquy, he speaks in Bachchan's translation:

मेरे जिवन का बसन्त अब
पिले औ' सूखे पत्तों में बदल चुका हे;
मान, प्रेम, आज्ञा का आदर, मित्र गोष्ठियाँ-
व्रध्दावस्था की शोभाएँ – ये सब मेरे
लिए नहीं हैं; इनके बदले मुझे मिले हैं
शाप, होठ के नहीं, हृदय के, मुँहदेखा गुण-
गान, पीठ के पीछे जिनसे दिल इनकार
किया करता है, मुँह पर जुरत करता डरता ।

*Mere jivan ka basant ab
Pilla aur shukhe patto mai badal chukka hai;
Maan, prem, agya ka adar, mitre gosthiya –
Virdhavaस्था ki sobhaye – yeh sab mere
Liye nahi hai; inke badale mujhe mili hai
Sraap, hoot kenahi, hriday ke, muuh dekhe guun –
Gaan, pith ke piche jisne dil inkar
Kiya karta hai, muuh par juraat karta darta!* ⁶

Life has now turned into weariness for him where youth, old age and death seem merely the roles, he has to play within a very limited time. Hence the translation of the famous soliloquy:

आज, आज के बाद, आज फिर-फिर से आकर
चलता जाता है दिन-प्रतिदिन, अविचल क्रम से,
जीवन-पथ पर, जब तक छोर नहीं आ जाता;

*Aaj, Aaj ke baad, Aaj phir phir se akar
Chalta jata hai din – prati din, avi kal kram se,
Jivan pathe par, jab tak choor nahi aa jata;* ⁷

Macbeth realises that his ambition to become the king of Scotland and to enjoy forever the special privileges while battling against the tempestuous time has been a futile attempt.

This realisation of standing at the wrong end of his life, earns our sympathy towards him. In Bachchan's translation, we may note this realisation of Macbeth's misreading the relation between youth and old age:

हमारे सारे आज, उजाले, काले
कल में बदल अकल के अन्धे इन्सानों को
अन्धकारमय काल-गर्त में पहुँचा देते ।
ठण्डी हो जा, क्षणभंगुरलौ ।
जीवन केवल एक स्वप्न है, चलतो-फिरता;
एक दीन अभिनेता, जो दो दुनिया के
रंगमंच पर हैंस-रोकर गायब हो जाता,
कोई पता नहीं फिर पाता: यह किस्सा है
किसी मूढ़ का गढ़ा कि जिसमें शब्दाडम्बर
बड़ा, किन्तु कुछ सार नहीं है ।

... Hamare sari aaj, ujale, kale
Kal mai badala kal ke andhe insano ko
Andhkar maay kaal-grat mai pahucha dete.
Thandi hoja, thandi hoja, chaan bhangur lau,
Jivan kewal ek swapn hai, chalta phirta;
Yeh kishaa hai,
Kisi moor ka grah ki jismai sabdambar
Baa, kintu kuch saar nahi hai. ⁸

While translating *Othello* into Hindi Bachchan has clearly stated in the preface that the ulterior aim of a translator should not be guided by any impressionism. Rather he had been an advocate of a perfect translation which would neither be-little the image of the original or its purpose, yet in itself would never look like a translation. It may seem that his view of literary translation of a Source Language Text into a Target Language Text would be like that of two original compositions done with some amount of similar resources. Since the dissimilarity of resources are as important as their similarities and the context of the production of the original and the translation being different, a translation would always stand in comparison and at times even competition with the original. The very thought of establishing a Shakespearean stage in Hindi and for this reason

building connection with the Little Theatre Group in Delhi had been Bachchan's preoccupation in this period. (Bachchan, 2006:119) Even he was interested in certain Radio Play versions of Shakespeare. He felt the urge of reaching out to people in order to let people understand in their own context the significance of Shakespeare's treatment of the various aspects of the human psyche.

As in *Macbeth* in Hindi translation, Bachchan's *Othello* also re-contextualises Shakespeare alongside experimenting with the various possibilities of Hindi language and meter in order to make the re-contextualisation successfully. How does he translate *Othello*, let us take some examples.

