



# Editorial Policy

'Translation Today' is a biannual journal published by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Manasagangotri, Mysore. It is jointly brought out by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, and Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. A peer-reviewed journal, it proposes to contribute to and enrich the burgeoning discipline of Translation Studies by publishing research articles as well as actual translations from and into Indian languages. Translation Today will feature full-length articles about translation- and translator-related issues, squibs which throw up a problem or an analytical puzzle without necessarily providing a solution, review articles and reviews of translations and of books on translation, actual translations, Letters to the Editor, and an Index of Translators, Contributors and Authors. It could in the future add new sections like Translators' job market, Translation software market, and so on. The problems and puzzles arising out of translation in general, and translation from and into Indian languages in particular will receive greater attention here. However, the journal would not limit itself to dealing with issues involving Indian languages alone.

## Translation Today

- seeks a spurt in translation activity.
- seeks excellence in the translated word.
- seeks to further the frontiers of Translation Studies.
- seeks to raise a strong awareness about translation, its possibilities and potentialities, its undoubted place in the history of ideas, and thus help catalyse a groundswell of well-founded ideas about translation among people.

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Translation Today welcomes contributions of articles and other suitable material as elucidated above for its issues in the following areas:

Annotated and original translations of all literary genres, translated excerpts from novels are accepted where they stand on their own, glossaries in any subject in any language-pair (Indian Languages TO Indian Languages or Indian Languages TO English or English TO Indian Languages), specialties in the translation profession: religious, technical, scientific, legal, commercial, specialties in the interpreting profession: court, conference, medical and community, multimedia, terminology, localization, translation technology: HAMT, translation memory softwares, translation teaching softwares, papers on translation as a category of or a significant dimension of thought, pieces relating translation to society, to culture, to philosophy, to poetics, to aesthetics, to epistemology, to ontology, to movements like feminism, subalternism, to power and so on, translation universals etc., to awareness's like civilisational space, nationalism, identity, the self, the other and so on, on translation pedagogy, translation curriculum, translation syllabus etc., ethics, status, and future of the profession, translator-related issues, translator studies: legal, copyright issues etc., squibs and discussion notes which are short pieces throwing up an interesting problem or analytical puzzle, reviews of translated texts, dictionaries and softwares, Letters to the Editor.

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All submissions, contributions and queries should be addressed to:

**P. P. Giridhar Ph D**  
**Central Institute of Indian languages,**  
**Hunsur road**  
**Manasagangotri,**  
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If it is the paper version two copies of the typescript must be submitted. The last page only should include the author's name, position, affiliation and contact information (postal address, fax and telephone numbers and e-mail). The other copy could be on both sides of the page. Submissions should be double spaced with generous margins.

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**Diagrams and figures** should be suitable for photographic/scanner reproduction. Drawings should be in black ink or stiff white paper. Lettering should be of draughtsman standard and large enough to remain legible where the figure requires reduction in size. Tables should be typed on separate sheets. Indicate in the text where tables should be placed.



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**Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh**

Director,

Central Institute of Indian Languages,  
Manasagangotri, Mysore – 570 006, INDIA.

Phone: 0091/ 0821–2515820 (Director)

Telex : 0846-268 CIIL IN

E-mail: udaya@ciil.stpmysoft.net (Director)  
bhasha@sancharnet.in

Epabx: 0091/ 0821–2345040

Grams: BHARATI

Fax: 0091/0821-2515032

Website: <http://www.ciil.org>  
[www.anukriti.net](http://www.anukriti.net)

To contact

**Head, Publications**

biswas@ciil.stpmysoft.net

nandeesh@ciil.stpmysoft.net

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# Re-forming the *Rāmāyana*: The Source Text and its Cultural Transformation

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Mandakranta Bose

## Abstract

*This article discusses and elucidates the dynamics of intercultural textual traffic with particular reference to the Ramayana, the Indian epic. Tracing the journey of the epic through temporal and cultural space, the author examines the 're-forming' of the epic in languages of northern and eastern India (in Hindi and Bangla in particular), which she views as an inevitable and necessary function of changing cultural milieus.*

Translation is not my area of work, but as a Sanskritist who has prepared critical editions of texts, I have to deal with the problems of translation throughout my research life. Translation is of course a necessary condition of all scholarly work but perhaps more urgently so for an Indian than, say, a Russian, since from childhood we Indians have had to learn how to move across the frontiers of our mother tongues and English. In my school days the translation of Bengali and Sanskrit passages into English and the oddly named reverse process known as "retranslation" were compulsory exercises. But language politics is not my subject here. Rather, let me focus on some of the issues that arise as we try to track the *Rāmāyana* through different domains of language and culture. The demands of intercultural textual traffic are particularly heavy, as I have discovered--like many others--in the course of making bilingual editions of old texts, one of which I have just completed. But even within a relatively homogenous cultural milieu, texts can become slippery as they travel across time and social domains. In my current

work on the *Rāmāyana* I constantly encounter such textual transformations, and in this paper I shall look at some instances from versions of the *Rāmāyana* and try to understand what they tell us about the travel of a major text across time and changing social milieus.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest complete Rāma story is the *Rāmāyana* of *Vālmīki*, composed between 2nd century b.c.e. and 2nd century c.e. *Vālmīki's* story is generally taken to be the foundation of all subsequent versions and it has been retold many times in many languages. Leaving aside the complex matter of *Rāma* tales outside India, I shall talk mainly about versions in languages of northern and eastern India, that is to say, the region where *Vālmīki Rāmāyana* (*VR*) is thought to have originated. The narrative structure and the principal plot elements of the *VR* remain the same in these later versions, and their authors not only acknowledge their indebtedness to the *ādi kavi* (the primordial poet) but imply that their works are faithful renditions of *Vālmīki's* poem. Where they go off the *Vālmīki* script is in the details of some episodes, a few invented ones, and much more importantly, in their moral and religious assumptions. These assumptions reflect such far-reaching alterations in attitudes and ideology that despite their narrative alignment with the *VR*, they go beyond the extreme limits of translation. These conceptual changes are so deep-rooted and their dictates are so compulsive that they end up as narrative interventions, such as altered emphases and even altogether new episodes. In effect, they re-form the *Rāmāyana*. I am of course using the word "re-form" both with and without a hyphen.

### **Re-formation**

I see three distinct movements in this process of re-formation. They are:

1. from righteous man to living god

2. from moral emulation to surrender
3. from elite to popular audience

## 1: From righteous man to living god

In Vālmīki's telling of the Rāma story, Rāma is the ultimate righteous man, even though he is part of Vishnu, who has taken this earthly form to purify the earth of evil demons and to bring justice and peace as the necessary conditions of *dharma*. This ethical purpose is evident in every act of Rāma and informs the narrative so unambiguously that Rāma's innate divinity recedes into the background after Vishnu's initial statement of purpose.

Valmīki's *Rāmāyana* asserts the virtue of *dharma* and its ultimate victory over evil. Rāma himself gives us this message on a number of occasions. For instance, in the *Ayodhyākānda*, Rāma says to Lakṣmana:

*dharmo hi paramo loke dharme satyam,  
pratisthitam/  
dharmaṣaṁbritam etac ca pitur vacanam  
uttamam//*

*Dharma* is paramount in the world and truth is founded in *dharma*. This command of Father's is based on *dharma* and is absolute. (VR.2.18.34)

Again in the *Kishkindhākānda*, the entire episode of Rāma's killing of Vālī raises questions about right action. To exonerate Rāma, Vālmīki asserts that the principle of *dharma* is higher than that of a fair fight, which is accepted by Vālī himself:

*mām apy avagatam, dharmād  
vyatikraṅntapuraskr̥tam, /*

*dhramasamhitayā vācā dharmajñā paripālaya//*

You understand *dharma*. Therefore, with words consonant with *dharma*, comfort even me, known to be a flagrant violator of *dharma*. (VR.4.18.44)<sup>2</sup>

A far more dramatic, indeed shocking, illustration of Rāma's commitment to *dharma* -- one is tempted to call it his servitude to *dharma* -- occurs at the end of the *Lankākānda*, when Sītā is brought to Rāma after her long captivity. At this point in the story the audience may be pardoned for expecting a joyous reunion. But all that Rāma has to say to Sītā is that he has done his duty as a warrior king and has fulfilled his *dharma* as a husband, but now as the ruler of Ayodhya he has to fulfill the *dharma* of casting out a wife who might be perceived as an unchaste woman. The necessities invoked here are unambiguously social and political, with no reference to some ulterior good hidden from mortal view.

