

Peddinti Ashok Kumar

# Friends Forever



Translated by P. Jaya Lakshmi

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A Novel in Telugu  
by  
**Peddinti Ashok Kumar**

Translated  
by  
**P. Jayalakshmi**

**Yugadi Publishers**  
Hyderabad, India

## Translator's Note

Sometime around June 2011 Peddinti Ashok Kumar's Telugu novel *Jigiri* came to my hand through a common friend as a downloaded copy from a webzine, where it was originally published as having won a prize in a competition for fiction. Knowing the author's reputation as a writer and in a state of curiosity, I read with fascination the tragic story of Imam and Shadul in one sitting. Allowing myself to be absorbed by the narration, I almost immediately set down to translating the novel. It is the tale of a man and his animal, politics of caste and community and marginalized history. It is not often that one comes across a novel that is unique in its choice of theme such as Ashok Kumar's *Jigiri* translated as *Friends Forever*. It struck me as a novel with a difference, an imaginative recreation of a conflict within a family belonging to a minority ethnic community in relation to an animal the family captured, trained and performed. Circumstances, socio-political in nature, threatened the family to fall apart when the government passed a law against training and performing of animals for a living. The novel is illustrative of a significant moment in the history of animal protection rights, but is also a moment of agonizingly intense conflict for the central character Imam to give up his animal and accept offer of rehabilitation. It may appear to some as going against the law but as an imaginative fiction the novel offers an ideal – a possible empathy existing between man and animal.

The struggle of the community of bear performers for subsistence, and its disappearing ethnicity proved to me the rallying point to embark on a translation of the novel. The novel records the negotiation of power in society and the disappearance of Kalandars, a wandering nomadic community of animal trainers and performers. As an imaginative construct the novel holds within it record of a community's social history living on margins of society. Many an ethnic and indigenous group that once earned its living as monkey performers, snake charmers, or puppeteers and bull performers ('Gangireddu' popular in many parts of Andhra Pradesh) is fading away fast from our midst. Translation of texts such as *Friends Forever*

that revolve around that life, culture and ethos of Kalandars automatically imbues an archival value to the novel as a repository of a cultural memory. The community since forgotten and marginalized both in its existence as well as in its disappearance, the novel in its translation desires to revive that memory and make it travel to open a dialogue with other languages and cultures.

The translation also holds the local, regional and national interests in mind. It emphasizes the local through its allusion to sentiments, beliefs, customs, its peculiar dialect of Urdu, casual quotidian use of abusive expressions and proverbs; the regional, in its reference to various festivals, traditional practices such as tribal medicine; and lastly, the national through its archetypal concerns of family in its search for identity and struggle for a life of dignity. This translation is not just literary and linguistic which would mean limiting the focus and scope of translation, but is also conscious that any culture is inseparable from its language and a successful translation has to always translate that culture through a judicious mixture of expressions in the source language with those in target language to retain the native colour. Translation of *Jigiri* is translation of that culture, and *Friends Forever* hopes to open a channel of communication for target language readers so they may access a socio-political moment, a historical circumstance.

Questions regarding mode of translation riddle any translator unflinchingly from which there is no comfortable get away. The predominant question has been how best to recreate a tribal experience hovering between a rural agrarian setting having a forest on its fringes. As a translator lacking this tribal experience, vital to arriving at an adequate understanding of the text, there was no easy escape from the problem. Doubts persisted if that tribal ethos could be evoked successfully coming from an urban background with English education. Beset with a greatly discomfiting feeling, the tribal sensibility appeared at once remote and alien. Hence, the apprehension that the translation would run easily the risk of getting branded inadequate in having intimate knowledge of that tribal sensibility, and

be termed hegemonic both from my own historical position and the choice of language of translation that is English. However, aware that a perfect translation is as elusive as a distant mirage, I approached the novel with utmost sympathy and understanding of the complex issues involved. Both that culture and I are Indian was the knowledge that strengthened me. So, with an eagerness and enthusiasm I attempted to give an 'afterlife' to the novel's indigenous culture. This honest endeavour to take the novel to a wider reading public as a cultural mediator and an ambassador, were enough to plod me on. Anything otherwise would have meant a regrettable proposition denying myself the pleasure of translating a text such as *Jigiri*.

