

Gandhian Translations/Translating Gandhi

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Abstract

The essay examines Gandhi as a translator, and discovers Gandhi's translation practices as animated/informed by startlingly radical ideologies. It suggests that while Gandhi's 'Indic' imagination is produced by translations, his translations intend to produce a distinct 'nationalist' consciousness. Translation enables Gandhi to recast minds, and 'imagine' a nation through transfer of (trans)national ideologies, while taking into cognizance the transnational conditions within which, paradoxically, nation-spaces are inscribed.

As a translator, Gandhi acknowledges and engages with the complexities involved in transfer of meanings, long before the emergence of translation-studies as a discipline. Realising that the translation act is a culturally inflected one and recognizing translation as a volatile, and ongoing dialogue between two cultures, Gandhi, more often than not, indicates the (im)possibilities of translation.

*"The 'tower of Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics" (Jaques Derrida, *Des Tours de Babel* Tr. J. Graham, 165)*

*"The best translation resembles this royal cape. It remains separate from the body to which it is nevertheless conjoined, wedding it, not wedded to it" (Derrida, *Des Tours de Babel*, 194)*

i

Imagining Nation: Translation as Resistance

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), otherwise recognized as a preeminent Indian political ideologue, and one that shaped/ directed an anti-imperialist mass movement (unique in human history in having employed non-violent, non-coercive means of conflict resolution) was also a tireless translator, experimenting radically with transfer of meaning in various languages. This essay contends that Gandhi recognized, and enunciated many of the contemporary positions regarding translation long before Translation-Studies as a discipline (enriched/inflected by postmodern theoretical tools) came into beingⁱ.

This essay is primarily concerned with Gandhian translations, as inscribed in his journal the *Indian Opinion* (founded and operating from his South Africa-based ‘ashrams’ Phoenix and Tolstoy in 1903) in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as well as his translation of the self-inscribed *Hind Swaraj* from its Gujarati original into English. It proceeds to examine the texture of, and the imperatives that contoured these translations.

Gandhi, it must be noted, never considered himself a professional translator, or claimed pre-eminence as a theoretician but saw ‘translation’ as an effective tool of communication; a means of making available transnational thought to his readers (that included semi or non-literate listeners) of his journal the *Indian Opinion* and the international Anglophone community at large, thereby ‘imagining’ⁱⁱ an Indian nation, and contributing to the rising tide of nationalist aspirations. English translations of European language texts, or translation of English language texts into Indian vernaculars (primarily Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil as Gandhi’s target readers, the diasporic Indians of South Africa, belonged to these language groups)ⁱⁱⁱ was geared towards the shaping of an anti-imperialist, anti-racist mass movement; and informing/ inflecting nationalist ‘imaginings’, thereby. Like Rabindranath Tagore^{iv}, Gandhi’s nationalist imaginings were developed within and animated by

(and in turn re-animating) a complex matrix of transnational ideologies, and enunciated in multifarious languages. Translation was Gandhi's way of building bridges between Indian *bhasas* and English (a language Gandhi never gave undue importance), just as it was a means of building bridges between his imagined India, and the world at large.

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Within a translated world

To evaluate/examine Gandhi's endeavors as translator is also to situate him within the larger and ongoing context of the translation- act as definitive of colonial modernity. I contend that Gandhi's specifically Indic imagination was produced by his exposure to translations in transnational conditions, while going on to produce a distinct brand of Indianism or nationalism.

The second half of the nineteenth century Europe marks a watershed in translation history, as there is a concerted effort to produce translations of the major Greco-Roman; modern European and Sanskritic classics, into the English language, for the benefit of Anglophone consumers. This effort had a great deal to do with Britain's preeminence as a political and economic power, and perceptions regarding centrality, as well as the normativity of the English language.

Translation efforts in colonies like India, were, on the one hand directed towards translating texts (written in classical languages such as Sanskrit, and Perso-Arabic) into English, and thus appropriating subject cultures by 'knowing' them. On the other hand, translating English language texts into the Indian vernaculars was intended to disseminate English (or European) culture and knowledge, and thereby render them normative. These efforts were often aided and abetted by governmental organizations such as the Fort William College, in Kolkata (the then capital of British imperial rule; the various School Book Societies, or by publishing houses

(such as the Bangabasi Press or the Naval Kishore Press) which enjoyed government patronage^v.

