

# Translation and Power: The Indian Context

Priyadarshi Patnaik

## Abstract

*All men are equal but some are more equal than others  
(Animal Farm, George Orwell)*

*Language born of man (sic woman), proliferating in and around him, giving him identity, can never be innocent. Translations born of men and their interpretations, selective, mapping signposts within minds of individuals and cultures, can only reiterate power relations variously. The paper proposes to look at the various ways power evolves in languages and proliferates to other languages through the translation of texts, contexts, configurations, signposts and concepts. The paper will attempt to do so through illustrations and case studies that primarily show the relation between Sanskrit and Oriya/Regional language traditions, but will also look at more radical cultural translations and their implications (say, from Sanskrit to English) and also from one mode of language to another (say, from poetry to painting), where the mode of languaging itself reconfigures translation according to different power rules.*

## Introduction

Translation has various meanings<sup>1</sup>, but one of the most significant of them is ‘retelling’ in the sense of telling again, transferring, conveying or moving from one place to another. This can happen in (1) another language, (2) in another art form (which is also a language) or (3) in another way – irrespective of language – through clarification, interpretation and elaboration.<sup>2</sup>

Jorge Luis Borges talks about Pierre Menard, in whose writings a fragment of *Don Quixote* is replicated intentionally in the twentieth century (Borges 1999). So the question that arises is: are

the two fragments – the one written in the sixteenth century and the one written in the twentieth century – the same? Borges writes:

It is a revelation to compare the *Don Quixote* of Pierre Menard with that of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes, for example, wrote the following (Part I, Chapter IX):

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

This catalog of attributes, written in the seventeenth century, and written by the "ingenious layman" Miguel de Cervantes, is mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

History, the *mother* of truth! – the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as a *delving into* reality but as the very *fount* of reality. Historical truth, for Menard, is not "what happened"; it is what we *believe* happened. The final phrases – *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor* – are brazenly pragmatic.

The contrast in styles is equally striking. The archaic style of Menard – who is, in addition, not a native speaker of the language in which he writes – is somewhat affected. Not so the style of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness. (94)

The text is interestingly poised. To the twentieth century reader, there is no difference between the two texts if (s)he is not aware of the background of this writing. But for the authors, who write the same text in two different worlds, what a profound difference! One is writing in his own native tongue (Spanish) who is so close to him in time that he can almost touch him. And the other? – What makes a twentieth century man write in the sixteenth century Spanish of a sixteenth century Spanish gentleman of strange attributes! The point I am trying to make is, here is a case of the same text and yet not the same text. There is some 'retelling' here

that is brought out by Borges's analysis of the two texts above, and in spite of the text remaining the same, there is such profound difference in possible understanding! The text remains the same, but it is rewritten again and again in the minds of its different authors with different intents and in the minds of its readers in different worlds – it is like moving into the world of *bhasyas* or commentaries.

If this be so, (where the same text can be understood differently in different contexts) what may not happen with translations where you are retelling something in another language, in another time, for another world? – where the text changes, the context changes, and so does the intent. One translation takes place in the mind-world of the translator and the other in the mind-world of the reader/perceiver.

Retelling<sup>3</sup> in or transferring a text into another language – this is first and most commonly understood meaning of translation. There are two other senses in which I shall use the word: 1) when the very form of language is different, for example when we translate a written story into a picture or dance performance. Here, the very structure of the language is different, the syntax and semantics following different rules; 2) an interpretation is also a translation. It includes an 'elaborate' restatement and the 'elaborations' are assumed to talk about things which are 'meant' or 'understood' but not explicit in the text being interpreted. In other words, the original text (*sutra*) has spaces or silences that are profound and meaningful and the translation (*bhasya*) makes them visible/audible. They are like the readings by Borges of Cervantes and Menard. Power can make its presence felt in all the three cases. We shall try to identify some of the ways this has been done in our tradition and in others.

