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Translation as New Aesthetic: Premchand's Translation of *Shab-e Taar* and European Modernism*

Early twentieth-century literature in India was marked by its "transactions with modernity, in some cases engaging with the ideology of European modernism, in others producing its own formal solutions to the problems of disorder, violence, and mimetic lack" (Chaudhuri 2010, 954). Historically, a period of strong nationalist upsurge and political upheavals, it also witnessed a wave of cosmopolitan avant-garde cultural practices in art and architecture. Given that many of the Hindi and Urdu writers were exposed to Western literature, either in English or in translation, during this period, Premchand's encounter with Maurice Maeterlinck's (1862–1936) symbolist-absurdist play *Les Aveugles* (1890) or *The Sightless* as *Shab-e Tār* (Dark Night) was mediated by English and thus followed the same trajectory. Translated as early as 1919, the play is about twelve unnamed people, all sightless, all inmates of an institution or shelter home, hopelessly stranded in an "ancient" forest one dark night. Anxiously awaiting the arrival of their guide, an old priest, to lead them to shelter and safety, they are unaware that he has been lying dead all along. Capturing an intense mood of isolation and fear, the play foreshadows the Brechtian anti-mimetic world of *Waiting for Godot* written more than half a century later.

Located against that background, this paper explores how and why Premchand's translation of a foreign text should be seen as a "new aesthetic." Also, given that Premchand kept a close watch on each major event of national or international importance, was *Shab-e Tār*, published four months after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, a camouflaged protest against British oppression and censorship? And, lastly, this paper also deals with

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Premchand's translational praxis in the context of *Shab-e Tār*.

I

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation in translation activities and it was also through the translation of European literature that Indians encountered European modernism. However, it was primarily English literature that was being translated and less of literatures from other European languages. In her survey on "readerly" preferences during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Priya Joshi observed that the Indian reading public stuck to the "good books" of fiction by Scott and Dickens which the colonial authorities wished them to read (2004, 309). Other popular choices were Fielding, Thackeray, Swift, Bulwer-Lytton, and Collins, among others, which continued to be read and translated throughout the next century (*ibid.*, 307). In fact, as Sisir Kumar Das points out, during the 1920s there was a sudden spurt of interest in Scandinavian authors in Bengal, and some of the non-British writers and playwrights such as Moliere, Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Maxim Gorky were being read and translated (1995, 57). Urdu literature too had a fair share of European dramatists through translations of Goldsmith, Sheridan, Alexander Dumas, Schiller, Maeterlinck, Ibsen and Shaw. Das observes that Maeterlinck, a hugely influential playwright of the Symbolist school, had "cast a spell on the Indian audience as he did on the contemporary Western theatre" (*ibid.*,58). Deeply symbolic in nature, his plays were in sharp contrast to the "robust realism of Ibsen" (*ibid.*) and hinted at the uncertainty of reality.

As mentioned earlier, *Shab-e Tār* is a translation of the English version of Maeterlinck's play. Of the two versions available in English—Richard Hovey (1894) and Laurence Alma Tadema (1895)—Premchand took up Tadema as his source text. *Shab-e Tār* came out serially in the September and October 1919 issues of Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam's monthly Urdu newspaper *Zamāna*, published from Kanpur. Four decades later in 1962, Amrit Rai published *Shab-e Tār* in book form from Hans Prakashan, Allahabad. Surprisingly, Das's comprehensive compendium *History of Indian Literature 1911–1956* inadvertently fails to mention either *The Sightless* or its translation, though a brief paragraph is devoted to Maeterlinck's other plays translated into Indian languages. Das stated that some of Maeterlinck's other works were also translated but we do not have any information about any of them being staged (1995, 58). Maeterlinck's masterpiece was thus subsumed under the category of "other works."

In the 1962 version of *Shab-e Tār*, the Arabic/Persian script was replaced with Devanagari, a Hindi subtitle was appended and difficult Urdu words