A different urge for capturing time is also present in the translation of *Othello*. We may hear from Brabantio that Othello is as old as he himself is, whereas Desdemona is still in her very youth. Othello wants to regain his youth by suiting Desdemona and in return she wants to experience the sway of the maturity that Othello has attained through his whole life's struggles. She is sympathetic towards the experience that have dawned on Othello with age. Bachchan translates Othello's experiences with the following words:

सात वर्ष की अल्पावस्था
से ले अब से आठ मास पहले तक, जिसमें
नया चाँद नौ बार उदय हो अस्त हुआ है,
मैंने अपने हाथों का सरोत्तम कौशल
शिविर-विमण्डित मैदानों में दिखलाया है;

*Saat varsh ki alpavastha
Se le ab se aatt maas pahle tak, jis mai
Nya chand nau baar uday ho aast hua hai,
Maine apne hatho ka sarvotam kaushal
Sivir – vimandit maidano mai dikhlaya hai.*⁹

Desdemona, moving to and fro at her house-affairs, or listening with grave wonder, and eager and restrained sympathy to the story of the Moor's adventurous life, appears to him, at

first model of beauty, gentleness, repose, and tender womanhood. Bachchan translates:

और कथा जब
पूर्ण हो गई, मेरे दुख पर उसने अपने
उच्छवासों की झड़ी लगा दी: सत्य, शपथ लेकर
वह बोली, 'यह अद्भुत है, यह अद्भुत से
भी बढ़कर है; व्यथा भरी है; इसमें अनुपम
व्यथा भरी है: काश इसे मैं कभी न सुनती!'
किन्तु साथ ही उसने चाहा, 'काश मुझे भी
प्रभु ऐसा इन्सान बनातो!' धन्यवाद देकर
वह बोली, अगर तुम्हारा मित्र कहीं हो,
और प्यार मुझको करता हो, तो तुम अपनी
कथा सुनाना उसे सिखा दो, वह मुझको बरबस
बर लेगा। पाकर यह संकेत बढ़ा मैं:
उसने मुझसे प्रेम किया है उन खतरों के
कारण जिनसे मैं गुजरा हूँ। मैंने उससे
प्रेम किया है उस करुणा के कारण उसने
जो मेरे प्रति दिखलाई है।

*Aur katha jab
Purn ho gyi, mere dukh par usne apne
Uchawaaso se jhari lga di: satya, spath lekar
Wah boli, 'yeh adbhut hai, yeh adbhut se
Bhi barker hai: wyatha bhari hai; esmai anupam
Wyatha bhari hai: kash esse mai kabhi na sunti!'
Kintu sath hi usne chaha, 'kash mujhe bhi
Prabhu aesa insan bnata!' dhanyabad dekar
Wah boli, 'agar tumhara mitr kahi ho,
Aur pyar mujhko karta ho, to tum apni
Katha sunana use sikha do, wah mujhko barbas
Wer lega.' Pakar yeh sanket brha mai:
Usne mujhse prem kiya hai un khataro ke
Karan jinse mai gujra hu. Maine usse
Prem kiya hai uss karuna ke karan usne
Jo mere prati dikh lai hai.* ¹⁰

Brought up amidst the refinements and ceremonies of Venetian life, she has found in Othello strangeness and splendour of strong manhood, heroic simplicity, the charm of

one who suffered in solitude, and on whose history compassion might be lavished. Both Desdemona and Othello are mutually attracted by wonder and grace of unlikeness. It has also been obvious in the whole course of the play how Othello's love with Desdemona remains incomplete because of his dedication to his services. When roused at night by the brawl she appears in the streets, the Moor is doubly indignant with the offenders, because they have troubled her repose and with affectionate force, he turns her back from enquiring into what had caused him disturbance. Bachchan renders into Hindi:

देखो, गुल से मेरी प्यारी उठकर आती।-
 तुमको सबक सिखाऊँगा मैं।
 डेसडिमोना: बात क्या हुई?
 ओथेलो: मधुरे, अब सब ठीक हो गया; चलो सो रहें।

Dekho, gul se meri pyari utha kar aati.
Tumko sabak sikhaunga mai
Desdemona: Kya baat hai?
*Othello: Madhuri, aab thik hogya; chalaao Soo rahe.*¹¹