These crucial episodes put Rāma centre stage as human hero. It is not till we reach medieval *Rāmāyanas* that the celebration of Rāma as god becomes the main burden of the narrative. The business of Vālmīki's story is not to assert that Rāma's action is integral to the divine scheme of creation, which is carried forward by Rāma as the living god. On the contrary, it is a battle story that illustrates and upholds absolute *dharma*, a term that is to be taken in its social and pragmatic dimensions. Rāma is of course idealized and his deeds are celebrated, but not because he is god; rather, he is the perfect man and his perfection is represented in terms of his absolute commitment to masculine might, soldierly resolution, dynastic pride and aristocratic duty. The key ideas are leadership qualities and a warrior ethic.

Rendering this story faithfully into other languages of India, complete with its conceptual underpinnings, should not have been

difficult. The fact, though, is that no such faithful translation was attempted until modern times even though there was no lack of poets who did undertake the vast labour of retelling Vālmīki's story. And as I have said before, they did tell the same story if we go just by the events, but their versions took on tones and colours different from Vālmīki's and constructed altogether different worldviews.

The most important difference is the apotheosis of Rāma from man to god, as we see in the explicit and insistent recognition of Rāma as Vishnu. While Vālmīki tells us that Vishnu took human form to combat evil, his Rāma is not worshipped as god. By contrast, in the two most influential north Indian retellings, Krittivāsa's 15th c. Bengali version and Tulsīdās's 16th c. Hindi one, Rāma's divinity is always at the forefront of the narrative. He is venerated as god, rather than as warrior prince and his deeds are celebrated as illustrations of divine power.

Still more striking is the shift from praise to devotion in recounting Rāma's deeds, to the extent that both in Tulsī and Krittivāsa the narrator assumes the posture of utter surrender to Rāma. The story is thereby situated inescapably within the *bhakti* culture. In that world view, the divinity celebrated is not merely the upholder of *dharma* but the source of such ecstasy that the worshipper has no option but to seek union with that divine being through total surrender. This is clearly not a position that promotes pragmatic and critical views on the doings of the object of devotion. Viewed from this position, issues of social relations and political necessities do not disappear but they exist primarily as opportunities for declaring the glory of the deity.

In both Tulsī and Krittivāsa, *bhakti* overtakes *dharma*. This reorientation calls for constant reminders that Rāma is god. For instance, as the royal parties take leave from one another at the conclusion of Rāma and Sītā's wedding, Tulsī puts a hymn of praise

in Janaka's mouth in the spirit of *bhakti* (RCM.1, 340.4b-342.3a). In Vālmīki's original, Janaka's concern is exclusively with social relations when he tells Rāma: “*iyam, Sītā mama sūtā sahadharmacārītava*” (VR.1.63.26b-27a). Here he is reminding Rāma of the responsibilities dictated by *dharma*. Interestingly enough, the best known remake of the *Rāmāyana* of our time, Ramanand Sagar's 1987 TV version, opts rather for the spirit of *bhakti* and *prapatti* or devotion and submission, and follows Tulsī, not Vālmīki. In Sāgar's *Rāmāyana*, Sītā tells Rāma “*ājñā kījiye, main āpkī dāsī huun*,” (Command me, I am your handmaiden) (TVR. II. 148), her rhetoric of submission reflecting the spiritual idiom of *bhakti* as aptly as the politics of gender that characterizes the world for which the film was made.

The culture of submission is not, however, quite homogenous and Tulsī's unquestioning *bhakti* is not always found in other poets in the *bhakti* tradition. His older contemporary, Krittivāsa of Bengal, takes equal pains to fix Rāma as god in the audience's mind, and yet he cannot keep uncomfortable questions from popping up. In some ways Krittivāsa pushes the *bhakti* line even farther than Tulsī. For instance, when his Rāvana lies dying on the battlefield, he confesses that he recognizes Rāma as the eternal Brahman (*Brahma sanātana*) at whose feet he seeks a place as a devotee (*ciradin āmi dās carane tomār*). Some of the *rākshasas* are devout *vaishnavas* who have chosen rebellion against virtue as the quickest way to get noticed by Rāma. Nevertheless, Krittivāsa's Sītā accuses Rāma of acting like a low-born, dishonorable man when he rejects her after his victory. True, her accusation comes to nothing but the fact that it is at all admitted into the text lends Krittivāsa's work a degree of ambivalence unthinkable in Tulsī.

This ambivalence within the *bhakti* tradition seems characteristic of *Rāmāyanas* from both eastern and southern India. A



near contemporary of Krittivāsa was Shankaradeva of Assam, whose Sīta says in the *uttarakānda*:

*sabe bole enuvārāmaka bhāla bhāla/  
maito jāno mora rāmesa yamakāla/  
svāmi hena nidāruna kaita āche suni/*

All speak well of Rāma but I know that for me he  
is like Death itself. Tell me where there is so cruel  
a husband.<sup>3</sup>

A much later poet, the immensely popular -- and populist --  
Dasu Ray follows Krittivāsa and makes the *rākśasas* devotees of  
Rāma. When Hanuman enters Lanka, he is struck with wonder and  
he says,

*ki āścarya mari mari/  
rākśasete bale Hari//*

How astonishing, upon my life! Demons utter the  
name of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, Dasu Ray injects a sharp note of doubt when he makes  
Agni comment on Sīta's *agni pariksha* (fire ordeal) in these terms:

*dekhilam eito ā kārya,  
je din habe rā marājya,  
diner prati to emni bicār habel*

Now I see how it works:  
The day Rāma's reign begins  
This is the justice that the powerless will get!<sup>5</sup>

In general, these renderings in the *bhakti* mode replace Vālmīki's matter-of-fact representation of the ethical framework of a warrior culture with the values of a settled and conservative society. But at the same time, even within the apparently seamless belief system of *bhakti*, cracks do appear that suggest considerable discomfort with the brutalities of battle narratives and produce undercurrents of criticism against the dominance of *bhakti*. I leave it to social historians to comment on the fact that these elements appear in east and south Indian versions as against the moral and spiritual certitude that underpins Tulsī's total surrender to Rāma. If Rāma is god, what else can the devotee do?

## 2: From moral emulation to surrender

I have argued above that the translation of man into god replaces moral emulation with surrender as the conceptual core of the *Rāmāyana*. This is not the place to speculate why this should have happened but we may note that it is part of a larger movement. Compelling evidence can be cited from the *Bhagavadgītā*, which remains perhaps the most influential and certainly more direct, didactic work within that movement. When Krishna instructs Arjuna, “*sarvadharmān parityājya māmekam, βaraṣam, vraja,*”<sup>6</sup> he is demanding from Arjuna *prapatti* or surrender and asking him to place *prapatti* above his understanding of *dharma*. Contemporary Hindu beliefs and practices prioritize for the devotee the ideal of *bhakti*, in which *prapatti* or surrender is the key concept and one that dominates the religious and social world of that time. Not only the re-formed *Rāmāyanas* but the proliferating *avatāra* fables establish Rāma as a full-fledged god in place of Vālmīki's warrior prince who is not God but god-like. One consequence of this development is that Rāma is seen as the absolute truth himself, and therefore, nothing he does can be questioned. For Tulsīdās, Rāma's infallibility and benevolence are so absolute that his Sīta is no longer the *sahadharminī* of Vālmīki's tale but a devotee of Rāma. Do we have

to go any further to seek the source of the veneration of husbands as gods enjoined upon Hindu wives?

### **3: From elite to popular audience**

As my last comment suggests, the re-formation of the *Rāmāyana* has had deep social implications. An important one relates to readership and audience, which changes through time. Vālmīki composed in Sanskrit which reserved his work for an elite group who could follow the language of the privileged class. It was meant to be heard and understood by them. They received instructions on ethical and moral problems through this epic, by the example of Rāma's adherence to *dharma*. With the emergence of *bhakti* as a belief system particularly accessible to the masses in medieval times, the need for stories narrated in regional languages became paramount. The poets who took up the task of re-presenting Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana* were clearly aiming at making it accessible to mass audiences. They no longer tried to write "a warrior tale" preaching righteousness, and Rāma ceased to be described primarily as a righteous man. Rāma was established as "God" himself and advanced from being merely a part of Vishnu to full godhead by the time the first regional version was composed. People were encouraged to surrender to the God Rāma, who cannot be questioned. It was easier for people to identify with this mode of *bhakti*, which had fast achieved mass appeal. With the influence of a vast range of *bhakti* literature like *Harivamsha*, *Bhāgavatapurāna* and *Gītāgovinda* on the Vishnu/Krishna culture, and the influence of *Sivabhakti* and *Vishnubhakti* in Andhra, Tamilnadu, and Maharashtra, people were receptive to the concept of Rāma as Brahman. The appeal of the *Rāmāyana* as a tale of *bhakti* was then a necessary and obvious re-formation of a warrior tale into a dharmic tale.