were glossed in footnotes. Perhaps Amrit Rai believed that in the newly emerged post-Partition nation, Premchand's readers would now mainly be Hindi-speakers. Also, the new generation of the 1960s, by and large, was no longer bilingual or conversant in both Hindi and Urdu. In the preface to the collection of Premchand's short stories *Gupta Dẖana* (1962a), Amrit Rai admitted that *"Urdū sē prapt kahāniyōñ kō jiyōñ kā tiyōñ čẖāp dēnā hindī kē pāṭẖkōñ kē prati anyaya samajẖ kar maiñ nē unkō hindī kā jāma pehnāyā—Munshījī kī apnī hindī kā, yānī jahāñ tak mujẖ sē hō sakā*" (Publishing those Urdu stories in Hindi would have been an injustice to the Hindi readers, so I gave them a Hindi color—in Munshiji's own Hindi to the extent that I could possibly do it, 6). On the contrary, in the preface to *Shab-e Tār*, Rai mentioned that *Shab-e Tār jiyōñ kā tiyōñ apnē Urdū rūp meiñ prastut kiyā jā rahā hai—hāñ, kaṭẖin shabdōñ kā artẖ fuṭnōṭ meiñ dē diyā gayā hai*" (*Shab-e Tār* is presented here as it was originally, in Urdu, with meanings of difficult words provided in footnotes (1962b, 5). Rai's preface to *Shab-e Tār* also brings to light two important facts: first, that Premchand was also translating another of Maeterlinck's plays, *Pelleas and Melisanda* in Hindi; and secondly, that Premchand had admitted that *The Sightless* and *Pelleas and Melisanda* were his favorite works. It was pretty obvious that Premchand held French literature in high esteem for he admits this in his introduction to *Ahankār* (1925), his Hindi translation of Anatole France's novel *Thais* (1890): "In Europe, the delightful literature of France is the best of all" (qtd. in Trivedi 1997, 407). Amrit Rai further notes that the translation of *Pelleas and Melisanda* and the Hindi edition of *Shab-e Tār* could not be found anywhere (1962b, 5). Who knows if they got published at all or were lost in oblivion like many of his other manuscripts?

Coming back to Maeterlinck's *The Sightless* (1890), the symbolist avant-garde play was written under the influence of the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer who asserted that life without pain is meaningless. The suffering body unfolds as the inner place of discovery and as the central locus of the meaning of existence. The philosophy of the unconscious of Eduard von Hartmann, who sought to reconcile two conflicting schools of thought, rationalism and irrationalism, by emphasizing the central role of the unconscious mind, also influenced him. A brief account of the play is as follows:[1] Twelve unnamed blind people (six men and six women) are hopelessly stranded on a desolate island anxiously waiting for their leader, the priest, to lead them to safety, unaware that he has been dead all along.

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[1]What follows is based on the Director's Note to the playscript of *The Blind* adapted for a production at Brown University in 2007 (http://brownblind.blogspot.in/2007/02/here-is-draft-of-script-we-will-be.html).

The sound of sea waves, falling leaves, rising wind and the flapping of the night birds punctuate the silence. Their senses take fright in that world of sightless disquiet and they grope in the dark as a tempest gathers and snow falls. A dog, then, leads them to where the priest "mortally still" leans against an oak tree. The group of men and women tremble in the silence and chill of the night. Then comes the sound of hurrying feet and someone approaching in the eerie silence. The steps draw closer and then stop. The sightless people (and the readers, too) wonder: Whose footsteps are those? Why did they stop? Who is it that has sought them in the night and in the snow? Was he/she a deliverer, a guide? To the late nineteenth-century audiences, the parable might sound familiar: Had God really died, as Nietzsche had proclaimed, leaving humans to fend for themselves? Translator and critic Richard Hovey (2002, n.p.), however, points out that the intruder is Death, that the play is the symbol of a "world lost in the dark forest of unfaith and unknowledge." The dead priest lying in the midst of the devotees who had little faith symbolically stands for religion/church. Through the slow uncertain groping of reason, in vain they seek for a guide in animal instinct, in the newborn future that cannot yet utter its revelation. Written at of the turn a new century, *The Sightless* raised quite a few probing questions: What would the new century bring? Will the young born on the threshold of the new century be able to "see"? Will they be able to comprehend what is coming their way (metaphorically as footsteps from the future)?

By bringing these queries to the Indian context, Premchand, too, displayed his anxiety about the future of his fellow countrymen under colonial subjugation. His translation of *The Sightless* at this critical juncture of anticolonial nationalism brought to the fore a number of uneasy questions: Did the play hint at the despair of the nation through the allegory of twelve blind men who were clueless about their future, oblivious of the fact that there was no one left to lead them to safety and security? Was this in any way symbolic of the failure of the Indian leadership who promised but failed to deliver, for they themselves were (figuratively?) incapable to do much for the people suffering under colonialism? Can the notion of blindness be applied metaphorically to the vision displaced under colonial control? Whether these are mere conjectures or carry some element of truth can only, at best, be explored.