All translations additionally face the rigours of translating a text linguistically. *Friends Forever* posed the problem in a complex way. The Telugu original is written in a *mandalika* distinct to novel's setting, and there is no way to recreating that dialect in translation into an alien culture but the question of bilingualism remained to be tackled. The novel though written in a dialect of Telugu spoken in Telangana region, the characters speak region-specific Urdu too, since the narration is about a Muslim community of that region. The Urdu spoken is quite natural and spontaneous and comes off with surprising forcefulness as sudden emotional outbursts, such as '*Arrey pagal*', '*Arrey bewaqoof*', as also other Urdu expressions. However, Telugu being the major language of communication of that region as well as the Source Language of the novel, the question was of retaining and infusing the translation with a native flavor and culture- specificity typical to that region. The intention has also been to make both Telugu and Urdu impact English. To this end, expressions in Urdu have been retained in italics facilitating the language to contribute to the natural flow of narration, deepen and expand the linguistic plurality of the text. Most Indian readers are familiar with that peculiar Urdu of Telangana region, but for those unfamiliar, equivalent terms are embedded in the narrative context so that the readers do not have to go too far to seek their meaning.

Another instance of complexity of language is the baggage of culture-specific words, allusions to sentiments, customs, traditions, festivals, sport, flora and fauna, sayings and proverbs, all part of the emotional make-up of characters of a rural, agrarian background. Those that called for elaboration, notes are given in the detailed Glossary provided at the end of the text. Similar is the case with regard to various trees and herbs (*Brahmadandi, Ishtikanta, Vishamushti, Uppi, Ippa, Katthera, Manga, Jaji* etc) most of whom are employed in tribal medicine. These beside, the novel abounds in proverbs popular in the Telangana dialect and some others popular also in mainstream Telugu. Imam quotes proverbs to drive home a point and it seems second nature to him. A straight and meaningful translation of them is preferred highlighting the Telangana cultural nuance, and explained with equivalent proverbs in mainstream Telugu as well as in English wherever available for easy comprehension of the meaning in the Glossary. To this category belong proverbs such as “as a *jaggery*-pounded dull stone unmoving”, “a lass who dies if touched, can she live if kissed?”, or, “as a jackal, desiring camel’s lips” etc. In addition, an Appendix is added at the end for readers not familiar with the socio-political and economic implication of issues concerning the fading ethnic communities such as the bear performers.

One major aspect found riddling during the course of this translation was the use of tense forms. The novel’s action in the Telugu original is in simple present and present continuous, probably employed to heighten the dramatic element in narration, but any rendering in the same tense forms in English would have proved disastrous to the translation. The action too keeps swinging backward and forward in time. Hence, to overcome the problem, the translation adopted simple past and past perfect tenses as relating something that already happened. Reason for this being, the novel’s context and historical moment relate to a past, recent to be specific, when the Indian government passed stringent laws against Kalandars forbidding them to capture, train and use animals for commercial gain or for living. The conflict within Imam’s family is therefore contextual and

historical, and therefore it is felt that evoking a socio-political and historical situation would sound convincing if narrated in simple past and past perfect tenses.

All these, it is hoped, would add up to make this translation transparent, so that it does not read as though written originally in English but as one that gives voice to the original in another tongue. It does not aim to cover or block the worth of the original novel, rather, allows the source language to be ‘reinforced’ through the medium of target language such as English.