Othello takes much care of her as one may usually expect, and it may ordinarily be read as signs of a matured man's infatuation towards his young wife. Hence, their celebration of marriage on the first night of their meeting gets disrupted and half-fulfilled. This half-fulfilled desire of being together haunting in various guises, sows the seeds of jealousy in Othello more vigorously when he ultimately sees Casio and Desdemona together. In translation:

मैं काला हूँ; सम्भाषण की कोमल-कान्त
 पदावलियों से भिन्न नहीं है, जैसे वेनिस,
 के जवान हैं, या मैं यौवन के बशन्त से
 गिर पतझड़ में पहुँच गया हूँ- गो थोड़ा ही –
 वह मेरे क्राबू से बाहर चली गई है।
 उसने मुझसे घात किया है, मैं भी उसको
 घ्रणा करूँ। अभिशाप ब्याह कितना भारी है।
 इन सुकुमारी प्रतिमाओं को तो हम अपना
 कह सकते हैं, लेकिन इनके प्यास को नहीं।

*Mai kala hu; Sambhasan ki komal-kant
Pdawali se bheeg gya hu, jaise Venice,
Ke jawan hai, ya mai yovan ke basant se
Girre patjhar mai pahuch gya hu – go thora hi –
Wh mere kabu se bahar chali gyi hai.
Usse ne mujhse ghat kiya hai, aur mujhko ab
Chain esi se mil sakta hai, mai bhi usko
Ghrina karu! Abhirapbyaahkitnabharihai!
En sukumari pratimao ko to hum apna
Keh sakte hai, lekin enke pyas ko nahi. ¹²*

The youth of Desdemona once so attractive now seems abhorring for Othello. He contrasts his age with her young feelings in the shape of jealousy that she is not faithless owing to her young age, but may be on account of his comparative old age, which she distastes. Iago is able to make the fake story only because Othello asks him again and again to tell it. In Bachchan:

दुष्ट, तुझे यह साबित करना होगा, मेरी
प्रिया पुंश्चली, छली; सिद्ध यह करना होगा।
आँखों देखा कुछ सबूत मेरे आगे रख....
*“Dust, tujhe yeh sabit karna hoga, meri
Priye prunschali, chaali; siddha karna hoga
Ankho dekha saboot mere agye rakh....” ¹³*

The handkerchief which becomes the most important evidence for proving Othello's jealousy, is not only a symbol of love, but of maturity since it has been tinged in the colour of time, it was given to his mother by a charmed women as a reminder of her subtle belongingness with her husband, and at the time of their death he was asked by his mother to give that handkerchief to his wife. That handkerchief is lost. Othello describes very nostalgically how was it weaved and for what purpose. Bachchan has rendered it into Hindi:

उसके ताने-बाने में जादू था।
एक बड़ी जादूगरनी ने, जिसने दो सौ
जाड़ा, गर्मि, बरसातों को पार किया था,
उसे बुना था, तब, जब स पर जिन सवार था।

रँगा गया था उसे एक ऐसे द्रव से जो
म्रत कुमारियों के दिल से खींचा जाता है,
बड़ी युक्ति से।

*... uske tane-bane mai jadu tha.
Ek baar jadugarni ne, jisne do sau
Jara, garmi, barsat ko paar kiya tha,
Usse bunnatha, tab, jab us par zin sawar tha.
Ranga gaya tha use ek ase drav se jo
Mreet kumario ke dil se khincha jata hai,
Bari yukti se.*¹⁴

But for Desdemona it has been impossible to understand the worth of maturity. It simply remains the first gift which she loves more than anything, yet unfortunately parted with it.

No supernatural authority needs to be summoned to bear witness to this reality of human life that youth and old age are parts of life and one cannot challenge one for the other in order to fulfil his/her ambition or desire turning the wheels of time either back or forward according to wish. "No pallid flame of hell, no splendour of dawning heaven needs to show itself beyond the verge of earth to illumine this truth."

(Dowden, 1957: 243).

TRANSLATING OMAR AND YEATS: THE CO-TEXTS

It is quite evident that the tendency of experimenting with poetic meter and diction, and the desire of re-contextualising the meaning in course of translating from the original Bachchan has reached enviable heights. We may take some further examples from his Hindi translation of Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat and the selected poems of W. B. Yeats.