II

Premchand's translation may be seen as a "new aesthetic" in the context of *Shab-e Tār*. My humble submissions are as follows:

Shab-e Tār was one of the earliest examples of an encounter with Western modernism in India and a revolutionary advance in Urdu drama (see Saksena 1927, 363). I wish to submit that though Homi Bhabha's[2] notion of "time-lagged colonial moment" (1994, 250) within modernity might support the argument that modernism was a late phenomenon in India, *Shab-e Tār* inaugurated a modernist moment in Urdu literary imagination almost simultaneously with its "moment" in a Europe marked by new experiments in literary and cultural practices. As far as modernism in art in India was concerned, Partha Mitter in his work *Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde* (2007) locates the "convenient entry point" for modernism in the year 1922 when an exhibition of Bauhaus artists whose works symbolized "the graduation of Indian taste from Victorian naturalism to non-representational art" (15) was held in Calcutta.[3] The first generation of Indian modernists owed an intellectual and formal debt to the Bauhaus and their modernist aesthetics. In this sense, the modernist impulse in Urdu almost coincided with modernism in Bengal, a vibrant center of intellectual and artistic tendencies among Bengali intelligentsia and cultural aficionados.

The Symbolists' refusal to depict the empirical world as a reaction against Realism and Impressionism was embedded in the wider cultural and political anxieties of late-nineteenth-century Europe. As a Symbolist play situated in the political anxieties of the period, *Shab-e Tār* showed that truth was beyond the sensory world and it could only be perceived through a rich use of allusory symbols and a reflective state of mind.

Premchand's age was one in which social reform and change had become a burning concern with intellectuals, yet when he translated this play, adapting its unique cultural and historical subtext, he was virtually entering another domain of creativity. This was the "new aesthetics" inspired by the Belgian Symbolists who were more socially and politically engaged with the working class than their French counterparts. In fact, Premchand was moving along the same trajectory as politically motivated directors, such as Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) who crafted Maeterlinck's plays and other Symbolist works as productions aiming at political change. In the words of Sara Rai, by that time Premchand had begun to subscribe to Bolshevist ideas and it was the vision of a revolutionary future

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[2]Geeta Kapur also argues that regions and linguistic communities in India have their own time-lagged histories of modernist experimentation (see Chaudhuri 2010, 596).

[3]Modernism in Hindi is said to have begun formally in 1943 with poet and novelist S.H. Vatsyayan Agyeya (Trivedi 1993, 189) and in Urdu only with the modernist ideas and concepts put forward by poet-critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi and Gopichand Narang in the 1960s (see Nazar 1998, 107–22; Faruqi 1992, 437–442).

—that of a government controlled by the proletariat, as in Russia—that began to dictate his attacks on the Indian reality (1979, 35).

Literature and ideology were aesthetically combined in *Shab-e Tār*. The play may be seen as a camouflaged/discrete act of resistance against colonial control and repression through the mode of increased surveillance on Indians. Indian colonial history informs us that the Censorship Act of 1876 had become a legal mechanism of imperial control over anti-colonial plays. Under such circumstances and also because of Premchand's prior encounter with censorship (his earlier work *Sōz-e Vaṭan* (The Dirge of the Nation, 1909) was confiscated and banned), it was pretty much certain that he could not have protested in a manner other than this.[4] Due to the threat of censorship clamped over the media after the Jallianwala Bagh incident, Premchand was discretely protesting against the British regime and presumably also against the Indian leadership whose vested interests were camouflaged behind their nationalist aspirations. In fact, as early as February 1919 Premchand was pained to observe the selfishness of the leaders of the *Svarāj* movement and had warned them: "There is no reason for the public to prefer your governance to the governance of the foreign rulers" (1978, 267).[5] Like the blind people in the play, he believed Indians now needed another guide to lead them out of the atmosphere of gloom and despair because their leader had become too old and infirm and could no longer "see" (1962, 17). In this thinly veiled reference to Gandhi, *Shab-e Tār* appears to have anticipated and supported Premchand's later change of opinion about him. In an article published on 16 April 1934 and

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[4]As a protest against the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Tagore renounced his knighthood, but Premchand's silence on the issue was puzzling unless one reads Amrit Rai's biography *Kalam ka Sipāhi* (translated and published in 1991 as *Premchand: His Life and Times*). Rai recollects that Premchand was in Allahabad taking his B.A. examination when the news of Jallianwala Bagh reached him. Six days later, in a letter to his friend Taj, Premchand wrote: "I hope to God there's peace in Lahore." And on 30 July 1919: "Thank God! Punjab is quiet again." Amrit Rai continues: "That was all. What more could he say? Free speech was restricted. But his heart smoldered and his resolve grew stronger to cast off the chains" (1991, 138). Rai further notes that the feelings of anger, indignation and revolt that simmered within him for quite a long time found expression in his novel *Premāshram* (1922) which forced open issues concerning colonial exploitation through long descriptions of forced labor and the molestation of poor peasants and their wives at the hands of rich landlords. But *Premāshram* came out three years after the Massacre. I see *Shab-e Tār* as Premchand's earliest oblique literary intervention and critique of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in particular and of British oppression in general.