## Part One

Translating from one language to the other involves two possibilities: 1) retelling (telling again), and 2) interpretation. Sometimes the two cannot be separated. In fact, some would insist

that they can never be separated. These can hide power; so also can contexts.

For instance, in the fourteenth century, in Orissa, Sarala Dasa wrote *Sarala Mahabharata*. The story goes that his mother was illiterate and hence had no access to the holy book. So her son translated the entire text for her. The very act of translation here is an exercise in power against power, both born of language: 1) Brahminical supremacy was based on power – the knowledge of Sanskrit and its exclusive use. The elite would decide what to elucidate for common people (which amounts to translation) and how much. They would also decide who should have access to the language, and definitely not the women; 2) Translation, here, undermines that power. It makes accessible a world otherwise shut within an alien language, controlled and regulated by a particular group of individuals. The act of translating/regeneration also makes this target language gain in richness, popularity, credibility and hence power. The Oriya language underwent such a transformation from orality to literacy, from the people to the court (which often used Sanskrit or Persian) between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Sanskrit *Bhagabata* was made available in Oriya by Jagannatha Dasa and the Sanskrit *Ramayana* by Balarama Das by the sixteenth century.

Colonial translations acted, perhaps, in the exact opposite way in Orissa. An English text translated into Oriya would make the alluring and ‘superior’ world of the Whites accessible to the Oriyas. This would not make the Oriya language more credible or powerful, as was the case in the earlier example. For instance, the British translated their language and texts when they felt that the natives must read and orient themselves to the ways of the White. It was also done by the *Phiringi*-oriented ‘natives’ in admiration of the White culture that they wanted their native friends to emulate. Interestingly, another way of translating (not texts but) culture came in form of travel writings by natives. We have less of these in our colonial past and more of these in our post-colonial present where many authors seem fond of recounting their experiences of the West for the Oriya reader.

On the other hand, an English translation of an Oriya text, as Said might suggest, would make that uncharted unknown world/knowledge accessible and hence controllable.<sup>4</sup> But this has two connotations in two different times. In the past, colonial power got translated into “what should be translated”: the English and the Europeans decided what should be translated and how. Indian identity-formation through language was articulated by these processes of selection and interpretation. We were ‘defined’ by the West, through a process of translation;<sup>5</sup> our identities were transformed/recreated by a process of translation. Today, the choice, at least apparently<sup>6</sup>, is in our hands.

Borges talks of the various translations of the *Arabian Nights*, some literal and some that attempt to catch the essence. (2000: 13; see also Rodriguez 1992) A literal translation makes the author’s words powerful and expects that meaning lies in the words; an essential translation looks at the configuration of words, echoes, stylistics and contexts, and attempts to translate some of these as well at the cost of the words. The first translator makes the source language more powerful. The second translator makes the target language more powerful and s/he gives more credence and respect to the culture for and to which s/he is translating.<sup>7</sup> But Borges’s essay points to other elements also. The story of the *Arabian Nights* illustrates this amply: 1) to begin with, the first truncated French translation – although it insisted it was a translation – was considered an imaginative work and not a translation; 2) when it was acknowledged that such a work as *Arabian Nights* existed at all (were Europeans unable to believe that the ‘East’ could produce such a work?) other cultural dimensions came into play, some overtly and some covertly. Truncated editions continued to emerge that assumed that only what was translated was relevant for the Europeans and only what was presented was ‘civilized’ and would not horrify decent taste. Editions after editions followed, but we shall focus on the above elements only. The source text was looked down upon. Any translation, in that case, with all its alterations and eliminations, were looked upon as improvements. The ‘original’ had potential but was not good enough until the European hand

‘transformed’ it into something better. Thus, a translation had not only the power to retell, but also to improve, to make the copy a ‘masterpiece’, which the original never was, in the process transforming the work according to a newer set of aesthetic canons.

