

TRANSLATING LANGUAGE POLITICS AND DECOLONISING THE STAGE IN DEV VIRAHSAWAMY'S *TOUFANN*

Dr. Onkar Nath Upadhyay
Associate Professor
Dept. of English and MEL
Lucknow University, Lucknow
India

ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at highlighting the language politics of the third world countries like Mauritius which is dominated by Francophone school of languages such as Creole instead of English being official language and Bhojpuri (Motia Hindi), the language of majority of slaves and indentured laborers (PIOs). Dev Virahswamy used Creole language of French colonizers which was spoken by the majority of PIOs because it is considered as the language of sophisticated and refined class. Since he belongs to South India, he did not prefer to write his works in Bhojpuri language. He is one of the most popular dramatists and poets of Mauritius whose famous works are *Draupadi*, *Krishna*, *Toufaan*, *Dr. Hamlet*, *Bhagwat Gita*, *Tamtam Gitar Ek Sitar* (Poem), *Jamuna Gaga Devi* (Novella) etc. Kaspalto sings a song "Diwana Mastana" to amuse the audience. Dammarro is an Indian Junkie who is made of two words Dam (taking deep breath) and marro (to kill) and kaspalto means a kind of cheap wine. *Toufann* is a kind of post-colonial, transnational and intertextual text written under the influence of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and David Lambkin's *Night Jasmine Man*. The characters of the play are King Lear as Alonso, Polonius as Gonzalo, Cordelia as Miranda, Prospero, Ariel, Kalibban, Ferdjinnan as Ferdinand, Kaspalto as Trinculo, Dammarro as Stephano. The venue of the play seems to be an Island which is Mauritius. Prospero creates Toufann (Typhoon or cyclone) in this play with the help of computer with the help of computer operator,

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Kalibaan and Ariel, a robot. In this play kordelia provokes kalibaan whom she loves to revolt against her father. Ferdjnan loves Ariel, a male. Prospero wanted to marry kodelia with ferdjnan in order to take revenge with king lir and his brother, Yago. Above all the play gets immense popularity in England and abroad on account of transnational scenario, introduction of the 21st century science and technology, inter-textuality and being the replica of Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. Prospero is no more the hero of the play but kalibaan is the hero being the real owner of the Island.

II

Introduction

Mark Twain appreciates Mauritius to say that God has first created Mauritius then copied it in the form of heaven. In 1841, the French poet, Bauldaire, wrote about Mauritius that it was a rich and magnificent land, full of promises which gave a mysterious scent of rose and musk and where life's musical sound reached one as a living murmur. Charles Darwin visited the land and passed a comment: "How pleasant it would be to pass ones life in such quiet abode". Although Mauritius gets drastic change due to the colonial power of France and England, yet its luscious beauty still remains the same in the 21st century. The Nobel Laureate, Jean Mare Clezio, and the French novelist was proud of being Mauritian descendants. Lindsey Collen, Dev Virahsawmy, Abhimanyu Unnuth and Anand Mulloo are some of the worth nothing writers whose works are acknowledged in the literature of the world.

III

Language Politics in Mauritius

Mauritius is a multilingual, multicultural and post-colonial country where language politics is a burning issue among the entire major writers as well as diplomats. Dev Virahsawmy's *Toufann* is a kind of re-writing of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Mauritian Creole language. Majority of indentured laborers were migrated from Bihar and eastern U.P. who spoke Bhojpuri language so their descendants also want to propagate the same. Bhojpuri is being taught in many colleges of Mauritius such as Basudev Bissoon Doyal College and Mahatma Gandhi Institute etc. Mauritian parliament under the stewardship of Navin chand Ramgoolam, Jagdish Gobardhan, Chit Dukhira passed a bill in favor of the language.

During my visit to Mauritius I was amazed to find that those who can speak Bhojpuri use Creole language in their houses. When I enquired, it was told that during the late 19th and early 20th century the Giritias descendants went to school where they were humiliated when they spoke Bhojapuri. However, Tamils also preferred to speak Creole because they were not in minority. Dev Virahsawmy, being the descendents of South India, did his post graduation in Creole and submitted his dissertation entitled "Towards the Re-evaluation of Mauritian Creole." So far as English is concerned, it has no foundation in Mauritian society except a political one. English is an official language used in parliament, Judiciary, and for administration in school. According to census 1990 only 0.26% speaks English, 3.26% French, 61.72% Creole and 34.71% Oriental languages. In recent years English has become an international language so the percentage of English learners is increasing among the native speakers. In the IIIrd world countries like Mauritius English is taught and learnt by majority of the children in order to enter in the world trade market of knowledge. Frantz fanon advocated total rejection of the standard of the colonizing culture, including its language. According to him, "The colonizeds raised the above jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother countries' cultural standards". On

the other hand Chinua Achebe acknowledges that English is a world language which history has forced down to his throat. V.S. Naipaul, an East Indian Hindu and a man of rural community of Trinidad, was brought up in a Hindi speaking family who regarded English as his principal language. Satish Mahadev favored English language because it has produced many Nobel Prize winners of non-native speaker countries like India and South Africa. Colonizers' language i.e. English may be used as an instrument to re appreciate the literature written in the past during the British imperialism. According to him "the vast majority of Mauritian learners are being taught in English in what can be called an acquisition for poor environment as opposed to an acquisition for rich environment, and as a result the language does not become a usable means of communication.