[5]All translations are by the present author unless otherwise noted.

collected in *Vividẖ Prasañg* (1978), Premchand admitted his disillusionment with the failure of Gandhi's Satyagraha movement and clearly called for the "despiritualization of national politics" and political realism. He also hinted that "Mahatmaji's voice is not very dependable" (257–58). The other reason why *Shab-e Tār* should be seen as "a distinctly political act" is governed by the fact that "the choice of a text not part of the literature of the colonial power, constituted an attempt towards the liberation of Indian literature from the tutelage of the imperially-inducted master literature [...]" (Trivedi 1997, 407). By deliberately taking up the translation of a play in a language other than the colonizer's, Premchand was subverting imperial linguistic hegemony and control.

III

Premchand and His Translational Praxis: A comparative reading of Maeterlinck's *The Sightless* and Premchand's *Shab-e Tār* reveals that the latter is a close and direct translation of Maeterlinck's play. Like its source text, *Shab-e Tār,* too, is a drama of minimal action, silence, and "mood studies of fear resulting from the mysterious intrusion of death" (Gassner & Quinn 2002, 541). The text under consideration is Amrit Rai's Urdu/Hindi version republished in 1962, in the preface of which Rai clearly stated that no changes had been made whatsoever in the form, content or language except the script (1962a, 5). A comparison with the Urdu version appearing in volume 15 of *Kulliyāt*-e *Prēmčand* (2000, 1–28) showed that indeed there were no variations between the Urdu and Hindi texts. So what remains now is to see how similar or different Premchand's translation is from Maeterlinck's English version.

Believing that all acts of translation are an attempt to mediate between cultures, texts and nationalities, I wish to focus on some of the issues related to *Shab-e Tār* as a translated text:

The title of the play *The Sightless* or *The Blind* was adapted as *Shab-e Tār or Andẖērī Rāt* in order to highlight the atmosphere of the play—of darkness, gloom, despair and silence—rather than the visual impairment of the characters. Read metaphorically against the context of the Jallianwala Massacre and its aftermath in particular, the title seems appropriate and justified. We can safely presume that Premchand deliberately and intentionally chose this title over the original French or the English version. Secondly, *shab-e tār* (dark night) is a Persian expression, not very commonly used in Urdu, and carries a stronger and more profound connotation of darkness. It is a known fact that Premchand's Urdu contained a liberal sprinkling of Arabic and Persian words.

Given that "metaphrase is an unachievable ideal" (Dharwadkar 1999, 116) and hence complete equivalence is unattainable, it is important to look into Premchand's lexical choices.

In his introductory note to the play, Premchand used the term dervish (1962, 11) for "priest" as in the expression "a very old priest," which may not be an exact equivalent for "sage" or "ascetic." The footnote in Hindi explains it as *sanyāsī*. The word dervish is deployed only once, thereafter it is replaced by Hindi substitutes such as *sād̲h̲ū* (12) *sad̲h̲ūjī* (16), *mahātmājī* (33) and *svāmījī* (54), which sound pretty close to the English word priest. Similarly, the Urdu and Hindi words *nābīnā* and *and̲h̲ā/and̲h̲ī* have been deployed interchangeably throughout the text. Keeping in mind the fact that it was Amrit Rai who brought out the Urdu play using the Devanagari script,[6] readers might have assumed that the Hindi equivalents were introduced by him. In that case, the translated text of *Shab-e Tār* would have become thrice removed from the original French! But this is not so. Even in the original Urdu text, Premchand has made use of these Hindi substitutes, perhaps to bring in a colloquial touch and also to adhere to the social convention by adding an honorific "*jī*."