The process I have been trying to describe is essentially one of literary as well as ethical translation. When you try to render into

your own idiom a narrative as massive as the *Rāmāyana* long after the social world that engendered it has passed away, its narrative structure remains much the same but its conceptual substance and ideological core are lost. They are replaced by concepts and ideologies that arise out of a different world and sustain a different world. The history of the *Rāmāyana* illustrates the ways in which the travels of a text through time, space and cultural forms test the limits of translation and impose upon that text new forms of thought, feeling and expression.

## Notes

1. For extensive studies in versions of the *Rāmāyana*, see Paula Richman, ed. *Many Rāmāyanas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Mandakranta Bose, ed. *The Rāmāyana Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). A particularly interesting work on the Tulsi *Rāmāyana* is by Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
2. References are to: Tulsīdās, *Śrīrāmcaritmānas*, ed. H. Poddar (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, [1942] 1990), and Krittivāsa's *Rāmāyana*, ed. B. Sil (Calcutta: Akshay Library, 1954 [bangabda 1361]).
3. Quoted by William Smith, *The Rāmāyana Tradition in Eastern India* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, (1988), p. 99.
4. *Dāṣarathī Rāyera Pāñcālī*, ed. A. Ray (Calcutta: Mahesh Library, 1997), p. 51, verse 137.
5. *Ibid.* p. 114, verse 194.
6. *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, ed. Shyamaprasad Bhattacharya (Calcutta: Nirmal Book Agency, n.d.), 18.66.

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## Notes on 'Translatability in An Uneven World'

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R. Radhakrishnan

### Abstract

*The article proposes the need to re-think modernity in order to understand modernity. Re-thinking is a reference to significant deviation from modernity. Modernity, on the other hand, is an epistemological modality of meaning and English stands as the most powerful and persuasive vehicle for the instrument of modernity. The article also emphasizes the diasporic nature of language and the loss that is concomitant with translation. Further the author equates translation with love-making and the erotic even as he expatiates on the nature of the relationship between the source language and source text on the one hand and the target language and target text on the other. The translator's love for two languages and the "purposeless purposiveness" in the translation are accounted for in the article. Finally the readerliness of the reader and the nature of an ideal reader are explained.*

How does one "rethink modernity" without invoking modernity all over again in an acquiescent mode? One contingent way out perhaps is to say that the rethinking has to take the shape of a translation into a different language or into a series of languages. If modernity as colonial modernity has taken on global valence as a necessary point of departure for all future possibilities, then rethinking modernity could be seen both as a reference to and a significant deviation from modernity. When I use the term modernity I think of it as a language in two senses of the term:

modernity as an epistemological modality of meaning, and as the dominance of English as the most powerful and persuasive vehicle and instrument of modernity. Just as one could ask, Can there be an Indian or Nigerian modernity; one could also ask a question such as: How is modernity doing in Tamil or Urdu? Particularly in the realm of culture and literature, these two registers are in perennial dialogue, since language is after all constitutive of meaning, and not a mere reflection of it. At a recent talk I gave on “*Diaspora: Literature and Theory*,” in Tamil, one of the most interesting questions I got was: Is diaspora possible or meaningful in Tamil? The question was not about the general intelligibility of the diaspora as such, but rather about its intelligibility within the linguistic domain called Tamil. In this brief intervention I will be using the terms “*translation*” and “*translatability*” both with reference to general worldviews as well as in invocation of the representations of these realities within specific languages.

I would like to begin with a gloss on the phrase, “*lost in translation*”. What is the mutually constitutive relationship between translation and loss? Do we even expect of a rigorous translation that it ought to foreground, avow, and thematize the loss that it has just engendered, rather than claim unimpeachable integrity and fidelity? Could we even go as far as to say that it is only when a translation is effected that the “*loss*” is actively constituted, i.e., we will not know what we have lost till the translation comes into play. In other words, is the active agency of the translation is a prerequisite for an affirmative valorization of our loss? But in that case, how do we distinguish between qualitative losses and shabby losses: losses occasioned by great and noble effort, and those entailed by inefficiency, inadequacy, and indifference? Since my rhetoric is tending towards the interrogative, a few more questions. What is lost as such? What is lost in life or experience? What is lost in language? What is lost in translation, within and between languages? Why can we not say, in a Borgesian way, that I am about to translate this English novel into English? I hope by now it is becoming clear that

on the presentation to follow that is a translation of what I want to say, that I am hoping to promote an energetic interaction between translation as historical and material, and translation as “*concept metaphor*” in Gayatri Spivak’s sense of the term. In other words, there is nothing that is not a translation, and yet, translation is a specific and delimited practice. Intelligibility without translatability would be invalid, and yet, the ethic of a good translation is to resist and problematize intelligibility. Another little gloss, by way of an episode, on the connection between intelligibility and an uneven world: Jayakanthan, an outstanding contemporary Tamil novelist-short story writer-and intellectual whose work I have translated into English, responded thus to an interlocutor who had asked Jayakanthan if he had read Sartre. “*You, sir, ask me if Jayakanthan has read Sartre, whereas I ask you if Sartre has read Jayakanthan*”. This indeed is the fundamental unevenness that I refer to. I know that much to his benefit that Jayakanthan knows some Sartre, whereas I am quite confident that Sartre passed away without ever having been enriched by Jayakanthan. I hope you understand that I am far from criminalizing Sartre, for it was Sartre in his magnificent advocacy of Fanon who posed the question of Fanon’s communicative context and his addressee: Europe or Africa. The problem is systemic and transcends the pieties of individual intentions and determinations.

Translations have something to do with love and the erotic. I would even say that a translation is an attempt to legitimate a *menage a trios* among the translating language, the translated language, and the act of translation. Love without erotics would be disembodied whereas a non-thematic erotics could degenerate into narcissism. So, how does one distinguish between a loveless eroticism and an erotics of love, i.e., between love and mere infatuation? To get more specific, how does the translator’s love of language emblemize itself during the act? Here are a few possibilities. The translator is in love with language or ‘*linguicity*’ as



such and, ergo, with the two languages in question in an allegorical sort of way.<sup>1</sup> It is an intransitive love, or a Duke Orsino kind of love that is in love with love and not with a specific person.<sup>2</sup> In such an allegorical love, the two particular languages get transcendently honored but historically disfigured. There is yet another problem: it cannot easily be made clear if the two languages are vehicles of the allegorical tenor in an equal or unequal way. The positioning of the translator's desire is posited in a way that does not allow for empirical or material verification.

The second scenario is what I participated in when I translated Jayakanthan and Asokamithran into English. Situated between two languages and loving both differently, I still had to be aware that the onus of intelligibility falls differently on Tamil and English, not for intrinsic philosophical reasons, but only because we live in a world structured in dominance where English is a canonically desirable world language whereas Tamil is not. A problem, or rather an ethico-aesthetic dilemma I faced, sentence after sentence, was: Should I author a resistant translation or a frictionless one? Would I have felt similarly had I been translating from English into Tamil? Though I was keen that the two masters I was translating should be relished and cherished in English by millions of people, I was equally passionate and anxious that I should not simplify the embedded magnificence of these masters. It was galling that these names were not even known in the so-called universal, cosmopolitan metropole. I wanted to be an active agent of a program whereby metropolitan readers would pay a penalty for their "*sanctioned ignorance*", to borrow again from Spivak. There was a feeling of resentment that the classic authors I was translating were not even heard of, for no fault of their own, and therefore, my act of translation, despite my best intensions, had to take an apologetic and or popularizing register. I would rather have the cocky, complacent metropolitan reader who would be garnering kudos for having gone out of her way to read and enjoy a translation from the third world, struggle, stumble, and even give up reading in

dread of the “*other*”, than exult in cheap global multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup> My love of the space “*between*” took on a schizophrenic dimension. In the very act of translating well and readably, I wanted to achieve two theoretical effects: 1) the effect of a fundamental and incorrigible untranslatability to be valorized in the name of the minor languages<sup>4</sup>, and 2) the effect of alienation whereby in the act of translating Tamil into English for an English speaking reader I would create a form of English that would de-nativize the English speaking populace. The challenge then was how to achieve an organic balance between the desire to translate well and effectively and the desire to actualize a meta-translational subversion in the name of justice.