No translation is complete without help and support coming from various quarters. I thank first and foremost, Peddinti Ashok Kumar the author of the novel for permitting me to translate his novel and for familiarizing me with the traditional tribal practices through the many interactive sessions with him. I also thank Nizam Venkatesham for being instrumental in introducing me to the novel and the novelist, Narsing Rao Verma from department of Botany, Osmania University whose wide knowledge of local flora and fauna was of immense help in the preparation of the Glossary, Mukunda Rama Rao for his encouragement and frank opinion, Sheshadri Naik for his timely advise and help, B. Narsing Rao of Telugu parallel cinema for his encouraging words to go ahead with the publication, and all my *friends forever* and *jigris*: Santa Sundari and Ganeswara Rao for their assistance and guidance at every step, Leela Masilamoni for patiently going through the script initially and help in firming up the tonal quality wherever it faltered, Tutun Mukherjee and Sita Das for their encouragement and critical opinion, Leela Lakshminarayan for her kind inquiries from to time regarding the progress made in translating the novel, and Srinivasa Sastry and Usha Sastry of Yugadi Publishers in their enthusiasm to publish this work in record time, and finally the personnel at Harshita Printers for bringing out the book. I express my gratitude to all of them.

P. Jayalakshmi

Hyderabad, July 2012

The sun rose.

The sun had also set.

The day passed, the night too had faded.

Imam was yet to return. No sign of Shadul either.

Bibamma and Chand were squat before the cooking fire discussing only about Imam and Shadul.

‘Ammee, Abba hasn’t come yet!’ Chand inquired curiously.

Bibamma did not respond. She added the vermicelli to the boiling milk.

Bibamma was happy though that both Imam and Shadul were away. Chand too was no doubt happy, but was somewhat scared within. Both moved restlessly in and out of the house. So much so, they checked every approaching sound of steps as those of Imam. Startled, they checked every sucking sound as it were of Shadul.

Formerly Bibamma and Chand never stayed without the other two, besides, none of them ever remained without seeing Shadul. It was always a no holds barred situation for Shadul.

If a thorn pricked Shadul’s foot, their hearts palpitated, if Shadul went hungry, their entrails growled within them. So too, when he ran temperature, they could not bear to send down a morsel. Even if they had to go to bed taking *uppidi*!, the cooking fire had to be lit for Shadul! Even if they did not have their food, Shadul had to have his! Regardless whether one was home or not, Shadul had to have his food served in his aluminium plate!

Shadul who mixed and mingled so inseparably in their lives, was not actually a man but an animal — a cruel wild beast that grew up into a gentle creature with a black nose, black coat of hair, sharp teeth, sickle-shaped claws and small eyes!

As for Imam, a man, who went round his animal like an animal — short, lean, wearing a white beard, thin moustache, pointed nose, rapidly moving keen eyes, Muscat *lungi*<sup>2</sup> hitched up about his knees, in a black coat, black shoes, a copper bracelet on his right hand, and an amulet round his neck!

Nobody in the village knew what their names were!

Known as *Pakkir*<sup>3</sup> or *Pakkir saab* and Shadul as the bear or sloth bear<sup>4</sup>, there was no record being seen separate anywhere, anytime, always moving together as close companions.

Chewing, walking, playing, or while being in the forest or in the village, Shadul always followed Imam close behind. He watched Imam keenly when he saw him speaking to anyone.

By the tone of Imam's voice, Shadul could assess the situation. If ever he heard anyone shouting at Imam or saw Imam raise his voice at someone, Shadul rose in anger. Unless Imam signaled him with a glance or a word, Shadul would never leave without attacking the person.

Imam always walked with a leash in his hand, and Shadul followed with the other end of the leash round his muzzle. Imam in front and Shadul close behind. They left home early every day before dawn and were back only at nightfall, exchanging messages through their glances!

Leash or no leash, Shadul always went behind Imam. On and off, he sniffed the ground below and then made a loud sucking sound bending and moving his muzzle. In spite of that daily routine, the dogs barked seeing him plod along the street. Showing no fear, he would walk bearing himself with a serious air about him.

For Imam, Shadul appeared a son who came of age. He would lovingly call him a fool, run his hand along Shadul's coat of fur, caress

**End of Preview.**

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