It is a well documented fact that, Gandhi's situatedness in London as a budding lawyer during his formative years, and his association with *fin-de-siecle* critics of industrial modernity, leavened his ideological stance. An assorted group of vegans, spiritualists, theosophists, Fabian socialists, such as Henry Salt, Anna Kingsford, Edward Carpenter, Edward Maitland, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Annie Besant were engaging with Indic cultures in search a viable alternative to the 'materiality' of the West, and Gandhi's intimacy with this 'radical fringe' of Victorian modernity exposed him to Sanskritic literatures in English translation^{vi}.

His subsequent location in South Africa, and his being surrounded by a group of radical European Jewish friends also exposed him to certain European Transcendentalist writing in translation. North American Transcendentalists such as Henry Thoreau were, in turn, formulating their critique of industrial modernity through a reading of translated Sanskritic texts. Gandhi's exposure to Ralph W. Emerson and especially Henry Thoreau's writings brought him even closer to an understanding of his cultural roots^{vii}. It was during this period that Gandhi read the *Upanishads* (translated and published by the Theosophical Society) and Edwin Arnold's translation of the *Bhagwad Gita* entitled *The Song Celestial*, as well as Arnold's *Light of Asia*, a rendering of the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. What is equally significant is his reading of an English translation of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's *The Voices of the Silence*, and exposure thereby to Theosophy, a belief-system (as admitted by its propagator Blavatsky) formulated through its responses to Hindu and Buddhist doctrines.

Pyarelal's *Gandhi: The Early Phase* records Gandhi reading, and his being particularly impressed by Arnold's *The Song Celestial*^{vii}. Gandhi's lifelong fascination with the *Bhagwad Gita*, his determination to learn enough Sanskrit to read it in the original, his adoption of phrases such as *aparigraha* (or a non-possessive

mind set) as definitive of his world-view; and his employing of the *Gita*-esque dialogic mode in many of his subsequent writings such as *Hind Swaraj*, owe a great deal to his reading of Arnold's English translation^{ix}. Gandhi's Indic imagination; his very consciousness of a nation's cultural past was mediated by the fact of his locatedness in Anglophone centres, and exposure to Anglophone translations of Sanskritic texts, as well as to his 'friendship' with European readers of the same^x.

It is perhaps a quirk of fortune that Edwin Arnold (of all translators) should stimulate Gandhi's Indic imaginations, leaven his culturally attenuated- 'nationalist' imagination; and awaken him to an anti-imperialist course of action. Edwin Arnold's life is a perfect example of the close relations between translation, penetration and empire building. Arnold served as the Principal of the Government College of Sanskrit in Pune (in the Western part of British India) and received special commendation from the Viceroy, Lord Elphinstone for his role in saving British life and property during the uprising of Indian *sepoys* in 1857. Arnold was also a close associate of Stanley (and the latter actually named a mountain in, Congo, after Arnold), and Cecil Rhodes, and had a considerable role to play in the British appropriation of Congo. He was awarded the CIE (the highest civilian honor) by the Queen for his role in preservation and extension of the British Empire. Gandhi's knowledge regarding Arnold's complicity in the perpetuation of the British Empire is a matter of conjecture, but nevertheless remains an interesting side story that could be pursued for an insight into the close relation between translation and empire building.

It is during this period that Gandhi read the Koran (in English translation) and Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomed and his Successors*. He was equally impressed by the English translation of Socratic *Dialogues*, and Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?* and *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.

Translation, transnationality and the nationalist imagination

The birth of the *Indian Opinion* in South Africa, and its operations as a mouthpiece of the racially- discriminated diasporic Indians, provides a clue to an understanding of Gandhi's approach to languages, and to the very business of transfer of meaning in times of nation building or a critical moment of cultural transition. Itamar Even- Zohar's contention that translation has played a major role in the developing of *national* cultures, and that translation takes on an added meaning when there are turning points or crises, or literary vacuums, where older, established models cease to be tenable and an influx of new ideas is required - seems particularly germane in this context (Even-Zohar, "The position of translated literature" 109)

The *Indian Opinion*, a foolscap –sized, three-column weekly journal, was launched in Durban on July 4, 1903, in four languages, Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil and English - so that it could reach out to every Indian in South Africa. Mansukhlal Nazar, the first editor records the incredible difficulties involved in publishing a four-language version, non-profit making, activist news-journal; that "translators are not particularly clever, and they will not work at day time" and that some translations are simply 'shocking.'" (qtd Uma Dhupelia Mestherie, "The Significance of *Indian Opinion*"). Then there was the practical problem of the editor (Gandhi) not knowing Tamil, and his struggle to explain the spirit of the articles to translators who were not too proficient in English. These practical problems led to the discontinuation of the Hindi and Tamil versions of the *Indian Opinion*. However, what is significant about *Indian Opinion* is its desire to imagine India in the multiplicity of languages, cultures and registers.