But when one talks of translation within a culture, as is often the case with Indian texts getting translated into various Indian languages, the configuration of power is differently articulated. Hence, the Indian history of translation within its cultures is radically different, but here also the notion of power can be explored profitably. ‘Translation’ is a difficult word to translate in the Indian tradition. For instance, the configurations within which translations took place in Europe and in India were different. They were probably also considered different types of activities and thus had different implications. The Europeans used two different paradigms for translation: 1) If the Bible was translated, it was the word of God. If it was Plato or Homer, it was their words, their worlds, acknowledged as superior. The author was powerful and the translator was lower down the hierarchy. Here, authorship lay in the source language as did the significant text, and the target language only attempted to communicate this to its audience. It acknowledged both the text and in the process the source language, as more powerful. A point of clarification – every time Aristotle is debated, we go back to how “catharsis” is to be translated/interpreted. The source language holds the secret and the key; 2) On the other hand, when the Europeans translated the “Sacred Books of the East” or the Arabian Nights, the text as well as the source language were looked down upon and the translator was powerful, as was his language. This might be a sweeping statement. True, there were anxieties and insecurities (that here was something that the West did not make but which was still beautiful or great), and even grudging admiration, and translation was a process of mastering it through rearticulation.

Such a thing did not happen with many significant Indian translations within its culture. This is not to say that power and language did not play their parts in our culture. The Buddha’s use of Prakrit was a reaction against the power of Sanskrit (through its

notion of exclusion). The retelling of the *Itihasa-Puranas* in regional languages was also a part of the same language politics. But at a different level; authorship and power were differently configured in the Indian context. As discussed above, authorship gave power. The cultural identity of the author was also linked to this power. Hence, an author of Greek culture or one with divine authorship were much more powerful than the translator, while one with a Eastern authorship could be played around with, manipulated, reconfigured and rearticulated casually. In the Indian context, things were configured differently; different signposts were used.

On the one hand, Sanskrit *mantras* and the authority of the Vedas retained their superiority. They were *apuresiya* (given or without human authorship). They were original words and hence untranslatable. So even up to the present day, there are hardly any notable regional translations of the Vedas, at least not into Oriya. Nor are medieval translations of the Vedas into other languages available.

On the other hand, a different type of configuration of power, where authorship was known, was taking place as well. Thus, the *Sarala Mahabharata* or the *Kamba Ramayana* acknowledged Vyasa or Valmiki's significance in a tradition of storytellers, but the stories no longer remained their property. If Vyasa was the author of the *Mahabharata*, so too was Sarala. The story belonged to everyone; it was communal property. Hence, authorship, in a certain way, was undermined, as was the power associated with it. It was a type of recreation – what is popularly called 'transcreation' today. But while transcreation presupposes an awareness of authorship, with all its authorial and legal implications (see Foucault 1988), and the transcreator's deviation, these ancient authors probably lacked that awareness. So these acts were different, as were those in Borges' tale of the authors of *Don Quixote*.

Thus, translation in the Indian tradition is not really translation as understood in English or by Europe. The European translator is trapped by words; s/he either translates (or attempts to

translate) words or evocations (what can be commonly included as style, connotation, associations, and context and so on) created by the vibration of and among words. The Indian retelling of the story, however, is not on the basis of words but on the basis of a process of internalization of words, where their edges dissolve, so that they are visually and aurally evoked in their culture and then become words again. The re-teller is aware of the other's style and technique, acknowledges his superiority (which may not always be taken seriously and may be considered an expression of humility) and writes on, as in the "Prologue" to the *Kamba Ramayana* (2-3):

How strange that with, the poorest of words,  
I should tell again that arrow's tale  
Which pierced seven trees like a Rishi's curse –  
A great story by a great sage.

...

Will children's sketches of rooms and halls  
Scratched on a floor annoy an artist?  
Should my poor and foolish poem  
Irk those well-trained in making verse?