The expression in Tadema's English version: "his hair, of a most solemn white, falls in stiff and scanty locks upon a face more illumined and more weary than all else that surrounds it in the intent silence of the gloomy forest" (Maeterlinck 1895, 169) has been translated by Premchand as "*uskē nūrānī aur safēd bāl uskē čehrē par bik̲h̲rē hu'ē haiñ"* (1962, 11). This collocation of the word *nūrānī bāl* does not seem idiomatically exact. This usage sounds more plausible in connection with the mystic halo or radiance on the face of a Sufi saint, for example. Similarly, in the expression "time to go back to the asylum" (1895, 171), the word asylum has been translated as *khānqāh,* which means a "monastery," not a "shelter house" as intended in the French play. It is to be remembered that when Maeterlinck wrote his plays, people who were visually impaired were placed under the organized supervision or assistance of institutions. The word *khānqāh* is semantically dissimilar. Another expression that seeks attention is the use of the word *khvābgāh* in place of "refectory" as in the following dialogue:

> Third Blind Man: I prefer staying in the refectory by the coal-fire; there was a big fire there this morning…
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> (1895, 191)

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[6]The change of the script of Premchand's works was criticized by scholars such as Kamal Kishore Goenka who considered it objectionable that the original form should have been tampered with at all (see Jain 2012, 22).

Urdu Version:

> *Tīsrā Nābīnā: Mujẖē tō apnī khvābgāh mēñ kō'lé kē sāmnē baiṭẖnā ziyāda pasand hai. Aj ṣubaḥ khūb āg raushan tẖī.*
>
> (1962, 30; 2000, 10–11)

It is quite surprising that Premchand opted for *khvābgāh* for the lexical item "refectory." Was it done intentionally to make the context sound more appropriate in the receiving language? The expression "coal-fire" has been changed to just "coal" when other options could easily have been introduced.

Similarly, the Urdu substitution of "*barf kē ṭukṛē*" (*ibid.*, 63) in the statement "It begins to snow in great flakes" (1895, 234) would have been improved considerably with the use of "*barf kē gālē*." It is interesting to note another instance of unusual collocation in the Urdu version: The expression "*kālī sardī*" used for "great cold," though indicative of the heightened intensity of gloom and hopelessness that the translator intended to capture, is not a commonplace usage. These are examples of lexical choices deployed in the target text that do not correspond to the original usage in Maeterlinck's English version.

The recurrent reference to "dead leaves" in Maeterlinck indicates his constant preoccupation with death. Premchand makes use of the phrase "*murda pattiāñ*" only once and thereafter he uses the phrase "*sūkẖī paittiāñ*" throughout the play, which is inadequate to bring out the original connotation. But this is a typical problem related to language and does not in any way cast aspersion on the translator's competence. In this case, a literal rendering would have been inappropriate. This raises the question of the translatability of a text and proves that absolute correspondence between languages is not possible. However, there are only a few instances where lexical choices seem to be contested in *Shab-e Tār*. On the whole, there are no major departures from the English version that affect the content, form or flow of the English version, but rather, only minor deviations which have been pointed out as an academic exercise in comparative analysis.

Bassnett and Trivedi believe that the "lesser position" granted to translation in comparison to the original work in the literary hierarchy reflects the hierarchic opposition between the European colonizer culture and the colonized culture (1999, 4). To avoid sounding like a derivative and appellative "copy" of the European text (though not a text of the master's language and culture), Premchand made use of cultural adaptation in his translation. The other reason was the transference of cultural references so that the translated text closely conformed to the culture of the

target language. In other words, the success of translation depends largely on the extent of its appropriation into the translator's own language and the degree of its domestication into the translator's own culture (Mukherjee 1981, 81–82). The expression "you can pray by-and-by in the dormitory" (Maeterlinck 1895, 173) is thus translated as *"tum lōg bāvarčīkhānē mēñ jākar namāz paṛẖnā*" (1962, 14). Another instance of cultural adaptation is in Premchand's deployment of the word *mahāl* for "parish." Consequently, "We are all three of the same parish" (1895, 197) has been translated as "*Ham tīnōñ ēk hī mahāl sē āʾī*" (1962, 4), and "praying" has been translated with the expressions "*duʿā karnā*" (14) and "*namāz paṛẖnā*"(14). Should all these cases be considered as instances of situational equivalence, cultural adaptation and creative deviance?

In *Shab-e Tār*, Premchand largely adhered to lexical, stylistic and semantic equivalences. The following dialogue between the Oldest Blind Woman and the Oldest Blind Man is about the missing priest and his purpose in bringing them out in the open. The characters are all unnamed personages and their problems may be seen as the tragedy of Man seized by the inscrutable powers that control his destiny.