What is equally noteworthy for translation-scholars is the reception/reading of the journal. In *Satyagraha in South Africa* Gandhi notes that at the height of the anti-colonial, anti-racist Satyagraha movement there would be "many whose first occupation after they received the paper would be to read the Gujarati section through from beginning to end. One in the company would read it,

and rest would surround him and listen.” (*Satyagraha in SA*, “Indian Opinion” 133) This complex transaction between the private reading of the written/printed word and its public hearing, is worth noting, as it involves another level of transportation of meaning; from the reader (enabled to read, access the printed word) to the reader orally receiving it. If this public reading is accompanied by comments and glosses (as I have often seen it being done in Indian roadside teashops), then there is an even greater refraction of the source text, and the deepening of shadows between its ‘originary’ coding and subsequent de-coding and re-coding.

A further clue to Gandhi’s view on languages and the dissemination of meaning can be gleaned when in *Satyagraha in South Africa* Gandhi condemns the imperial education system, geared towards colonizing and disabling of minds, rather than enabling it to understand and use multiple languages. He commends the natural linguistic abilities of South-African Indians such as Thambi Naidoo who speak, and understand at least three or four languages without having been formally taught in schools (*Satyagraha in SA*, “A Series of Arrests” 136). What Gandhi emphasizes (with unfailing regularity) is multiplicity of languages, and the necessity of seeing English as one among many such languages. Gandhi questions the un-seeming primacy given to the English language as a result of the colonial intervention, and chooses to treat it as one among many languages (and by association, cultures) of the world. The printing and publishing of the *Indian Opinion* in several Indian languages was meant to serve as a co-text of people like Thambi Naidoo, and an objective correlative of the polycultural, polylingual Indian nation, of Gandhi’s dreams.

Indian Opinion was a means of bringing news about Indians in the colonies before the public within South Africa and in India. Gandhi notes that “through the medium of this paper we could very well disseminate the news of the week among the community. The English section kept those Indians informed about the movement who did not know Gujarati, and for Englishmen in India, England and South Africa, *Indian Opinion* served the purpose of a weekly

newsletter” (*Satyagraha in SA*, 131-132). Translation was a means of disseminating information, so vital to the anti racist movement in South Africa. The translation of Natal State laws into Gujarati, Tamil and Hindi made it intelligible as well as accessible to the poor and oppressed indentured labour, and enabled/urged them to defy the same^{xi}.

iv

Translation as Resistance

Mohandas Gandhi’s distinct interpretation of oppression and resistance as mind-games, his rejection of armed struggle and advocacy of *satyagraha* or principled non-violent resistance owe a considerable intellectual debt to his reading and (what is more significant) decision to translate/paraphrase texts as various as Socrates’ *Apology* (tr. as “The Soldier of Truth”), Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You, A Letter to a Hindoo*^{xii}, and Thoreau’s *On Civil Disobedience* (tr. as “The Duty of Disobeying Laws”); and John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* (tr. as “Sarvodaya”).

To understand the Gandhian position regarding translation is to begin with an evaluation of his translation of a European text, that is, Ruskin’s *Unto this Last* (1860). In many ways, Gandhi’s reading of this text, and his decision to translate it into Gujarati for the diasporic community of primarily indentured labour, and Indian businessmen in South Africa was momentous in the sense that it led to the crystallization of his decision to wage a non-violent protest movement (the one he called *satyagraha*) against the racist South Africa government; and his enunciation of an ‘alternative modernity’. His foundation of alternative habitational structure/lifestyle (that Gandhi ultimately described as ‘ashram’) and belief that it was imperative to the producing of the true *satyagrahi* mindset-can also be traced back to Gandhi’s reading and translation of Ruskin’s *Unto this Last*. Gandhi records its momentous impact as

“the magic spell of a book” in his *Autobiography*, as well as in his other works such as *Satyagraha in South Africa* and *Ashram Observances in Action*.

In deciding to translate into Gujarati, Tolstoy’s *Letter to a Hindoo* (where Tolstoy advocates non-violent civil disobedience in response to Taraknath Sen, the editor of *Free Hindustan*’s advocacy of armed resistance to colonial powers) and stating that he would “induce others to translate and publish it into various Indian vernaculars” (Parel, *Hind Swaraj*, 136), Gandhi acknowledges translation as forging modes of resistance, that are Indic and yet not quite. Translation is both an inscription of difference, as well as sameness.