Of the three that in sacred tongue  
Told this story, I shall take  
The earliest master as my source  
To render into Tamil tongue.

## Part Two

Translating from one form of language to another brings in other interesting notions of power. First, let us justify the notion of translation here. Translation presupposes an 'original,' on which it depends. Its independent, self-contained existence is impossible. If one looks at Indian visual arts tradition, it is either narrative or else freezes a moment from a narrative. Thus, the entire *Gita-Govinda* may not be translated, but a fragment is frozen and translated. Thus, one notices hierarchies, a presupposition in all translations – an original and its representation/retelling (although this hierarchy may be reversed). In the *Visnudharmottara* there are passages that



emphasize the knowledge that is required to understand image-making:

Mārkaṇḍeya said: Lord of men, he who does not know properly the rules of *chitra* can, by no means, be able to discern the characteristics of images. [. . .] Without a knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of painting are very difficult to be understood. [. . .] The practice of dancing is difficult to be understood by one who is not acquainted with music. [. . .] Without singing music cannot be understood. (Part 3, ch. 2, verses 1-9; pp. 31-32)

Certain art forms were given primacy over others. For instance, while *kavya*, *sangita* and *vastu* could make one reach the *Brahman*, the other art forms only emerged from them. (Pandey 1959) While *kavyas* had authors, authorship was lost for most sculptors and painters. In the king's court there was place for poets and musicians, but none for artists and sculptors. (Sivaramamurti 1970: 14-17) This is expected to manifest power relations if one looks at them from the perspective of translations as well – for instance there is hardly a story that is performed first and then written down.<sup>8</sup>

Translations presuppose certain commonalities in rules of syntax and semantics. For instance, the temporality of a story can only be replicated in sculptural relief or panels if one knows the sequence in which they are to be viewed. The translation of the play *Sakuntala* in *nritya* (dance with meaning) presupposes that one already knows the story. Here, the role of authorship/power is taken up by the source language (written/oral language) and the key to unraveling the meaning of the translation in the target language (sculpture or dance) lies: first, in one's knowledge of the text in the source language, and second, in certain codes (for example, iconography or gestures that suggest that someone is a king) that are common to the tradition and hence common to both the source and target language. Thus, the source language is very powerful in this type of translation. Unlike the case with literal translations, where

one often does not know the source language, here familiarity with the source language (and the text) is the basis for understanding the translation.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Walter Benjamin's query, "Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?," becomes very significant. "For what does a literary work 'say'? What does it communicate? It 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not a statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential." (Benjamin 2000: 15) The paradox of translation (which he calls bad translation) does not apply here. Rather, the notion of good art (whose essence is transmitted) is based on the notion of translation as transformation, of construction, of "interpretation in pictorial space" where the space of the picture, unwritten, is where translation of the 'essence' takes place. This is not possible in translation in the first sense discussed in this paper.

A less complex translation takes place into dance. Here, again, the visual depends on the text. In the Indian performance tradition, a distinction is made between *nruta* and *nrutya*. *Nruta* is dance as celebration, an articulation of the joy of life which is not systematic, reflective and thus not linguistically meaningful. On the other hand *nrutya* is articulated through elaborate socio-cultural conventions, through the languages of gestures and facial expressions and usually take up a story for enactment. For instance, in Kathak there is a practice where the dancer translates into the language of performance an entire verse (from the *Gita Govinda*, for example) in front of a literate audience.