Bachchan was made to believe as a child, the verbal reading to Omar Khayyam is 'umar khatam hoti hai', that is 'life flies', and then on the picture of the old, bearded oriental mystic and his beautiful verses became his lifelong companions. In the preface to the Hindi translation of Fitzgerald's English rendering of Omar, entitled *Khayyam ki Madhusala* (1935), Bachchan writes

that *Rubaiyat* is a song of morning to evening, from beginning of life to its end. In this collection of verse there are two figures, Omar Khayyam and his beloved, but the poems are not simple dialogues between these two. Describing the life's long journey from birth to death, the poems are about the time from when we human beings become aware of this world till we leave it. They enshrine the voice of such a soul which cannot see anything beyond this world, of one who is not satisfied, yet unable to leave this world. Therefore, old age and the process of ageing infuse in Omar's poems birth to a phobia which works at two levels. On one level, it is associated with physical decline and on the other with psychological sufferings caused by the fear of death. Omar seems to be an epicurean who wants to fulfil all his wishes and desires before he grows old. Is it possible for us to recall Macbeth also as an epicurean on the basis of the fact that he too wants to enjoy life and fulfil the youthful possibilities of becoming the King of Scotland much ahead of reaching the ripe old age? His mind-set may be touched upon through a translated piece of Omar by Bachchan:

प्रिये, आ बैठो मेरे पास, सुनो मत कहते विद्वान,
यहाँ निश्चित केवल वह बात कि होता जीवन का अवसान।
यहाँ निश्चित केवल वह बात, और सब झूठ और निर्मूल;
सुमन जो आज गया है सूख, सकेगा वह न कभी फिर फूल।

*Priye aa betho mere paas,
Suno maat kya kehta vidwan,
Yhaa nischit keval yeh baat,
Ki hota jivan ka awsaan.
Yha nischit keval yeh baat,
Aur sab jhoot aur nirmul;
Suman jo aaj gya hai sukh,
Sakega wah na kabhi fir phool.*¹⁵

The witches whom Macbeth meets twice gives birth to an allusion. All the three prophecies which come in form of apparitions – an Armed head, a Bloody Child, and a Crowned Child holding a twig in his hand, gives Macbeth creates an

illusion of his security for some time. This psychological liberation of Macbeth can be manipulated through this poetic piece of Omar:

पिलाकर प्यारी मदीरा आज नशे में इतना कर दो चूर,
भविष्यत के भय जायें भाग, भूत के दारुण दुख हों दूर ।
प्रिय, लेना मत कल का नाम, नहीं कल पर मुझको विश्वास ;
अरे, कल दूर, एक क्षण बाद काल का मैं हो सकता ग्रास ।

*Pilakar Pyari Madira aaj
Nashe mai itna ker do chur,
Bhavisat ke bhay jaye bhag,
Bhut ke darun dukh dur.
Priye lena maat kal ka naam,
Nahi kal per mujhko Biswas,
Are, kal dur, ek chan baad
Kaal ka mai ho sakta grash*¹⁶.

(Bachchan, 2014: 64)

As noted earlier, when Othello finds Casio alongside Desdemona in Act IV, his very quest for recovering his youth is shattered. Desdemona who has been the icon of gentleness, beauty and womanhood is now defiled. This gives rise to the tension of youth and old age foregrounded in the following acts that also finds its echo in the following lines of Bachchan's translations of Fitzgerald's Omar's:

अरे, वे सुन्दरतम, वे श्रेष्ठ, जिन्हें हम करते इतना प्यार,
त्रूर-कटु काल-कर्म के, हाय, हो गये कितने शीघ्र शिकार ।
न पी पाये थे प्याले चार, गया उनका जीवन-मधु सूख,
चले करने विश्राम अन्तत लिये निज अरमानों की भूख ।

*Aare, wo sundertam, wo shresta,
Jinhai hum karte itna pyar,
Kur-kut kaal-karm ke, haye,
Ho gye kitne sighra sikar.
Na pi paye pyala char,
Gya unka jivan madhu such,
Chale karne vishram Anant,
Liye nej armano ki Bhukh*¹⁷.