What is equally remarkable is the intimate connection between Gandhi’s desire to translate, and his responsiveness to the conditions of victimhood inherent in the diasporic situation. While the very idea of an Indian nation for Gandhi could only be realized in terms of his understanding of how Indians lived (and suffered) under racially prejudiced regimes around the world, his formulation of a resurgent Indian nation could also be inscribed by translating (and thus making available as historical exemplars) cases/patterns of exceptional courage and resistance to Indians around the world. Consider the data provided below, and note how Gandhi’s concern for, and need to resist racial denigration of immigrants around the world (especially Indian immigrants) went hand in hand with his translation effort. The connections between the impulse to translate, and the desire to express solidarity with the wretched of the earth was neither casual nor arbitrary. Such translations in the *Indian Opinion* intended to serve as historical exemplars of courage, and integrity in the face of unjust oppression. Section 148 in the eighth volume of the *Complete Works of Mohandas Gandhi* discusses pitiable state of Indian immigrants in Canada (281); section 150 with racist denigration of Chinese immigrants in Australia (286); section 153 with victimhood of Indian diaspora in South Africa (291), and

section 161 with racial harassment of Indians in Canada (300). These sections of the *Indian Opinion* are interspersed between Gandhi's translations of Socratic *Dialogues* entitled *The Story of a Soldier of Truth* (published in parts in sections, 122, 131, 140, 151, 156, and 166). Similarly, his translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (sections 175 to 257) and Henry Thoreau's *The Duty of Civil Disobedience* is followed by his narration of the plight of immigrant Indians' in Vancouver Canada (CWMG vol 9, section 148, 240).

v

The (im)possibilities of translation

(i) The untranslatable sarvodaya

It is my contention that, long before translation theory had taken 'a cultural turn' to quote Bassnett, Gandhi, through his translation practice, was able to suggest the extreme complexity at the heart of transfer of meaning. He realized that language is after all a complex system of significations, and those significations are meaningful only within a co-text and con-text. Hence 'equivalence' in translation is a practical impossibility, or an 'interpretative fiction', and transfer of meaning a complex, ongoing, fluid process. Gandhi as translator takes into account the angle of refraction between the source text and target of the transfer. While in English 'translation' could simply mean transfer of meaning in a transparent, non-problematic, interchangeable manner, *anuvad*-the Sanskrit-Hindi/Gujarati word that Gandhi often uses has a distinct semantic charge. *Anu* in Sanskrit is 'diminutive,' as well as 'one that follows,' and hence, semantically speaking, according primacy to the 'source' or 'original' text. '*Vad*' is, however, both 'speech' and 'dialogue' and hence conveys the sense of exchange, dialogue, or transaction. *Anuvad* actually encompasses what most postmodern theories regarding exchange of meaning suggest – that is, 'translation' being a complex and ongoing dialogue/transaction between the source and the target texts, and by association, cultures. The translator decodes

the source language text and recodes it in the context of another culture, giving the text a new life and meaning. “Translation effectively becomes the after-life of a text, a new ‘original’ in another language (Bassnet, *Translation Studies*, 9). Also, it is an ongoing process where an excess of meaning or trace is always left behind, and the translator works in awareness of the (im)possibilities of translation, rather than in conviction of carrying across meanings in a transparent, reversible and non-problematic manner. Gandhi posits the vital difference between *tarjuma* (or *tarjumo* in Gujarati) *adhare* (based upon; in paraphrase of) and *saar* (essence) and uses the former to mean complete and faithful transfer of meaning. *Adhare* and *saar* are used to convey the idea of a free translation in which texts must be recoded for the specific needs of his culturally distinct (that is from the Eurocentric cultural source) readers

An examination of the “Prasthavana”, (foreword, a statement of purpose) to *Sarvodaya* - Gandhi’s translation of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* - will bear out many of my contentions. Gandhi refuses to translate *Unto this Last* literally because he considers this task to be an interpretative impossibility. Instead, he provides a *saar* or essence because:

“Tena lakhano ame je saār apie che,te tarjumo nathi.Tarjumo aapta ketlāk Bible vagare ma thi apelā dakhilāo vachnar nā samjhi sake evo sambhab che. Tethi āme Ruskin nā lakhano saār je apio che” (I have rendered the essence of Ruskin’s book, and not a literal translation because the examples cited in Ruskin’s text emanate from Biblical sources and may not be intelligible to the readers. Hence, here is a rendering of the essence of Ruskin’s writing, *Sarvodaya* 4.)^{xiii}

Gandhi’s awareness that examples/analogies drawn from the *Bible*, and concepts of Christian Socialism or Christian brotherhood (emanating from Bible-reading/knowing European/British cultural contexts) would fall flat upon the Indian diaspora of Gujarati-speaking indentured labour in South Africa. It is a realization of

cultural specificity, and the distinct nontransferable con-text of Ruskin's work that motivated him to 'paraphrase' rather than 'translate' the book.