Before concluding this brief section, I would like to point out how the notion of translating from one form to another embeds layers of reading and exposes the operation of power through hierarchies. This notion of hierarchy through which power operates affects both the artists (in a particular social setting) and his/her work, which in order to be appreciated, in its essence (as Walter Benjamin proposes), had to depend on certain master codes. In that sense, the very acts of translation of the text into art (by the artist)

and translation or the act of understanding both the literary text as well as the art form (by the viewer) were only possible through codes that did not belong to the translating language (i.e. painting or dance) but rather to the source language (or literary text). I will use a brief illustration<sup>10</sup> to make this point:



This is a *ragamala* painting which depicts *ragini bhairavi*. An appreciation of this presupposes an understanding of music (*raga*, garland of *ragas*, meditating on *ragas* through *dhyanaslokas*) and of the dance-performance tradition (the iconography, the gestures codified in the performance tradition). In Indian music *ragamala* was a tradition where a garland or chain of *ragas* is sung one after the other. Since different *ragas* have associations with different times of the day or night as well as with different seasons, a chain of *ragas* can symbolically traverse an entire diurnal or seasonal cycle with all their evocations. *Dhyanaslokas*, on the other hand, are verses for musicians that are supposed to embody the *raga* (in a human form) for them. The challenge for the painter of the *ragamala* tradition is to evoke both these connotations successfully. For the audience without such knowledge, without an understanding of the cultural meaning, such a painting collapses. This brings back the quotation from the *Visnudharmottara* cited above. While music is self-contained, dance depends on music, and painting depends on

both music and dance. Thus, translating, for example of *ragamala* or the *Gita-Govinda*, fails if the translator (painter) is not aware of the master codes, and if the perceiver does not know them. In terms of social hierarchies, this power gets reflected in the humble status of the painter/artisan. In the context of his painting, his very existence is based on translations only. Since time immemorial, his painting is 'mere' translation in the Indian tradition. Ajanta frescoes translate *Buddha Charita*, Jaina palm leaves translate/supplement Jaina stories, the miniatures of the medieval times are subservient to mythical or historical narratives (the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita-Govinda*, the *Ain-i-Akbari*) and even in a non-narrative tradition as in *ragamala*, they translate musical forms and gestures. If architecture can invoke the Supreme (*vastubrahman*) then art (sculpture and wall paintings) can only embellish creation.

### Part Three

It was a question earlier of interpretation as translation. The concept is not new. Discussing Borges's views on translation, Rodriguez writes:

Reading in itself is a translation within the same language. He does not consider literature as a fixed monument, but as a text. And a text is a circular system which irradiates possible impressions, given the unlimited repercussions of the oral. A text has many possible approaches, that is to say, many possible translations. (244)

This was later on taken up by Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes as well. The West has a rich recent tradition of the notions of reading/ misreading, interpretation/ misinterpretation, reconstruction/ deconstruction and self-referentiality. Such a tradition moves within the awareness of the possibility of multiplicity of meanings and translatabilities. The notion of power is inbuilt into such a tradition of interpretation where one is aware that to interpret is to exercise one's power in a certain way – to suppress certain configurations and to reveal or construct certain others.

What is interesting in the Indian tradition is a sub-tradition of interpretability called *vasya*-making or *tika*-making. Yet it is not self-conscious of itself, nor torn by the turmoil of the multiplicity of meanings. Each *tikakara* assumes that a text is to be understood in only that specific way. For instance, if one takes the case of *Brahmasutra*, there are at least five significant *bhasyas*. We can start with *Sankarabhasya* and then move on to the ones by Ramanuja and Nimbarka. Each starts a tradition of philosophy – *advitavedanta*, *dvitadvaitavedanta*, *visistadvaitavedanta* and so on.

This tradition was not unique only to Sanskrit but pervaded other regional languages as well. Here is an example from Oriya of a fifteenth century text and its sixteenth century interpretation. Orissan literature had a popular form (*Koili*) that belonged to the *dutakāvya* genre. Jagannātha Dāsa took one of them, *Keśaba Koili*, a poem of lament, and interpreted it in philosophical terms in his *Artha Koili* or ‘The meaning of the *Koili*. Apparently, such a method can be traced not only to the *bhasya* tradition but also to Tantric-Buddhism of Orissa and its influences; Jagannātha’s attempts can be traced back to them, especially to their tradition of esoteric writing known as *sandhābhāsa*.<sup>11</sup> While *bhasya* assumes that the text is innately difficult, evocative, suggestive and that its ‘silence’<sup>12</sup> has to be explicated or translated, *sandhābhāsa* assumes that the text is innately secretive, hiding another meaning behind the surface, which has to be translated. Here are a few lines from *Artha Kolili* to illustrate the point.