(Bachchan, 2014: 65)

The Rubaiyats are not songs of happiness, but of unhappiness, of dissatisfaction. In fact, it is a universal truth that at some stage of life a person would bound to be sad, unhappy and dissatisfied. This universal mood is to be located in Omar's verses; Macbeth's or Othello's individual mood to merge in this universe.

Bachchan also translated W. B Yeats, a noted modernist poet himself intensely motivated by the themes of youth and ageing. When young, Yeats tried to compose poems on the themes related with old age. In fact, he desired to get the maturity and experiences of old man. In Bachchan's translation of Yeats' "A Song" from "The Wild Sawns at Coole" (1919), the tension between physical and mental ageing is clearly voiced:

मैंने सोचा था कि जनानी कायम रकने
को डम्बल-मुगदर काफ़ी हैं,
ये दुरुस्त रखेंगे तन को।
हाय, किसी ने पहले ही क्यों न बताया
मन भी ब्रध्द हुआ करचा है ?

*Maine socha tha ki jawani kayam rakhne
Ko dumble – mugdar kafi hai,
Yeh durust rakhenge taan ko.
Haye, kisi ne pahle hi ku na bataya
Maan bhi bridh hua karta hai?* ¹⁸

In the later stage of his poetic career, when Yeats grew old physically, he wished to turn the course of ageing and wanted to live young. Interestingly he described his last years as a second puberty. According to Richard Ellmann this term for Yeats expresses his renewed sexual vigour and psychological recovery. He wanted to undergo an operation to regain his sexual power. Verse making and lovemaking were always connected in his mind. Since growing old physically he had felt that he was not able to compose his poetry to the extent of not being able to write anything new. Hence, he started revising his earlier verses so that the quest for youth can be re-energized. After undergoing

the operation Yeats wanted, Ellmann wrote, “[Yeats] had written new poems which, in the opinion of those whose opinion he valued most, were among his best work” (Ellmann, 1988: 28). Hence one can understand the effect of the operation in Yeats had in his mind. In the poems composed at this later stage like “Lapis Lazuli” one may note his new vigour and response towards life. Here he describes the death of various tragic heroes, especially Hamlet and Lear. He attributes to them not exactly laughter but a sort of tragic gaiety. The actors who are playing or have played the role of

Hamlet and Lear are right in not weeping at the moment of their stage deaths. It is so because Hamlet and Lear have already expressed fundamental energies and there are “eternal delight”. For Yeats, tragic heroes, in pursuing their destiny to its end, make death their accomplice rather than their adversary.

BACHCHAN’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: CONTEXT OF CREATIVE LIFE

Locating such probable points of connection between Bachchan’s translation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Othello* with that of Fitzgerald’s translations of Omar and Yeats’ selected poems rendered by the translator into Hindi, we may now feel curious about how Bachchan himself did respond to the tension between youth and old age in his original compositions, both prose and verse. Does Omar and Yeats and finally Shakespeare influence his personal notions of ageing with his own sense of growing old? Does the translator himself get translated while translating?

Bachchan has written in The Fourth volume of autobiography *Dashdwar se Sopan Tak* (1985) that he tried to live his youth throughout his life, though unfortunately had to accept the reality of undergoing the process of ageing. Yet being old, he mentioned that the experience, happiness and everything one had received at different stages of life must be fully enjoyed. Speaking on adulthood in this context he has been of the opinion that an adult never proclaims whether he or she is young, rather

simply continues with this stage of early young age as long as possible. A very important fact he has mentioned that in reality the adulthood and its vigour can only be fully realised when those are added to the innocence of childhood. Physical fitness and capacity of powerful imagination, ultimately lead to youthful possibilities. Since this stage of childhood is something to be spent with the passage of time, this youth is a special gift to a person, though its span is very limited. Unlike Shakespeare who wrote that old age always prevails on adulthood, at a point when a person reaches almost forty years of age –

When forty Winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tattee'd Weed...

(Bachchan, 2009: 76)

Bachchan has his typical reply ready for Shakespeare:

प्यार, जवानी, जीवन – इनका जादु मैंने सब दिन जाना
मन के राजा हो तो मुझसे
लो वरदान अमर योवन का ;
नहीं जवानी उसने जानी
जिसने प्यार का बन्धन जाना
प्यार, जवानी, जीवन – इनका जादु मैंने सब दिन जाना ।

Pyar, Jawani, Jiwan – Inka Jadu maine sab din jana
Maan ke Raja ho to Mujhse
Lo Wardan Amar yovan ka;
Nahi Jawani Usane Jani
Jiska Par ka Bandhan Jana
Pyar, Jawani, Jiwan – Inka Jadu maine sab din Jana.