Since I have initiated the economy of desire, I may as well go with it some more and get into the adulterous erotics of translation. The translator is in love with two languages and understands that he/she is part of both linguistic formations from “*within*”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, it is not only adultery, but it is also an incestuous and/ or endogamous relationship from two directions. I find myself “*between*” Tamil and English only because I am already part of Tamil and part of English. To borrow from the always ubiquitously useful Edward Said, I may belong to Tamil filiatively and to English affiliatively; but in any case, I am doubly interpellated, and now I am facing a third call that stems from the between, but in honor of the two shores that account for the space of the between. So as a translator, I want to indulge myself in an affair as though it were the wedded relationship and I want the frissons of a transgressive affair as through a proper relationship. The point I want to make is that the ethics of translation as a “*between job*” is accountable to notions of justice without at the same time being captive to norms of the proper and the authentic. If matrimony can be thought of as an affair and an affair legitimated as matrimony within the temporality of the between, then the task of the translator has to be theorized as non-referentially ethical, or to borrow from Kant’s famous aesthetic

“*purposeless purposiveness*”, or better still, as ethical in an implosive or auto-telic manner. I sincerely hope that my conflation here of the ethical register with the aesthetic is quite intentional.

The task of the translator enfranchises erotic loving as a form of intransitive passion even as it gestures substantively towards possibilities of a transitive recuperation of intentional commitments and oaths of adequation and loyalty. The logic of translation has a double and reversible economy: on the one hand, it eroticizes that which is domestic and thus renders it homeless and wild, but on the other hand, it domesticates a wild and lawless passion into something like a home. To put it concretely, when I took up the task of translating Jayakanthan into English, I had to think, in some provisional way, of English as the “*home*” that had to be reached by Jayakanthan’s Tamil, thanks to my integrity as a translator. I as translator had the double duty of honoring the radical and erotic outsiderlines of the Tamil text *Vis a Vis* the genius of the English language and at the same time enable the Tamil text to accept “*its*” English destination as valid home. And all of this had to be done without my letting English “*eat the alterity*”<sup>6</sup> of Tamil, or allow the Tamil text to scorn or dishonor the hospitality offered by English. To put it differently, the ethic of translation dangles between erotics as an *a priori* and the indeterminate betrayal or postponement of the *a priori* in the living present. The only way the translator can test her love for one of the two languages is by rendering that “*primary*” love vulnerable to erotic siege by her love for the “*secondary*” language, and the only way she can be assured contingently that she is in fact in love with two languages and not with the one primarily and with the other secondarily is by loving “*translation as such*” passionately and purposelessly much like an architect who falls in love with a bridge without any concern about the entities that are to be connected by the bridge.

As I turn my attention inevitably towards Walter Benjamin on translation, I would like to frame the discussion a certain way.

What does “*translatability*” mean in all its generality, which is to say, not the translatability of Urdu into Tagalog, or of English into Tamil, but translatability as such? Is “*translatability*” an existential phenomenon or a linguistic effect? When for example, an individual asserts that he or she understands a certain experience that she has had, how indeed has this experience become “*available as intelligible*” to the individual? Does she translate the language of experience into a specific language that in her case might be Hindi, or Arabic, or Russian? To put in Heideggerian terms, is it a translation from “*the language of being*” to “*the being of language*”? On what register is “*language*” inaugurated: at the ontological, or the discursive? If the very term “*translatability*” is part and parcel of a linguistic economy, does it then pertain to the language of being, or the being of language? In other words, does the concept metaphor ground the literal, or is it the other way around? Or to put it differently, in the context of Foucault’s discussion of “*verbality*” in ‘*The Order of Things*’, how is the priori of language distributed between a primordial intelligibility secured as translatability, and an intelligibility of the progressive tense to be embodied in the specificity of actual translations?<sup>7</sup>

The discussion about the universality of experience despite differentiation by language has of course gone on interminably, in the context of the Tower of Babel and in the context of an ancient Sanskrit *shloka* that declares that though the streams be diverse they originate from the same rain and terminate in the same ocean. What is it that makes me confident that any thing at all is intelligible? Is it because it is structured like an experience that precedes diversification, differentiation, and heterogenization by language that meaning is intelligible universally, or is it because it is structured like a language that universal intelligibility is enabled? In other words, is there the need for an ontological original, or is universal intelligibility premised on the superannuation of the original and the celebration of “*difference*” that has no “*other*” or no

“*before?*”<sup>8</sup> Are the truths of translations as such as well as the truths of determinate translations to be understood as forms of radical relationality without “*identical or original*” recourse, or is there the strategic need, in a world structured in dominance, to invoke the “*original*” as a way of signaling that there is a lot of friction and static between ontology and history, between temporality and historicity? The latter strategy may well be a way also of bringing into the discussion a term that Benjamin chooses to ignore, i.e., “*representation*”: representation as translation, and vice versa.

In Benjamin’s entire discussion, it is a given that when we are talking about translation, we are talking about literary translation. In Benjamin’s analysis then, literature gets both marked and unmarked as a special category. Here is how: “*The Task of the Translator*” begins

In the appreciation of a work of art or art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an “*ideal*” receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posts is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, points man’s physical and spiritual experience, but in none of its works is it conceived with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener<sup>9</sup>.

Benjamin achieves several critical effects here. First of all, there is the absolute valorization of a professional norm. Benjamin is a literary critic/theorist and it from within this domain of expertise he speaks and constitutes literary and or/aesthetic appreciation as the platform for discussion. What is most interesting is his negotiation with readerliness. In taking the ideal reader out of the equation, he is also disqualifying the entire category of readership and readerliness. Benjamin triangulates a relationship among “*the public*”, “*the ideal*

reader", and "*theoretical considerations of art*". It is obvious that Benjamin is posing himself a dilemma between democratic and elitist choices. Clearly art necessitates complex theoretical considerations that have no room for *naivete* either of the sociological-empiricist kind or the romanticist-idealist type. What Benjamin finds troubling and stultifying is the mere positing of "*man's existence and nature as such*". Clearly, he expects more of art than a smug recuperation of man's existence in terms of his ideality. A transcendence of sorts, but not one mired in the known or in a comfortable anthropocentrism. I would read his audacious claim that no art work is intended for the receiver as an invitation to a programmatic dismantling of a whole range of humanisms that wish to remain centered in their naturalized privilege. Benjamin is anticipating Foucault who in a Nietzschean vein would call for the dissolution of "*the human*" in the process of knowing. In not being intended for any particular terminus, the work of art releases possibilities of intransitive understanding that owe no filial allegiance to their provenance or their destination. Benjamin could also be understood as paving a way for "*the aesthetic*" as a secondary or "*supplemental*" epistemology that is not concerned with the shoring up of the human as existence or ideal nature. It is through this strategy of alienation or defamiliarization that Benjamin reconciles his anti-humanism as a form of populism. It is in art and in the theoretical considerations of art that the human recognizes itself in difference, in perennial alterity.

It might well be asked if this insistence on alienation and defamiliarization is not a case of modernist obsession. My response is that it is a modernist concern (by no means an obsession), and so what? Honestly, the modern world is the only world we have: true, each one of us, as subaltern or postcolonial or dalit or feminist subject may well signify differently on the legacy of colonial and postcolonial modernity, but even such different and adversarial or resistant significations necessarily fall within the episteme of the

modern. I would even submit that the thesis of “*translatability in an uneven world*” needs to be co-articulated with notions such as transnational, contested, and alternative modernities. As a matter of fact, the coming into its own of language (what Said calls “*linguicity*” and what is still referred to as “*the linguistic turn*” in social thought) offers a great deal to theories and practices of translation as they shuttle among and between cultures. By insisting that ideas and concepts are linguistically constituted, the human subject avoids the pitfalls of an unsituated idealism, preferring instead the paths offered by synchronic and diachronic analysis of languages and their dispositions. Once we are in the realm of languages, we cannot avoid coming to terms with the Tower of Babel. Sure there are universals, but such universals are differently and relationally constituted intra-and inter-linguistically. Neither does the idea dominate the heterogeneous play of language, nor does one dominant language claim an avant-garde representative legitimacy on behalf of all other languages that supposedly follow. The leader in a way then, the task of reclaiming or rethinking modernity perspectively becomes the function of critical negotiations, contestations, and elaborations among and within the languages of the world. The pluriform world we know speaks multilaterally, but very often it is received and understood in a uniform manner that is crafted by the dominant language. Once translation theory instills “*loss*” at the very heart of all languages, and moreover, insists that each language is a translation into and within itself, then, it becomes possible to appreciate and respond honestly to the heterovalences of the world and its many words. Such an understanding of the cultural politics of translation, as a matter of fact, is part of a larger thesis that argues that the colonial modern condition itself is an effect of an uneven, incomplete, and an insufficiently multilateral translation.