*Artha Koili*

(The meaning of the *Koili*)

Poet: Atibadi Jagannātha Dāsa

*Sutra*

O Cuckoo, Keśaba has gone to Mathurā,

On whose bidding has he gone,

My son has not come back yet, O Cuckoo. (1)

*Bhasya*

Arjuna Speaks:

Arjuna said, 'Listen, O Mighty Armed,  
Give me leave to ask you a question,  
What does one understand by Keśaba Koili?'  
– To this question of, O Srihari, give me an answer.

Krishna Speaks:

Hearing Pārtha's question, Bhagavān said,  
'You asked a very noble question indeed.  
By Cuckoo, the *ĵiva* is meant.  
That life force is me, pervading everything.  
The *ĵiva* came by itself and went by itself,  
Hence the son did not come back and  
Mathurā, the body, lay empty.' (1)

Sutra

O Cuckoo, who shall I give milk of the breast?  
my son has gone to Mathurāpuri, O Cuckoo. (2)

Bhasya

Again Arjuna prostrated himself at Krishna's feet,  
'Clear my doubts, O Bhābagrāhi.  
Explain to me the discourse about the mother's breast.'  
Srihari said, 'Listen O Arjuna,  
Inside the *pinda* the *ĵiva* gets great happiness.  
Again it disappears and goes elsewhere.  
It dissolves into ether and enters another *pinda*,  
To relish the nectar of Hari - mother's milk.'  
Hearing this Arjuna was delighted  
And Krishna explained on and on. (2)

I will not attempt to delve into the reasons why the multiplicity of meanings was not made problematic in the Indian tradition. It is beyond this paper and I have not yet explored it. It is puzzling since Nagarjuna already wrote of *Chatuskotibinirmukta* and yet the tradition did not explore self-referentiality. That language is slippery, can lead to paradoxes, can have multiple interpretations was thus illustrated through our tradition and cultural texts. And yet that element of self-reflection that makes language problematic did not come in, but what is interesting while looking at the notions of translatability and power is the license allowed to each interpreter

within the tradition. The tradition allows for the possibility that the last interpretation/ translation is not final and that there is scope for more. Meaning lies beneath the words, hidden away, and a *tika* can bring it out, but at the same time a new *tika* does not invalidate the last one. One moves within an awareness of pluralities that is never made explicit. In the Indian tradition interpretation is encouraged. Each *bhasya* is often commissioned by the master, within the tradition, in order that the text be ‘translated’ again and again, for new contexts and in order to retain the contemporaneity of the *sutra* in each new era. However, I believe that one also moves within the awareness that beyond the plurality there lies one master text (*sutra*) that is indescribable in words. Perhaps, to me, this pervades the Indian psyche – the immense power of the source text or *sutra*. It is so powerful that even a thousand interpretations do not do justice to it. Language and interpretations (translations) with all their paradoxes are subsumed by it, resolved by it and thus the *bhasyas* do not become meaningless. In this sense, the *sutra* is a kind of unconscious cultural metaphor for “That” which is indescribable in its totality, whose complete reality eludes each translation or interpretation. In sum, language fails or is only limited and so is the power of language. Whether one looks at Nagarjuna’s *Chatuskotibinirmukta*, Jaina *anekantavada* (made popular by the analogy of the elephant and the six blind men) or the popular Hindu saying that the *Vedas* became speechless on seeing the *Brahman*, I believe that the reference is to the same issue. The essence of the source text is beyond language and is reformulated through each translation (*tika* or *bhasya*) again and again for new generations.