(Bachchan, 2009: 76)

He has experienced the magic of love, youth and life throughout his life. If there is anyone who is the ruler of his self, may ask for the boon of eternal youth from him. One can never understand youth if its limits are taken for granted. For he has experienced the magic of love, youth and life throughout.

He further writes that after completing fifty years of age one often faces a tension between youth and old age. Reaching fifty years actually means one has lived fifty years of his life. In other words, fifty years of life is decreased, the span of living is reduced in respect to the process of ageing. Referring to a well-known Urdu poem, he seeks to sympathise with himself growing old: ‘जितना बड़ती है, उतना घटती है/ उमर तो अपने आप कटती है’ [Jitna Barti hai, utna Ghatti hai, / Umar apne aap katti hai.] (Bachchan, 2009: 145) Looking back at the years so spent, Bachchan understands that his process of becoming old has never been useless. Whenever he thinks about his own creative potential and skill as a poet and translator, the feelings of happiness, sadness, juvenal hardwork come live and this revival inspires him in receiving more intently new feelings and experiences. Though the youth had been all about strength, masculinity, bravery and enthusiasm, yet the process of aging would give him more experience, completeness, intelligence, wisdom and self-sufficiency.

Bachchan perhaps knew that since he is a poet, he cannot live the life of a common man, he has to make his own way. After getting the job of a translator, translating official documents into Hindi in the Foreign Ministry of the Government of India, he took the initiative for the ‘Hindi Prachar Sabha’. However he was restricted by some of his officials who were not in support of this and subsequently forced to be limited to his job. Quoting lines from Browning’s “Rabbi Ben Ezra” Bachchan wrote how he had been inspired by the famous lines: “Grow old along with me / The best is yet to be”. (Bachchan, 2009: 145) He rejuvenated his own poetic self from the claustrophobic atmosphere in which he was working. To him ‘Rabi’ had said that good time was still waiting for him. He had to bring that good time, for which he needed to create the good time and hence first of all to grow old. The initial decades of Indian post-independence era was the time of progressive movements – when the writers were in search for new models and inspiration for expressing the crisis and new hopes of the nation. This probably supplied the background for

Bachchan deciding to translate the four major tragedies of Shakespeare *Macbeth* in 1958, *Othello* in 1959, *Hamlet* in 1967 and *King Lear* in 1969. In Indian dramatic tradition, especially in Sanskrit Drishya Kavayas, there has been no prototype for tragedy. It needed to be imported from the West. Therefore, when others were in search of new models and sources, Bachchan took recourse to translation of Shakespeare.

Being a poet of Nehruvian era, he was inspired by Nehru himself. In his autobiography Bachchan wrote how he was impressed by Nehru's idealism and thus translated one of his most favourite poem written by Robert Frost "Crossing by the Woods" in Hindi. Referring to the Hindi poet Suman's poem he expressed his feelings and gratitude for Nehru. He also wrote that, can it be possible that he [Nehru] has grown old on whom youth has always remain benevolent; He cannot be old since the nations breathe depends on him, if he has turned old how can the forty crore people depending on their leader retain their youthful ageing enthusiasm?

With the process of ageing, Bachchan had to undergo various physical problems. Struggling with ulcer, he had to approve for surgery. In the year 1965 a time came when he realised that his life was about to end. The very image of death started haunting him so much that a phobia powerfully gripped his mind. But with poetry he dislodged the fear of death from his heart. In a poem "Old Farmer" ("Burah Kissan") published in his anthology *Jaal Sameta* (1972), since his work is complete, now he may think of taking rest, he makes the old Farmer say that all the tools which had been used in farming 'Khurpi', 'Hansiya', 'Purwat', 'Lariya', 'Har', 'Henga' were of no use to him. Whatever was there in his soil, he ploughed and ripped with the honest labour of his body and soul. Now there was nothing that death could take away from him:

अब समाप्त हो चुका मेरा काम ।
करना है बस आराम ही आराम ।
अब न खुरपी, न हैंसिया,

न पुरवट, न लढ़िया,
 न रतरखाव, न हर, न हेंगा।
 मेरी मिट्टी में जो कुछ निहित था,
 उसे मैंने जोत-बो,
 अश्रु-स्वेद-रक्त से सींच, निकाला,
 काटा,
 खलिहान का खलिहान पाटा,
 अब मौत क्या ले जाएगी मेरी मिट्टी से – ठेंगा !