If colonial modernity at the height of its hubris dreamed of one world, based on “*dominance without hegemony*”,<sup>10</sup> then a post-modern and post-colonial condition based on the deconstructive

truths of a world that is nothing but translation is indeed well positioned not just to read modernity against its much vaunted monolingualism, but go well beyond to imagine non binary possibilities regarding the One and the Many. It becomes possible to initially enable polylogues between deconstructive linguistic ventures and emerging linguistic endeavors (always keeping in mind the reality of an unevenness hatched in dominance that I have addressed earlier on in this essay), and eventually imagine a decentered world of relational plays and possibilities. Here is Derrida thinking two thoughts at the same time: “1. *We only ever speak one language.* 2. *We never speak only one language.*”<sup>11</sup> When these two propositions are put together, a space opens up where the labors of translation as “*concept metaphor*” and the concrete practices of translation work within a symbiotic relationship of accountability and integrity. The one does not automatically make sense to itself just as the Many are not condemned to chronic translatability as their only precondition to meaning. Aware then of the ruse of the One in the Many and the murmuring groundswell of the Many in the One, translation as meaning may, to borrow from Ralph Ellison’s magnificently double-conscious modernist conclusion of his novel *Invisible Man*, perennially speak on registers other than the ones sanctioned by the dominant discourse: those other registers where recognition and representation are in a state of constant mutual negotiation<sup>12</sup>.

I would like to conclude this brief intervention with the thought that the worldly project of finding and honoring intelligibility in all its protean shapes not be reduced to questions of mastery and instrumental opportunism. All I am saying is that as I translate, say Ambai, from Tamil into English, I should also be translating Tamil and English: each into its own relative imperfection, incompleteness, and contingency.



**NOTES**

1. “Linguicity” is a term that Edward Said uses in the chapter “Abecedarium culturae” in his book **Beginnings** to suggest the condition of being in language.
2. I refer here to Duke Orsino in William Shakespeare’s **The Twelfth Night** and his famous lines, “If music be the food of love”.
3. For more on this, please see the chapter, “The Use and Abuse of Multiculturalism” in my book **Theory in an Uneven World**, Blackwell 2003.
4. See Deleuze and Guattari, **Kafka: Towards a Minority Literature** (University of Minnesota Press), and **the Nature and Context of Minority Discourse**, eds. Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (Oxford University Press).
5. See Abdelkebir Khatibi, **Amour bilingue**.
6. I refer here to an essay by Bell Hooks, “Eating the Other” in the collection in **Black Looks: Race and Representation**, South End Press, 1992
7. See Michel Foucault, **The Order of Things** and **The Birth of the Clinic**.
8. For a memorable exposition of the nature of “difference”, see Derrida’s essay with the same title in the collection **The Margins of Philosophy**.
9. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in **Illuminations**.
10. For an exquisite exposition of the conduct of “dominance without hegemony,” see Ranajit Guha’s essay in **Subaltern Studies, Vol. VI**.
11. Jacques Derrida, **Monolingualism of the Other, Or The Prosthesis of Origin**, trans. Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, 1998.

12. Ralph Ellison's **Invisible Man** ends with these poignant and magnificent lines: "May be on another wavelength I speak for you too."

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# Translation, Context and the Public Sphere

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B. Hariharan

## Abstract

*In Hariharan (2004:194) Hariharan discusses three levels of translation: (a) Translation as a personal enterprise (b) Translation as a cultural enterprise with a social mission and (c) Translation as cartographing social demography or translation as public enterprise. The “dimensions of translation in the public sphere” he says (ibid: 209) “possibly manifest best the change in a people and culture. Only a fuller study of the translations in the public sphere will enable an understanding of the cultural discourses that condition the transcreation of space.” This paper proposes to address translation in the public sphere to understand how space gets transcreated. An attempt will also be made to explore the crucial question of the relationship between “the consequence of translation and the location of leisure” that he had briefly mentioned in his study cited earlier. The texts that form the basis for his argument which are considered here include the Connolly Canal that was once the artery of commerce in North Kerala, Kallai Over bridge that is only a memory now, and the City Centre, a multistoried building that towers above the older city centre, the Vadakkumnathan (Siva) temple in Trichur.*

Translation and Translation Studies in the realm of Cultural Studies have become increasingly significant for the way in which

new languages shape the space of our living. While translation strongly implies a linguistic activity wherein printed texts are rendered in different cultures and languages, it is important to recognize that they were validated largely with the advent of the printing press and the movable type, what Benedict Anderson calls in his discussion of the origin of nationalism “*print capitalism*” (Anderson 1983:40)<sup>1</sup>. Translation as a scriptable, linguistic activity enables the shaping of specialized studies in the area requiring special linguistic skills that notify cultural texts and the translator’s specific competence. An understanding, thus, of ‘*source*’ language and ‘*target*’ language where linguistic codes are transferred across linguistic and cultural boundaries has been the domain of Translation Studies. It is therefore possible to talk of inter-lingual, intra-lingual, and inter-semiotic translations and their problematic.

I propose to push the signification of ‘*translation*’ from the textuality of the printed word and work, from the question of the politics of who translates what and for whom, to a more flexible understanding of the term. What I propose to do here is not to look at the idea of translation and translation theory straight, but with a sidelong glance<sup>2</sup>. Since the signification of ‘*translation*’ and its cultural situatedness in a readership market describes the articulation of the economy of spatial production, it is important to describe the creation of cultural spaces and what they imply for translation.

In this context, it is appropriate to acknowledge that before the advent of print culture and the market economy, there were cultural translations. For instance, in his book *Imagined Nations: Reflections on Media in Canadian Fiction*, David Williams refers to King Alfred’s ninth-century translation of Pope Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis*, with its important vernacular “*Preface*” (Williams 2003:24). Williams observes how a Saxon king might address a wider audience of *Angelcynn* in Old English, prefacing his translation of the Latin text in a manner that ‘*relentlessly integrates land, language, and people*’ (ibid:24). To extend the argument

further, translation ‘*integrates land, language, and people*’. What the rise of vernacular over Latin implied for King Alfred was “*a loss of that national reputation*”. Yet, notes Williams, “*the very memory of such a national past evokes a shared sense of community*” (ibid:25). The shared sense of community evolves not out of print literacy, but through a different actualization of cultural space.

And so, while there are other ways to actualize cultural space that need not be authorized by books, located within the ambit of print culture, it will be culturally significant to discuss ways in which larger texts that configure societies, social attitudes, nations, empires, or even experiences of leisure are subject to translation. The texts that get translated need not, therefore, be in purely linguistic terms a rendering of source language to target language. Rather than address the linguistic, semantic, or culturally specific problems translations and translators face, it is proposed to address the way in which translation crosses linguistic boundaries and recasts, even re-inscribes new spaces that are of cultural significance. This is perhaps what Mary Ann Caws means when she talks of “*inscribing in another language, your own...you are inscribing in your own language what someone else has said and inscribed in another language.*” (McCance 2001: 13)

In. Hariharan (2004) I argued that city-space could be seen as a cultural text subject to translation. It is to be noted here that Walter Benjamin worked on the Parisian Arcades from 1927 for thirteen years<sup>3</sup>. For him, the city, the architecture manifest in the Arcades, the flâneur, or the Ecole Polytechnique was all texts that articulate the dialectics of cultural space. Benjamin’s incomplete project discusses a wide range of cultural texts in nineteenth century France within the larger text of the city and its arcades. Here’s what Benjamin sets out to do with the Parisian Arcades:

“*Here, the Paris arcades are examined as though they were properties in the hand of a collector. (At bottom, we may say, the collector lives a piece of dream life. For in the dream, too, the*

*rhythm of perception and experience is altered in such a way that everything – even the seemingly most neutral – comes to strike us; everything concerns us. In order to understand the arcades from the ground up, we sink them into the deepest stratum of the dream; we speak of them as though they had struck us”* Benjamin (1999:205 – 206).