## Notes

1. “The network of connotations associated with the term *translation* leads to notions of transferring, conveying, or moving from one place to another, of linking one word, phrase, or text to another. These connotations are shared among the words for translation in many modern languages: *fanyi* in Chinese, *translation* in English, *traduction* in French, *honyaku* in Japanese, *Übersetzung* in German, and so forth. It may therefore appear justified to postulate the following definition: ‘Translation is a transfer of the message from one language to another.’” (Horowitz 2005: 2367)

2. This is based on Roman Jakobson's division of translation into three classes: "1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. 2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. 3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems." (Horowitz 2005: 2365)
3. It is assumed that something 'essential' exists at the core of a work that can be transferred. Each translator must discover his/her essential and this is what makes translations different. It is also this that decides how power is exercised, consciously or unconsciously.
4. As Vossler suggests, "The artistically perfect translations in a national literature, are the means by which the linguistic genius of a nation defends itself against what is foreign by cunningly stealing from it as much as possible" (Venuti 2000: 13).
5. Although Borges does not make it explicit, while discussing the *Thousand and One Nights* he points out that the very work in European languages and its unity is a European construct, addressed to a variety of European audience. (Borges 2000).
6. 'Apparently', since even today what gets published is regulated by publishers. A foreign publisher would have a say in the matter, would expect something (which in turn reflects the expectation of its audience) and one might translate accordingly. Thus, power is more subversively presented in translations today.
7. Other things happen as well. As Schleiermacher's notion of "foreignizing translation", later taken up by Benjamin, suggests, attempting to evoke the 'literalness' of translation across time and culture can transform the target language as well, thus extending the stylistic possibilities of the language into which one is translating. Here, one might, as Pannwitz critiques in a colonial context, "germanize hindu greek english instead of hinduizing grecizing anglicizing german." Either direction would suggest a different power politics. (Venuti 2000:12)



8. The contemporary art context is radically different. Often the avant-garde artwork prepares its own world and context; understanding it requires a translation into words, an interpretation of its context, formal qualities and intention. Here, the artist as author is very powerful and the text is subservient.
9. The other element of power would lie in what a language is best at expressing (say description of dance can never be as powerful as a performance of dance, or description of painting and painting as an act can never be equated). In such circumstances, power relations can be reversed.
10. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragamala\\_painting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragamala_painting)
11. *Gunduripadānaam*  
**(Tiaddā Chāpi Jōini De Ankabāli)**  
**Poet: Gunduripā, my translation.**

**‘I will press the three veins,**  
**Open your thighs.**  
**Churning your lotus flower with my lingam**  
**Would give me the ultimate pleasure<sup>9</sup>.**  
**O jogini, I cannot live a moment without you!**  
**Kissing your lips I will drink the lotus juice.’**  
**Angry, the jogini, would not go to bed.**

Yet her breath comes out harsh.

The mother-in-law has locked the door.

Rip open the two lips, the solar and the lunar.

Tells Gunduri, he is a king among the handsome

Standing naked amidst the beauties of the town.

One might read the poem for its erotic content, but one cannot neglect the reference to lotus (female sexuality as well as the highest state of meditative consciousness) or to *Idā* (sun) and *Pingalā* (moon). In yoga the consciousness or meditative practice moves through six (according to some seven) stages. The lowest is *kundalini*, at the base of the loins, and the highest is at the top of the skull, known as sahasrāra, represented by a thousand lotuses and implying the highest state of consciousness. This poem, the final of the illustrations presented here, is the most significant. It is

an erotic poem in its own merit. It is complete without loose ends, and at the same time there is no reference to another level. Here, the concealment is complete.

12. Wolfgang Iser's notion of gaps that the reader fills and the *Gestalt* notion of closure or completion (of that which is incomplete) are concepts that self-consciously explore the notion of interpretation/*bhasya*.

## Works cited

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