Also, the very title of the book, (which Ruskin gleans from the parable of the "Labourers in the Vineyard," chapter xx, verse 14, "Book of Mathews" of the *New Testament*) and where the phrase "I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" is used to signify unselfish service; commitment to the poorest of the poor, the wretched of the earth - is changed to *sarvodaya* as it conveys Ruskin's spirit. Ruskin's *Unto This Last* critiques Adam Smith's proposition that pursuit of happiness is constituted in the accruing of wealth and thereby, wellbeing, for the majority, and even when such pursuit is achieved at the cost of overlooking (as well as infringing upon) the rights of the weakest in a community and in contravention of ethical positions. What Ruskin, as well as his translator/transcreator Gandhi proposes is the **upliftment of all**, the happiness and advancement of the poorest of the poor, the marginalized of marginal, rather than good of the majority.

Gandhi captures the essence of Ruskinian protest by using the title 'Sarvodaya' to mean not the 'well being of many' but the good of all. "*Te pustak na naam no pan ame arth nathi apio kemke te jāne angreji ma Bible vachu hoe tej samajhi sake. Pan pustak lakhano hetu sarvanu kalyan—sarvanu udaya (matra vadhareno nahi) –evo hoa thi ame a lakhano ne 'sarvodaya' evu naām apiu che*" (I have not translated the title of the book literally because it would not really convey any meaning to people who have no English or Bible reading habits. This book is about the upliftment of all and not just the advancement of majority and hence I have chosen the name 'sarvodaya', 4)

What is equally 'postmodern' is the fact that Gandhi refuses to grant John Ruskin or himself, or anybody for that matter the status of textual 'originality.' Ruskin he says is merely 'expanding' ideas that are inscribed in Socrates' *Apology* (something that Gandhi paraphrased as *The Soldier of Truth*), and hence wisdom seems to be

something that can be freely drawn upon by different writers of different cultural contexts to suit their different needs. As Gandhi notes in the “Prasthāvanā” of *Sarvodaya* “*Socrates m̄nās ne su karu ghate che. Tenu thoruk darshan karāvīu. Tene je u keoiu teuj kareu. Tena vicharonu lammāne Ruskin nā vichāro che* (Socrates was a man whose philosophy had a great influence. He was a man who practiced what he preached. Ruskin has worked on and expanded Socrates’ philosophy to arrive at his own, 4). Gandhi prefigures Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury of polysystems theory fame, in his efforts to deprioritize **source-centric** discourse that sees translation only as an inferior copy. As Zohar notes; “This implies in fact that no clearcut distinction is then maintained between ‘original’ and ‘translated’ writings, and that often it is the leading writers (or members of the *avant garde* who are about to become leading writers) who produce the most conspicuous or appreciated translations” (110).

Significantly, *Hind Swaraj* is a text that in many ways coterminous with *Sarvodaya*, as repeats and expands many ideas already touched upon in *Sarvodaya*. Significantly, *Hind Swaraj* also announces in its title page “No Rights Reserved”, thereby, cancelling at a stroke, the claims of originality and authorship^{xiv}.

vi

The impossibilities of translation ii: The untranslatable Satyagraha

The historical evolving of the concept *satyagraha* is an indication of how Gandhi achieved deferral of ‘normative’ meanings, and produced the desired differences between European terminologies and his cultural-specific endeavors. Within a year of Gandhi’s organizing civil disobedience against the infamous Asiatic Registration Act in South Africa (one which compelled people of Asiatic origins to register with fingerprints and bodily identification marks with the government in 1906), he had begun expressing dissatisfaction with the term ‘passive resistance.’ In his *Autobiography* he notes that he found the term “passive resistance”

as “too narrowly constructed” so that it appeared to be “the weapon of the weak.” What he actually wanted to convey was a unique principle of active nonviolent resistance to injustice, which was aimed at not simply neutralizing violence but transforming the opponent. In order to arrive at a unique word, which would convey this unique idea he announced a contest in the *Indian Opinion* for the renaming of “passive resistance”, and even declared a prize for the best entry:

To respect our own language, speak it well and use in it as few foreign words as possible [...] this is also part of our patriotism. We have been using some English terms just as they are, since we cannot find exact Gujarati equivalents for them. Some of these terms are given below, which we place before our readers. [...] The following terms are in question: Passive Resistance; Passive Resister; Cartoon; Civil Disobedience [...] it should be noted that we do not want translations of these English terms, but terms with equivalent connotations (*CWMG* vol 8, sec. 95. 194).