Benjamin’s examination of the Parisian arcades locates the impact of iron and glass as construction material in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He argues that the impact of these building materials on construction and city-spaces is repeated with “*the human material on the inside of the arcades....Pimps is the iron uprights of this street, and its glass breakables are the whores”* (ibid: 874). The dialectics that he found in the arcades spoke for Benjamin, “*not of decline but transformation. All at once, they were the hollow mold from which the image of ‘modernity’ was cast”* [ibid: 874]. Consider again what Benjamin says in one of his methodological reflections on “*the evocation of the different districts of a great city. It is not their picturesque aspect that concerns the author, nor anything exterior. It is, rather, the unique character conferred on each of these quarters by the social strata informing them and the occupations of the residents”* (ibid:913). The transformation of the public sphere is truly a version of the process of translation of the cityscape. It is obvious that, to use Benjamin’s phrase, “*human material”* is implicated in the transcreation of space.

What the translation of city-space underlines is the dialectics between ‘*human material*’ and the sites of processes those text new cultural discourses of space. The “*dimension of translation in the public sphere”* communicates the conditions that enable a realignment of the distribution of cultural spaces. Translation in the public sphere can be seen, to put it in Hariharan’s words, to “*possibly [manifest] best the change in a people and culture. Only a fuller study of the translations in the public sphere will enable an*

*understanding of the cultural discourses that condition the transcreation of space.”*

With this intent, I would like to look at three distinct landmarks, of which two have an ancestry dating back to colonial times and one to very recent times. The Connolly Canal in Calicut district<sup>4</sup>, and the Kallai and Feroke Road-bridge in Calicut date back to 1840s and 1883. The City Centre in the heart of Trichur city is an addition in the latter half of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Connolly Canal:** To expand the facilities of water transport was drawn a very ambitious plan to link some rivers in North Malabar, which included Kotta river, Akala river, Elathur river, Kozhikode Kallai river, and Beypore river. As part of this project, in 1843 was constructed the 1.6 kilometer-long Payyoli watercourse linking the rivers, the Kotta and the Akala. This facilitated water transport between Badagara and Elathur. Later, in 1848, with the orders of the then collector of Malabar, Mr. Connolly, Elathur River, Kallai River and Beypore River were linked and the Connolly Canal watercourse was built.

As a result, it was possible to transport conveniently coconut, coconut husk, coir, black pepper, ginger, cardamom, coffee and tea from Badagara to Kozhikode and one could return to Badagara with tiles, bricks, rice and other commodities. This trade route was almost the lifeline of business, for there was hardly any other mode of transport connecting these places. Gradually, as road transport increased, this mode of transport had fewer users and by 1950 – ’55 it stopped.

Today, there are no boats plying on this route. Instead, all the sewage of Calicut city gets emptied here and has become the breeding ground for mosquitoes. But, as recently as 1999, the tourist potential of the canal was recognized and as part of the actualization of new projects, serious renovation work was done here. This

included constructing walls on either side. Removing silt and increasing the depth of the canal is continuing. The Calicut Corporation has prepared a big project called “*Dream City*” that covers about 247 acres of land that includes the marshy areas near Arayidathupalam, and land reclaimed from the candel overgrowths. It may be emphasized here that the candel growth is sanctuary to many migratory birds that breed only here because their breeding habits are environment-specific. The sports complex is also coming up with a project here. The Kerala tourism minister has gone on record saying that they are planning a one and half crore rupees project here. These projects might be realized, but, at present, Connolly Canal is an eyesore. The cosmetic beautification and fibreglass boats going in circles in the canal in wish-fulfillment augment this.

Alongside the canal, there is a mini bypass from Kalluthan wharf in the south to Karaparambu in the north. Because of this road, people frequent this place, there are programmes planned by different organizations, the corporation has exhibitions, annual celebrations, and other major events are held in the big ground here. People come here in the evening, and enjoy their time; dreaming under the shade of the trees their dream city.

A conceptual understanding of the impact the creation of such a communication network in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had on the growth of trade, other modes of communication, and economy reveals primarily the functional transcreation of space that caters to a sustainable marketing route. This space unambiguously charts here a new language of communication. But it should also be noted that with laying new roads and infrastructure development, spaces that sustained economies till then became dead languages. Newer languages and their spaces become possible with different modes of communication. And yet, the dead language, the dead cultural text is further translated with its inherent potential to define newer cultural spaces. This is illustrated well in the translation of the dead



communication network into a space that has tremendous tourist potential. It is also interesting to note that the Calicut Development Authority had taken up dredging work to increase the depth of the canal but it had to be abandoned, as there were other pressures. The idea was to link Badagara to Ponnani in Malappuram district, make travel cheaper and create new contexts for translating communication spaces.

But then, to return to the present situation, it must be observed that this translation in the context of the dynamics of larger movements of people across spaces makes over unambiguous languages into unresolved matrices that are caught in the marketability of the translation network itself. So the unfinished project viz. ‘*Dream City*’, the ongoing dream of expressing leisure in dreams and fiberglass boats. The new translation project exploring the tourist potential of the canal, then, re-makes even the name of the colonial district collector and the then interlinking of rivers the always already postmodern enterprise that prepares for the modernization project.

**Kallai and Feroke Road-bridge:** A discussion of railway and road-bridges will have to acknowledge the history of architecture and its relation to the appearance of iron in building technology. It might yet be useful to cite Benjamin to understand this advance in technology. As part of his dialectical reading of the French arcades, he studies iron construction that is in contrast “*both with Greek construction in stone (raftered ceiling) and with medieval construction in stone (vaulted ceiling)*” (*ibid*: 150); the study in turn engages with the history of construction work in at least two cities in Europe, Berlin and Paris.

For Benjamin, iron, the “*artificial building material*” (*ibid*: 4) was crucial for not just the arcades but also for the subsequent transcreation of the engineer and architect. Benjamin also underscores how there was significant development in the use of

iron in relation to the locomotive, so much so that they were “*compatible only with iron tracks*” (*ibid*: 4).<sup>5</sup> It is not merely a historical curiosity to observe that “[*t*]he rail becomes the first prefabricated iron component, the precursor of the girder. Iron is avoided in house-construction but used in arcades, exhibition halls, and train stations - buildings that serve transitory purposes.” (*ibid*: 4, 16) In other words, iron is “*immediately allied with functional moments in the life of the economy*” (*ibid*: 154).

Iron, which was functional in the life of the economy, at least when it was introduced in the construction of public spaces for transit purposes, in a dialectic contingent on history is translated into a landmark when the Kallai bridge or say, the bridge across Hooghly<sup>6</sup> is considered today. It may be mentioned here that the Kallai and Feroke Road bridges were constructed and were commissioned in 1883 and the Hooghly bridge in 1897. The railway bridges across the Kallai and Feroke rivers were commissioned in 1888. These bridges, across the two rivers, were constructed when Lord Charles Napier was the Governor of Madras Presidency. The railway bridge across the two rivers was crucial for the Madras Railway trunk route along the west coast as they are today for the southern and Konkan railways.

Landmarks are defining factors for public space. They are the text of the public sphere. From the earlier ‘*functional moments in the life of economy*’, the bridge is translated to speak other ‘*functional moments*’ as it is landscaped as much more than a colonial structure. If the Kallai River figured in a classic Malayalam song of the seventies, in the late eighties the Kallai road bridge figured prominently in a popular Malayalam film titled *Hey Auto*. There is a wide-angle shot of the bridge with auto rickshaws blocking the car of the villain from either side where we witness intense drama as passions run high.

The road bridges across Kallai and Feroke rivers were probably the last remnants of British legacy in Calicut; it is not with

nostalgia that the structure was seen to constitute the landscape. The two bridges were reminders of the demographic and sociological dimension of physical labour as well as an expression of the medium of communication translating as communal space. It might be useful to bear in mind that the material used in the construction was transformed into the medium of communication and had been an important link in networking and altering the social and demographic nature of the Malabar region.