IV

Virahsawmy's *Toufann* as a Post- Colonial Text

The play *Toufann* was written in Creole language which was translated by Nisha and Michael Walling in English. The 'introduction' of the play was written by William Kinson which was published in Martin Banham's book *African theatre :Playwrights and Politics* in 2001. When the play was staged the role of central character, Prospero, was played by Shaun Chawdhary who appears like Imran Khan in the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Granada) and Ali in BBC's popular *Eastenders*. Prospero, the powerful but philosopher king spent his time in writing, reading and doing research in his laboratory and left his brother Yago, the Prime Minister, with the responsibility of running the country's affairs. Yago, hooked on power, wanted more of its elixir. He joined hands with Prince Edmon and King Lir to overthrow his brother, Prospero, through a military coup. In a conflict Prospero's wife was killed and Kordelia, their newly-born daughter, was spared. Both of them were placed in a broken boat which finally landed on an island; Prospero, the computer genius, turned it into a paradise. The only inhabitants of the island were Kalibann and his mother, Bangoya, a black slave who was abandoned by a white pirate after he had fathered Kalibann, later to become Prospero's scientific assistant. The role of Prospero's daughter, Kordelia, was beautifully played by Catherine Mobley, who spent 20 years on the island through patience, hard work and research. Prospero developed his science to have total control over people and nature. Prospero was thus able to create a cyclone to trap the ship, which was carrying those who had toppled him from his throne. "Time of revenge had come", Prospero proclaimed, "they would now have to face my toufann, the instrument of my vengeance".

The passengers could not make any sense of the mysterious cyclone, which appeared to have flown their ship across the island and landed on a mini-lake, with mountain around, and "a ship with no sea to sail". Prince Ferdjnan, the son of King Lir who had dethroned Prospero, was among the victims of the shipwreck, and while exploring the island, he was hypnotized by Aryel, a robot whose creator was no other than Prospero, "the child of his science, the creature of his competence". Aryel brought the Prince to Prospero and Kordelia. The plan of Prospero was taking shape, he had decided that his daughter Kordelia would eventually marry Prince Ferdjnan to re-conquer the lost kingdom. The world of Prospero's enemies was in disarray. King Lir had decided to abdicate. They finally clubbed together to install Kordelia as a queen. But the crucial part of Prospero's plan fell apart when his daughter Kordelia revealed that she would marry kalibaan and not the Prince. Prospero exposed the plan to Kordelia. In response to the plan Kordelia says. "It is enough for me that he has a human blood". In *The Tempest* Prospero

resigned himself. He threw the key into the sea and, with it, went his magical powers. In Virahswamy *Toufann* Kordelia and Kalibann's reign began, new king, new problems! Mari sa! When the play was staged in Africa, India, London and other places in 1999 more than dozens of appreciations were received within two months. The stage performance was so successful that the Africans and the British developed a yearning to read the original text for the sake of comparison between the two. The toufan existed not only in the ocean but also in the heart of almost all the characters of the play.

In the play, *Toufann*, Prospero's wife was killed and Kordelia, their newly-born daughter, was spared. Both of them were put on a 'nutshell' of a boat in uncharted waters; they finally landed in an island and Prospero, the computer genius, turned it into a paradise. The only inhabitants of the island were Kalibaan and his mother, Bangoya, a black slave who was abandoned by a white pirate after he had fathered Kalibann, later to become Prospero's scientific assistant. The role of Prospero's daughter, Kordelia, was beautifully played by Catherine Mobley, who spent 20 years on the island through patience, hard work and research. Prospero developed his science to have total control over people and nature. Prospero was thus able to create a cyclone to trap the ship, which was carrying those who had toppled him from his throne. "Time of revenge had come", Prospero proclaimed, "they would now have to face my Toufann, the instrument of my vengeance".

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V

Decolonizing the state in *Toufann*

Virahswamy borrowed the subject of his play from Shakespeare *The Tempest* and his characters are Prospero, Polonius (Gonzalo) Yago (Antonio) Aryel (Ariel), Kalibaan (Caliban), Ferdjnan (ferdinand) kaspalto (Trinoculo), Dammara (Stepheno), Kordelia (Miranda) king lir (Alonso) Edmon (Sebastian). In fact, Gonzalo is replaced by Polonius, the character of *Hamlet* who is loyal to Claudius, Hamlet's uncle but in *Toufann* kordelia calls Polonius as yogi in the sense that he maintains the loyalty towards the throne and Miranda is replaced with kordelia, the daughter of King Lear of Shakespearean tragedy who is known for her honesty and truthfulness. Here kordelia is aware of the mischievous actions of her father, and provokes kalibaan to revolt against her father.