> The Oldest Blind Woman: He said too that we ought to know something of the little Island we live in. He himself has never been all over it; there is a mountain that no one has climbed, valleys which no one likes to go down to, and caves that have not been entered to this day. He said, in short, that one must not always sit waiting for the sun under the dormitory roof; he wanted to bring us to the sea-shore. He has gone there alone.
>
> (1895, 184)

Urdu version:

> *Sab sē Buḍḍẖī Andẖī ʿAurat: Vō kahtē tẖē ke ham jis jazīrē mēñ rahtē haiñ uskā kučẖ ḥāl ẓarūr jānanā čāhiyē. Unhōñ nē khud bẖī pūrā jazīra nahīñ dēkẖā hai. Yahāñ ēk aisā pạhāṛ hai jis par kōʾī nahīñ čaṛẖ sakā, aisī vādiāñ haiñ jahañ kōʾī nahīñ jānā pasand kartā aur aisā ghār hai jis mēñ āj tak kōʾī dākhil nahīñ hō sakā. Algharaẓ un kī manshā tẖī ke ham lōgōñ kō āftāb kē inteẓār mēñ hamēsha khānqāh kē zēr-e sāyāh baiṭẖē rahnā munāsib nahīñ. Is liē vō ham kō sāḥil tak lānā čāhtē tẖē. Vō vahāñ tanhā gaʾē haiñ.*
>
> (1962, 24; 2000, 8)

As the play comes to an end on a fearful and sinister note, the child begins to wail in the dark while the elders try to pacify him:

> The Young Blind Woman: Oh! How he is crying!—What is it?—Don't cry.—Don't be afraid; there is nothing to be afraid of; we are here all about you.—What do you see?—Fear nothing! —Don't cry so! —What is it that you see?

—Tell us, what is it that you see?

(1895, 235–36)

Urdu version:

Naujavān Andh̲ī ʿAurat: Uf! Kitnī zōr sē rōtā hai. Kya hai! Mat rō bēṭē! Ḍarō mat! Ḍarnē kī kōʾī bāt nahīñ hai. Ham sab tumhārē pās haiñ. Tum kyā dēkh̲ rahē hō? Ḍarō māt! Is ṯaraḥ mat rō! Tum kyā dēkh̲tē hō? Ham sē batlāʾō ākhir yeh kyā čīz hai?

(1962, 64; 2000, 27)

The translation, here, maintains a stylistic equivalence which has also been observed in the case of idiomatic expressions. And finally, the eerie silence is pierced by the desperate wail of the child as the unknown figure stands before them, though the silence communicates more than that sound.

The Young Blind Woman: Who are you?
[Silence]
The Oldest Blind Woman: Have pity on us!
[Silence. The child cries more desperately.]

(1895, 238)

Urdu version:

Naujavān Andh̲ī ʿAurat: Tum kaun hō?
Sab se Buḍḍh̲ī Andh̲ī ʿAurat: Hamārē ūpar reḥam karō!
(*Khamōsh*)
(*Sannāṭā hai. Bačča gala ph̲āṛ ph̲āṛ kar rōnē lagtā hai.*)

(1962, 67; 2000, 28)

These closing lines are examples of literal and semantic correspondence and capture the dramatic rising tension—the moment of terror, amazement, hysterical fear, Death or even Death-in-life. They affirm Maeterlinck's belief that "[t]here is a tragic element in the life of every day that is far more real, far more penetrating, far more akin to the true self that is in us than the tragedy that lies in great adventure" (Maeterlinck 1905, 97). On the whole, the translation presents a new concept of Maeterlinck's "tragedy of everyday life" (*ibid.*) which also arises from the blind inmates' uncanny ability to sense the coming of Death.

To conclude, translation requires an act of the imagination as well as the translator's linguistic competence. Being equally proficient in English and Urdu, Premchand adhered to the lexical, semantic and stylistic equivalences without compromising on the spontaneity and grace of the target language. *Shab-e Tār* is a reliable representation of the original text—its language, poetics, tradition and its cultural context. Finally, Mukherjee

argued that "[w]hether one translates or transcreates, the original work is renewed by being rendered into another language," and this is "the least we may expect when we regard translation as new writing" (1981, 83). Appropriating Mukherjee's concept of "new writing" as "new aesthetics," I wish to conclude that *Shab-e Tār* may be seen as an effective engagement with world literature and specifically with the renewing of the aesthetics and politics of Maeterlinck's play. ❑

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