Very recently, the Kallai road bridge was dismantled. This was part of the doubling of the railway line in the Shoranur-Mangalore sector. In the place of the iron structure that watched the sunset for more than a century, now is a concrete bridge constructed by the railways. A firm from Tiruchirapalli AMK & Co, left with the iron structure that made up Kallai Bridge. It may be mentioned here that the tenders were opened in Tiruchirapalli for fear that there might be proactive demonstrations against the idea of demolition. The translation of the bridge as communal space was best seen when people protested on the site<sup>7</sup> when plans were drawn for the demolition work. Perhaps what must also be noted here is the translation of the old functional economics of iron into another language that speaks economics but on a much larger scale in terms of time saved to go to the northern part of the country, mass transport<sup>8</sup>, and faster movement of freight. At another level, iron continues to be used as building material to reinforce concrete. And so, something in the '*source*' text finds place in the '*target*' text. It is possible to suggest that translation into communal space is the feeling, and experience of space that has shared cultural value.

**The City Centre:** I would like to cite here some short excerpts from Benjamin related to the arcades, capitalism, and the idea of phantasmagoria to read transcreations of public spaces that are expressions of commodification. Benjamin has used the word "*phantasmagoria*"<sup>9</sup> (ibid: 7) extensively to discuss the commodity character of nineteenth century culture. In the section titled

‘*Convolutés*’ which is a major part of his work on the arcades, Benjamin sees “*The arcades as temples of commodity capital*” (ibid: 37). In the catalogue of materials for the Exposé of 1935, we read, “*The experience of our generation: that capitalism will not die a natural death*” (ibid: 912). In “*Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*,” he says, “*The arcades are a center of commerce in luxury items. In fitting them out, art enters the service of the merchant*” (ibid: 3). He further seeks to address the question, “*Arcades as origin of department stores?*” (ibid: 37).

Almost in answer to the question, in “*The Ring of Saturn or Some Remarks on Iron Construction*,” Benjamin writes of the appearance of gas with cast iron in “*those elegant establishments*,” the arcades. Here “*The leading fancy-goods stores, the chic restaurants, the best confectioners, and so on found it necessary to secure a place in these galleries in order to preserve their reputations. Out of these galleries emerged, a little later on, the great department stores, of which the pioneering model, Au Bon Marche was designed by the builder of the Eiffel Tower*” (ibid: 886). It is compelling to see the appearance of shopping malls in North America, our own supermarkets (the specialist and non-specialist varieties), and departmental stores as metamorphoses of the arcades for they are the temples of commodification.

The City Centre<sup>10</sup> in Trichur is a temple that is an expression of phantasmagoria. This temple with a glass front faces the northwest corner of the Sree Vadakkumnathan Temple around which the city developed. It has ample car parking space in the basement, escalators and lift exposed to public gaze like a big capsule of glass encasing people as they go up and down. There is a fountain outside to complete the picture. Enquiries made around the place at random reveals that people are not sure as to what structures existed before the City Centre. There is vagueness as to the existence of two or three houses. In all likelihood, there might have been an old

*Nalukettu*<sup>11</sup>. Public memory about private spaces becomes short when such spaces get translated into public space.

The new public space made of concrete and glass, towering above the temple dome (the temple is yet another public space), is assuredly ambivalent space unlike the Siva temple. An ambiguous public space located at a counter-point with other public spaces in the vicinity alters the language of the cityscape. If what Benjamin says about the use of glass in the Parisian arcades is true<sup>12</sup>, then the ambivalence has got to do with the building material used here. In the section on “*Mirrors*”, Benjamin says, “*A look at the ambiguity of the arcades: their abundance of mirrors, which fabulously amplifies the spaces and makes orientation more difficult. For although this mirror world may have many aspects, indeed infinitely many, it remains ambiguous, double-edged. It blinks: it is always this one – and never nothing – out of which another immediately arises*” Walter Benjamin (*ibid*: 542). The glass front of the phantasmagoria with its glass elevators and alluring escalators, “*the oppressive magic worked by the alluring mirror-walls of the arcades...invites us into seductive bazaars*” (*ibid*: 541).

Inside this phantasmagoric temple are the City Centre Supermarket and other shops occupying shop space in the six floors. There is a Gold Park, shops selling leather goods, clothes, apparel, crockery, bakery, and cafeteria and snacks shop. One attraction is the availability of electronic appliances and imported goods, especially with a China bazaar, which has hot sales throughout. Computer games and other digital savvy entertainment co-exist with provisions, stationery items, household items, vegetables and other consumer durables. The creation of such languages of the interior effects the translation of human material as the site of consumption. The crowd puller is the Food Court on the third floor where one pays two hundred rupees, buys a credit card, and gets ‘*unlimited*’ food. The card seduces the exchange value of the consumer in the fetish for the value of commodity; the cardholder consumed in the

seduction of the capitalist slogan of ‘*value for money*’. This is the “*Primordial landscape of consumption*” (*ibid*: 827). This primordial landscape, one might conclude, is metamorphosed into the space that accommodates commodity.

This landscape of consumption is the amplification of not just the immediate space, but the language of the cityscape itself. For, the orientation inside is always through ambivalences generated through spaces replicated across floors “*in the bosom of nothingness*” (*ibid*: 878). And yet, here is made possible a collective space where are realized the aspirations, dreams, experiences of the city dweller; where leisure is expressed and experienced in the materiality of being human. While for Benjamin, the “*street reveals itself in the arcade,*” (*ibid*: 879), here it may be said that the collective is re-inscribed in the phantasmagoria of the commodification of space. In its phantasmagoria, the City Centre becomes the ‘*real*’ City Centre.

Arguably translated spaces are always fluid, where meaning is never given, is being constantly moulded as it also moulds other spaces. In this sense, cultural translations are spatial inscriptions. They signify texts that are cultural processes transforming spaces and languages and their relationship is nothing less than ‘*human material*’. Translation needs to be read as expressing the materiality of culture in spatial terms, not necessarily confined to the printed word, or the book.

## Notes

1. Though Anderson (1983) discusses print-capitalism in relation to the rise of national consciousness, and in that context refers to Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible, it serves equally to illustrate our point. He says, “But when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel-door in Wittenberg, they were

printed up in German translation, and ‘within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country.’ In the two decades 1520 – 1540 three times as many books were published in German as in the period 1500 – 1520, an astonishing transformation to which Luther was absolutely central. His works represented no less than one third of *all* German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525. Between 1522 and 1546 a total of 430 editions (whole or partial) of his Biblical translations appeared. ‘We have here for the first time a truly mass readership and a popular literature within everybody’s reach.’ (*ibid*: 43). Translation and translator are caught unaware in the market economy ushered in with production technology. With the dissemination of the word of God in the vernacular, a reading public was brokered into place translating the “citadel of Latin” (*ibid*) into the vernacular creation of God’s word as commodity.

2. I am indebted to Mary Ann Caws for the idea of the 'sidelong glance'. See the interview given to Dawne McCance (2001) in *Mosaic*.
3. I wish to acknowledge that Prof. Narayana Chandran drew my attention to the relevance of Benjamin’s work for my discussion of city-space as cultural text.
4. I thank Mr. V. Ravindran, Retired Executive Engineer, Calicut Development Authority, Calicut, and V. Rakesh, contractor, Calicut, for valuable information on Connolly Canal.
5. Benjamin cites A. Gordon’s argument against iron rails in the 1830s in his *A Treatise in Elementary Locomotion* in which Gordon argued that, “the steam carriage (as it was called then) should run on lanes of granite. It was deemed impossible to produce enough iron for even the very small number of railway lines being planned at that time” (1999:156).
6. Ian J. Kerr says that, “By mid-1850 Dalhousie had selected the routes and sanctioned the start of the construction of a 121-mile line in Bengal, extending north-westwards from Howrah (across the Hooghly river from Calcutta) to the small town of Raniganj, centrally situated with respect to the coal-fields of Bundwar, and

a 35 mile line from Bombay east to Kalyan at the foot of the Western ghats” (26 – 27). See *Building the Railways in the Raj 1850 – 1900*.