"An electronic expert doesn't understand the basic things. Once you have got your freedom, he cannot force you do anything. Do you understand? (245)

Kordelia is described as studying Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and revolted against the patriarchy of her father. Kalibaan asks kordelia "So, what have you been reading? Simon de Beauvoir? (244) Kordelia is in love with kalibann on account of his honesty, devotion and dedication whereas ferdjnan does not want to marry with kordelia so he says:

"My dream in turning into nightmares.... Where is this hidden camera?
Can't see a thing in a pit! I did not want to be king any way- kordelia can have my place! but I will not let you force to marry. No way, I can not make life with a woman- that is not who I am.O God, what is his name?
kali no kila- kaliban! perhaps he can help. Kalibann! I am trapped- I am trapped. This is hell, kalibann (228)

In Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* tempest was created with the help of magic band which Prospero drowned in the ocean at the end of the play. So the play is called a tragic-comedy of reconciliation and forgiveness. Here computer genius, Prospero and his daughter kordelia are thrown in a ship which is mysteriously wrenched in the Island. Prospero's enemy the past king lir, his son, Ferdjnan, his brother's Edmon, and Prospero's brother, Yago were there in the ship. He wishes to take revenge and marry kordelia with the son of the king Ferdjnan with the help of robot, Aryel, and computer expert kalibann. There were also kaspalto and damenarro, the traditional clowns of Mauritian culture. The two clowns were disguised as Yago and prince Edmon to confuse king lir.

In *The Tempest* Prospero says "Twelve years since, Miranda, twelve years since, thy father was the duke of Milan and prince to power". In this play Prospero says "You have no idea of what I am feeling. I have been working for twenty years. Twenty years I have been working". (229)

In *Toufaan* kalibann is described as a hero because the Island belongs to his mother, Sycorax, so he is the owner of the island and Prospero is the colonizer who simply came to exploit the wealth of the nation. His own daughter is dubious over her father. We also find the concept of New- historicism when kordelia says-

"History is a pretty symbolic thing, Fardjnan. Your father tells you Prospero led a failed coup. My father says Lir and Yago conspired to destroy him. Now who has a plan." (23) Aryel also reacts against the exploitation of Prospero and says "We are giving orders around here now! We are republicans! up the republicans of ecstasy". (232)

Gonzalo is described as kind and generous in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* so Polonius is also presented of kind nature in *Toufaan*. Polonius secretly gave Prospero 'some food and clothes and his favorite books' (240). In act III he sensed the presence of invisible Prospero being his good friend. Prospero's daughter, kordelia, calls him yogi because of his ascetic personality. In *The Tempest* Gonzalo defines the common wealth against the bureaucracy of the Britishers as he says: "In the commonwealth, I would be contraries execute all things...." In both the plays he is presented in the same spirit.

Caliban has been described as a barbarian and ill tempered and ill mannered supernatural element in *The Tempest* who obeys Prospero. Commenting upon Prospero's ruthlessness he says:

"You taught me the language
And my profit in it is, I know how to curse.

The red plague rid you for learning me you language."
 Caliban revolted against the atrocities of Prospero who could only curse him but in *Taufaan* kalibann is a computer expert who can't be exploited by Prospero rather Prospero's daughter falls in love with him.

VI Conclusion

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, being the root text, is equally important in the 21st century English literature which highlights the colonial concept of the British imperialism. The central character of the tragi-comedy, Prospero, was a magic expert and colonizer of the island which belonged to the mother of Caliban, Sycorax. Being the last play of Shakespeare, it starts with the revenge of the hero with Alonso, Antonio and others but ends with forgiveness, conciliation and renunciation of the hero. On the other hand Dev virahsawmy's *Toufaan* is a transnational, post-colonial, text in which kalibaan is the hero and the instruments applied by the dramatist are also the products of the 21st century such as computer, robot and musical songs like "Dammaro Dam..." Kaspalto sings a song "Diwana Mastana" to amuse the audience (232) Dammarro is an Indian Junkie who is made of two words Dam (take breath) and marro (to kill) and Kaspalto means a kind of cheap wine..David Lambkin's *Night Jasmine Man* gave inspiration to the playwright to produce the drama. No doubt, the play was written in 1991, it gets immense popularity when it was translated into English and staged in London and South Africa. The word Toufann (Hindi Word) is more forceful than tempest, cyclone or typhoon which indicates the appropriateness of the title. Virahsawmy also applied the Brechtian theory of alienation in this play.

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