By 1920 Gandhi had been able to coin an alternative concept as well as an alternative word distinguishing it from the cultural register of ‘passive or civil resistance’

Passive resistance is used in the orthodox English sense and covers the suffragette movement as well as resistance of nonconformists. Passive resistance has been conceived and regarded as the weapon of the weak. Whilst it avoids violence, being not open to the weak, it does not exclude its use if, in the opinion of the passive resister, the occasion demands it. [...]

Satyagraha differs from Passive Resistance as the North Pole from the South. [...] In the application of *satyagraha* I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit use of violence being inflicted on one’s opponent but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy [...] and patience means self-

suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self (*CWMG* vol. 8, 194)

In a section entitled "Gujarati Equivalents for Passive Resistance" (anthologized in the eighth volume of his *Complete Works*) Gandhi rejects words such as *pratyupaya* (countermeasure), *kashtadhin prativartan* (resistance through submission to hardship); *dridha pratipaksha* (firmness in resistance) as unable to suggest the exact meaning of his particular mode of protest, and chooses *sadagraha* (later transformed to *satyagraha*) which means firm adherence to truth and truthful principles^{xv}. "To suggest any word that comes into one's head [in finding an equivalent of for passive resistance] is an insult to one's language; it is to invite ridicule upon oneself" (*CWMG*, vol.8, 194).

vii

The case of Hind Swaraj

I will conclude with *Hind Swaraj* to underscore once again Gandhi's views regarding the impossibilities of complete translation or transfer of meaning. Incidentally Gandhi was adamant about **not** using words such as 'independence' or 'freedom' to connote the Indian nationalist movement because he felt that such words were culturally coded and while 'freedom' and 'independence' had the charge of 'go as you like,' 'swaraj'-- a word evolving from Indic context was suited to re-present an Indic struggle. "The root meaning of the word *Swaraj* is self rule" he noted and therefore "Swaraj may [...] be rendered as disciplined rule from within." 'Independence,' "on the other hand, has no such limitation. Independence may mean license to do as you like. The word *Swaraj* is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not a freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means."

Gandhi went further to underscore the unique cultural context of the word *swaraj* and thus its unique acceptability among the Indian masses.

I defy anyone to give for 'independence' a common Indian word intelligible to the masses. Our goal at any rate may be known by an indigenous word understood by three hundred millions. And we have such a word in *Swaraj*, first used in the name of the nation by Dadabhai Naoroji. It is an infinitely greater than and includes 'independence'. It is a vital word. It has been sanctified by the noble sacrifice of thousands of Indians. [...] It is a sacrilege to displace that word by a foreign importation of doubtful value (*CWMG*, vol. 35, 456)

Such was the extent of his refusal to consider these words as interchangeable that when in the 1927 Madras Congress, Nehru suggested that the Congress Party should drop 'swaraj' and adopt the phrase 'complete independence' as 'swaraj' was unintelligible to the world (and of course Nehru was considering an English-speaking/known world) Gandhi replied that he had no problems with 'independence' if it led to 'swaraj' for all mankind.

Hind Swaraj (1909) is in many ways special, as this is the only book that Gandhi translated personally, and exists therefore in both Gujarati and English, with both languages inflecting and informing the other and interanimating the texts. It is a text that was produced within several kinds of liminality—on board of a passenger ship plying between Britain and South Africa; in a trance/dream like state; with both right and left hands; and offered as a book and a no-book. By retaining the Gujarati and the English title in the English translation, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, he created linguistically speaking an amphibious text. That he calls his own translation of a work that he himself inscribed a 'free translation' and not a 'literal' one is a case in point.

The concluding section of the Gujarati *Hind Swaraj* is entitled '*chutkaro*' literally meaning 'freedom', emancipation, or

‘release.’ The Bangla equivalent is ‘*chuti*’, and the Hindi ‘*chutkara*.’ This term, in the context of a work that sets out to demolish the discursive chains of colonial modernity and industrial civilization has a distinct charge. Coming, as it does, at the end of the text, it identifies *Hind Swaraj* as a clarion call of release from the normative prisonhouse of European discourses.