*Aab samapat hua mera kam.
 Karna hai baas aaram hi aaram.
 Aab na Khurpi, na hansiya,
 Na Purwat, na Lariya,
 Na raatrkhaw, na Har, na Henga.*

*Meri mitti mai jo kuch nihit tha,
 Usse maine jot-bo,
 Asru-swed-rakat se sincha, nikala,
 Kata,
 Khalihan ka khalihan pata,
 Aab moth kya le jayegi meri mitti se – thenga.*

(Bachchan, 2009: 70)

Reaching his seventies Bachchan decided that he would stop writing poems. In the anthology *Jaal Sameta*, he announced that it would be his last. It was the rolling back of his poetic net. Although in journals and magazines his poems continued to appear he never thought of any collection of poem thereafter. Bachchan wrote that being a poet, it is quite natural that he would express himself freely through his poetry. For his grandchildren, he wrote three more volumes of poems and finally breaking his vow of not publishing any collection. This creative outburst was perhaps an impact of his ripe age alongside the love for children which was still unrevealed in his poetic career. Again it was the very pain of being separated from his son Amitabh and Ajitabh, who were living away from him that forced Bachchan to write his own poems and translate some poems of Amitabh as well.

NOTES

1. "Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day." (*Macbeth*, Act I, Sc. iii, l.l. 147-148)
2. "The Prince of Cumberland!
That is a step,
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies." (*Macbeth*, Act I, Sc. iv, l.l. 48-50)
3. "Had he not resembled
My father as he slept...." (*Macbeth*, Act II, Sc.ii, l.l. 12-13)
4. One will have to continue the life's' journey till s(he) breaths. Along with them the cluster of stars are singing their song in the sky. Even the sky is on-going it's journey. The power of timing is surrounding you from every side. One cannot stop even for a moment. Till the breathing is going on you will have to continue the life's journey. (Prose translation of "Yatra aur Yatri")
5. Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. (*Macbeth*, Act III, Sc. I, l.l. 60-63)
6. ...my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
(*Macbeth*, Act V, Sc. iii, l.l. 22-28)
7. "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time...."
(*Macbeth*, Act V, Sc. v, l.l. 19-21)
8. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth*, Act V, Sc. v, l.l. 23-28)

9. "For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now, some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
Their dearest action in the tented field...."
(*Othello*, Act I, Sc. iii, l.l. 84-86)
10. I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffer'd. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'ywas wondrous pitiful:
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story.
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
(*Othello* Act 1, Sc iii, l.l. 155-169)
11. Look, if my gentle love be not rais'd up! –
I'll make thee an example.
Desdemona: What's the matter?
Othello: All's well now, sweeting; come away to bed.
(*Othello*, Act II, Sc.iii, l.l. 246-249)
12. Haply, for I am black,
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chambers have; or, for I am declin'd
Into the vale of years; – yet that's not much:
She's gone, I am abus'd; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage!
That we can call these delicate creatures ours.
And not their appetites.
(*Othello*, Act III, Sc. iii, l.l. 267-274)
13. "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof...."
(*Othello*, Act III, Sc. iii, l.l. 362-363)
14. 'T is true: there's magic in the web of it.
A sibyl that had number'd in the world

The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk,
And it was dy'd in mummy which the skilful
Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.

(*Othello*, Act III, Sc.iv, l.l. 71-77)

15. Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies:
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

(Bachchan, 2014, 26)

16. Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears Today of
Past Regrets and future Fears –
Tomorrow? – Why, Tomorrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.

(Bachchan, 2014, 64)

17. Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and best
That time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have Drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

(Bachchan, 2014, 65)

18. I Thought no more was needed
Youth to prolong
Than dumb-bell and foil
To keep the body young.
Oh, who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?

("A Song", l.l. 1-6)

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