However, in the English version Gandhi uses “Conclusion” to end his work, when he could have used an equivalent of ‘*chukaroo*’ such as ‘release’ or ‘emancipation.’ The decision to avoid a semantic equivalent (say such as ‘release’) to distinguish the concluding-section of the English *Hind Swaraj*, robs the text of its vital charge, denudes it, and renders it far less effective in terms of what it purports to propagate!

Gandhi’s motives for making such a vital change in the English text are not known, but one could, advance three possible reasons as to why he may have made the change and remained silent about it. Readers could choose any one, or all of them!

- 1) This replacement of ‘*chutkaroo*’ with ‘conclusion’ in the English translation of original Gujarati *Hind Swaraj* is due to Gandhi’s is careless, or unmindful approach to the text.
- 2) Gandhi deliberately replaced ‘*chutkaroo*’ with ‘Conclusion’ and not its equivalent ‘release’ in the English *Hind Swaraj* as ‘Conclusion’ signifies the conventional end of an English language text. Also, possibly, Gandhi considers the body of the text, that is *Hind Swaraj* [decrying Western ‘civilization’ and ‘modernity’], strong and rousing enough. He prefers not to confuse his English-knowing audience with a strange unconventional term like ‘release’ to conclude his text, and deflect their attention from the clarion cry he has declared against Western modernity.
- 3) Gandhi considers the contents/codes of his Gujarati text (written on board of Kildonan Castle, in a trance- like state, distinct, inimitable, and unique. By refusing to translate ‘*chutkaroo*’ into English, and remaining completely silent

on this issue in his English text, Gandhi directs our attention, once again, towards the (im)possibilities of translation.

Notes

- i. For more on birth of Translation Studies as a discipline with distinct methodological tools, read Susan Bassnett's "Preface to Third Edition" in her *Translation Theory* (London: Routledge, 1980, 1-10); "Preface" in Bassnett, Lefevre eds *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook* (London, Pinter Publishers, 1990); Lawrence Venuti eds. *Translation Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1998). Also refer to Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanah eds. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009)
- ii. Benedict Anderson used the term 'imagined communities' to suggest the idea of nation as a discursive construct rather than merely a geographic entity, in his book.
- iii. Refer to Margaret Chatterjee's *Gandhi and His Jewish Friends* (Houndsmill, Macmillan, 1992, 23-38) as well as to Gandhi's *Satyagraha in South Africa* for more on the heterogeneous configuration of immigrants (in terms of race nation, class) in South Africa at the beginning of the 20th century. Margaret Chatterjee notes: "The Johannesburg Indians, in fact, presented a picture of India in miniature. It is interesting to note that the Hindi and Tamil editions of Indian Opinion were dropped in February 1906. There would be no readers for a Hindi edition and in any case the Gujaratis read the edition in their own language and those who were able to read the English version. The Colonial Born children of indentured labourers were mostly Tamil- speaking and looked for material to read in their own language. This group, many of whom were converts to Christianity, were catered for by *The African Chronicle* started by P.S. Aiyar" ("Gandhi and his Jewish Friends", 43)
- iv. Refer to Rabindranath Tagore's essay "Nationalism" to appreciate his plural and cosmopolitan interpretation as well as critique of the parochial definition of the nation-state in European cultures. Also, refer to Ashis Nandy's *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* for more on this.

- v. Refer to Ulrike Stark's *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2009), to see the close connections between the imperial process and growth of vernacular publishing houses giving primacy to translation activity, in late 19th century India. Amiya P. Sen records the activities of the Bangabasi Press in British Bengal, and its active encouragement in translation of Sanskrit classics, as well as Indian epics on a mass scale. Sen sees translation activities at the end of 19th and beginning of the twentieth century as contributing to the rise of Hindu nationalism in India in *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal*, 244-247.
- vi. Pyarelal's *Gandhi: The Early Phase*, records Gandhi's association with the vegans, theosophists and Fabian socialists. Gandhi's own writings, as anthologized primarily in the first and second volumes of his *Complete Works*, also records his involvement with vegetarians and theosophists in London. Gandhi refers to these connections in his *Autobiography* as well. For more on Gandhi's involvement with Theosophists in both London and South Africa, refer to Joseph Doke and Margaret Chatterjee's "The Theosophical Connection" in her *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends* (Macmillan, 1992).
- vii. Pyarelal records this rich cross-fertilization of cultures when he notes that "the Transcendentalism of New England was the result, among other things, of the quickening of the American mind by impact of Indian Vedantist thought" ("In Search of Goals", 240).
- viii. Pyarelal notes that "two Theosophist brothers introduced him to Edwin Arnold's verse translation of *Bhagwad Gita-The Song Celestial*" and goes on to quote Gandhi to convey the momentous impact of Arnold's translation on the Mahatma-"It opened to me a new view of life. It touched my spirit as perhaps it can only touch a child of the East. I found at last, as I believed, the light I needed" ("In search of goals" *Mahatma Gandhi: The Early Phase*, 250).
- ix. In his *Autobiography* Gandhi notes that "to me the *Gita* became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily

reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of words that I did not understand, I turned to the dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) and *samabhava* (equability) gripped me” (“Result of Introspection” 211). In the same chapter Gandhi comments on the rich cross-fertilization, transfer, translation of thought and culture in London from 1893 to 1903-“When, in 1893, I came in close contact with Christian friends, I was a mere novice. They tried hard to bring home to me, and make me accept, the message of Jesus...

In 1903 the position was somewhat changed. Theosophist friends certainly intended to draw me into their society, but that was with a view to getting something from me as a Hindu. Theosophical literature is replete with Hindu influence ... I explained that my Sanskrit study was not much to speak of, that I had not read the Hindu scriptures in the original, and even my acquaintance with the translations was of the slightest. ... I already had faith in the *Gita*, which had a fascination for me. Now I realized the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Sanskrit (112)

- x. Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities: The Politics of Friendship* uses the trope of friendship to explain the alliance and interdependence between Gandhi and characters such as Henry Salt, Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland, Annie Besant, Edward Carpenter, in London in the formative part of his life. Margaret Chatterjee shows Gandhi’s close alliance with his Jewish friends and the mediation of East European ideologies through these friends and associates in *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends*.
- xi. I take this opportunity to answer a certain question/ comment that an acute translator such as Shurhud poses in his “Introduction” to the bilingual edition/translation of *Hind Swaraj*). Shurhud notes that “For someone setting out to write his definitive work, the decision to write in Gujarati was truly daring” considering the marginality of the language even among Indic group of vernaculars in the first decade of the 20th century, (not to take into account the near-total unintelligibility- quotient of Gujarati, so far as the Anglophone world was concerned). Shurhud proceeds to

ask “How is one to read Gandhi’s choice of Gujarati as the language for thinking through and spelling out a meaningful appraisal of modern civilization as it happens to be, and as it seeks to become?” (Shurhud and Sharma, “Introduction” xiv) My response to these questions/comments is more basic. I suggest that the very practical necessity of conveying his ideas to his immediate audience (the readers and listeners of *Indian Opinion*) who were primarily Gujarati- speaking, and his sensitivity to the Gujarati-Indian cultural context of his South African struggle propelled Gandhi to inscribe, a work as seminal as *Hind Swaraj*, in Gujarati. Note that *Hind Swaraj* first in the columns *Indian Opinion* in two installments on 11th and 18th of December 1909, respectively; and in 1910 as an independent book. The decision to translate was also need-based as copies of *Hind Swaraj* were intercepted by the colonial government and proscribed on 24th March of 2010, and Gandhi went on to translate the text in English so that his ideas could reach out to a wider reader group. I conclude that Gandhi conceived of *Hind Swaraj* in a Gujarati/Indic context and therefore translated it only when the context-specific (and untranslatable) text was unavailable, and not as its equivalent.

- xii. In translating “A letter to a Hindoo” in Gujarati,(and deciding to publish it alongside his seminal work *Hind Swaraj*) Gandhi effectively participates in the ongoing debate between radicals such as Taraknath Sen (editor of a newsjournal entitled *Free Hindustan*) and Leo Tolstoy regarding the inadvisability of armed or violent resistance against an oppressive power; underlines emphatically 1) his interpretation of oppression and resistance as mind games, and 2) the necessity of forging a resistance movement based on soul-force. Tolstoy’s letter addressed to a young radical, centres around the stupidity of violence on the ground that this is not the “fundamental principle of the social order” (Tolstoy, *Recollections and Essays*, London, 1937, 426).
- xiii. All translations from *Sarvodaya* from original Gujarati into English, if otherwise not mentioned, are mine

- xiv. I am indebted to Tridip Surhud for this idea. Read Sharma and Surhud's *Hind Swaraj: A Critical edition* (Orient Longman)
- xv. Refer to Raguramaraju's "Reading *rajas* and *tamas*" in *Modernity in Indian Social Theory* (OUP, 2011, 111-124) for a nuanced reading of Gandhi's 'satyagraha' as produced within the ideological matrices of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*

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Derrida, Jacques. “Des Tours de Babel” tr. Joseph F.Graham. Translation, then, is both an inscription of difference, as well as resistance.

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