7. There was, for instance, a core group led by Prof. Wilson H. Mackaden who had retired from the Dept of English, from Malabar Christian College that had actively led a campaign to ‘save’ the bridge. They had approached the court and had obtained an order that prevented further damage to heritage structures.
8. Walter Benjamin writes: “The historical signature of the railroad may be found in the fact that it represents the first means of transport – and, until the big ocean liners, no doubt also the last – to form masses. The stage coach, the automobile, the airplane carry passengers in small groups only” (1999:602).
9. The importance Benjamin attaches to the word ‘phantasmagoria’ can be gauged from the way it is used repeatedly in his discussions of commodification of culture. Rolf Tiedemann in “Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*” appended to Benjamin’s text argues that ‘phantasmagoria’ “seems to be merely another term for what Marx called commodity fetishism” (ibid: 938). Tiedemann says, “The fate of nineteenth century culture lay precisely in its commodity character, which Benjamin thereupon represented in ‘cultural values’ as *phantasmagoria*. Phantasmagoria: a *Blendwerk*, a deceptive image designed to dazzle, is already the commodity itself, in which the exchange value or value-form hides the use value. Phantasmagoria is the whole capitalist production process, which constitutes itself as a natural force against the people who carry it out” (ibid: 938).
10. I am grateful to Dr S. Satheesh and Dr E. Sandhya for providing additional details about the City Tower and the Siva temple in Trichur.
11. The *Nalukettu* is the traditional style of architecture of Kerala. The main feature here is that the house will have a quadrangle in the centre. The other important feature is the open central



- courtyard. Today it has become a status symbol for the well off.
12. Benjamin (1999: 877) says: “Where doors and walls are made of mirrors, there is no telling outside from in, with all the equivocal illumination. Paris is a city of mirrors”.

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# *Chemmeen* Processed for Export: The Earliest Signs of Globalisation of the Word?

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A.J.Thomas

## Abstract

*This paper attempts to analyse an English translation of Chemmeen, the Malayalam novel by Thakazhi Sivoashankar pillai. Chemmeen has been translated into English by V.K Narayana Menon. A.J Thomas in this article examines Chemmeen as a piece of translation in a globalised world. Originating in Malayalam, the novel was an astonishing success in the world of translation. The article analyses the difficulties, delicacies and the indeterminacies of the translator in maintaining the authorial intention without any alterations. It articulates the strategies, the colonial or imperial and post-colonial impact on the translator in making the work of art a "best-seller." The defence the translator mounts in omitting certain key passages and more importantly the deviation that the translated novel takes from the original seem to stem from the power equation between the two languages.*

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's (Malayalam) novel *Chemmeen*, accepted as part of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works - Indian Series, was translated by V.K.Narayana Menon, and published by Victor Gollancz, London in 1962. It was the first significant Malayalam novel to be translated into English after Independence or, rather, during the early post-colonial era. I have selected *Chemmeen* for detailed analysis for two reasons: One, this is the first Malayalam novel that captured the imagination of the rest of the world. Therefore the mechanics of its

translation, and its standing vis-à-vis the original, the points of departure it showed from the source text, the way linguistic and cultural problems were handled and resolved and so on would be of great interest. Two, this is the path-breaking novel in translation that showed the way for many more similar success stories. Most of the translation strategies adopted in it - including both the approach which was most faithful to the source text and selective omissions/deletions, compressions, paraphrasing, dilutions and so on – were also adopted by subsequent translators. To interrogate the instances of free translation, the usurpation of authorial authority, and other strategies which result in the appropriation of a work by hegemonic cultures, especially in the back-drop of the attempts at globalising culture that we are witnessing today, we have to understand the processes that were at work in the translation of this pioneering text.

The politics of translation and the peculiar approaches towards culture in the then Third World, emerging in Shanta Rama Rau's "*Introduction*" to the translation, merit discussion.

Shanta Rama Rau writes that it was our duty in those days (of colonialism) to understand the West and our colonial rulers, but not necessarily vice versa. One's acquaintance with one's own culture would remain really slender too. Writing in English gives the writer a pan-Indian reach and that too among the consumer segments that would actually buy a book! Only very few regional language writers have ever reached the sales figures a successful Indian English writer has reached. Therefore, the idea of a "best-seller" in India is a strange and wonderful thing and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* in English translation became precisely that. In Narayana Menon's brilliant translation, his work got the international audience which it deserved. Shanta Rama Rau's arguments in her introduction to the translation are really revealing in the context of today's market-driven literary products.

In *Chemmeen*, Thakazhi made a departure from his avowed commitment to realism as it appeared in his works -- till then -- he brought in a fresh breeze of lyricism and romanticism. The novel acquires the quality of a fable in which life in the fishermen's community is depicted with great emotional detail. The customs, taboos, beliefs, rituals and the day-to-day business of living through the pain of stark existence come alive magically through Thakazhi's pen.

Narayana Menon's translation remains very popular even to this day. It has gone into several editions and is readily available at bookshops all over India.

With *Chemmeen*, a new era in the history of translation in modern Malayalam fiction was ushered in. The book, in its 1962 UNESCO-sponsored edition, sold 20,000 copies (according to Meenakshi Mukherjee 1972) and created publishing history.

As already averred, *Chemmeen* is the first significant work of modern Malayalam fiction translated into English after Independence. It is interesting to note how the approaches to translation, which hitherto conformed to the imperial power's requirements, have changed in the early post-colonial period -- in the selection of equivalents, in the manner of retaining culture-specific items, in the selection of the language, and of course, with the confidence of presenting it to the world something patently Indian. And yet, an eagerness to reach out, bordering on a motivated approach in promoting a product, is visible in the 'presentation' of the translated text of *Chemmeen*.

The systematic omission of whole sections and passages found in the original tempt one to question Narayana Menon's intentions in doing so. For, these omissions do not appear to be the result of oversight. There is certainly some design, some definite

pattern underlying these deletions. Was it selective editing as suggested by some foreign editor through the UNESCO connection is a question one is tempted to ask. At any rate, one is led to suspect that Narayana Menon has consciously made the omissions, or acquiesced with an editor's intervention, with an eye targeting language sensibilities. The portions that are left out are, none of them, insignificant or superfluous. They certainly contribute substantially to create Thakazhi's lyrical narrative style in the original. One is led to surmise that editing the exuberantly romantic and lyrical elements in the narrative language of the original is clearly with a view to conform the sensibilities of a western readership that appreciates a terse, subdued, narrative style.

I am citing below a few examples, and am trying to illustrate this with my own translations of the deleted portions:

(1) After the last paragraph on page 14 of the UNESCO Edition that ends with the line, "*He must not sing in her vicinity,*" an entire paragraph has been omitted in the TL Text. I am translating this paragraph thus:

Till two days ago, she flitted about animatedly like a butterfly. The changes that have come over her within these two days! She got things to sit down and think about. She began to understand herself more and more. Isn't it something that adds gravity to life? She is being careful about herself. She must put each step forward cautiously. How can she then dash about as before? A man looked at her breast. That moment she became a woman.

This section is an integral part of the novel that gives a factual picture of a teenage girl in a coastal village of Kerala, who has suddenly become aware what male eyes can do to her self-image. This may not mean anything to a reader who is used to

exposed female bodies in the acts of swimming, sunbathing or scanty dressing during summer, or to those who live in societies in which boys and girls are entirely on their own from the time they reach their teens, and have an open approach to love and sex as normal outward expressions of their individuality. One suspects that this portion was deleted because it would not make sense to the target language readers. In other words, the translator was making the novel palatable to the target language readership, in this case, the *global* reader. But the fact remains that the cultural ethos of the source language society has been sadly, and culpably, compromised before the target language reader, who, one hopes, would be only too happy to apply their imaginative faculties and meet halfway the culture-specificities of the source language community.

(2) Another instance of deletion makes this point even clearer:

On page 49, towards the middle, a considerable portion of the original has been deleted, which is given below in my translation:

Whatever Chakki said was right. And she was right manner. But those words seemed to rip through Karuthamma's heart.

Walking some distance, Karuthamma looked back. Not wittingly; she cannot help looking back like that. As they reached home, that heart-piercing song began from the seashore.

Said Chakki: "Isn't that boy going to sleep today?"

Again, Chakki spoke, aiming at Karuthamma. "Somehow, you will have to be sent away from this seaside now."

There is an accusation implied in her mother's words. Her presence has brought trouble there; everyone has lost peace of mind. Unable to bear her sorrow and anger, Karuthamma said:

“What did I do?”  
Chakki didn’t say a word.

When one considers the fact that there are 146 instances of such deletions and distortions throughout the novel (not given here for reasons of space), the gravity of the situation is brought home.

I am compelled here to observe that thus when one analyzes the text in depth and in detail, comparing it with the original, one finds that the target language (English) text of *Chemmeen* made available to the world is a highly manipulated, edited, doctored one. Making the translation eminently readable and racy, Narayana Menon got away with it -- at the cost of the narrative marvel of the original, through deletions, suppressions, and mutilations, as proved by the hard evidence of the cases of omission and manipulative translation, illustrated by my alternative translations provided in all these 146 cases.

Looking at it from the point of view of power inherent in the act of translation, which is often described as an act of subversion, we get to one of the main forces at work in the instant case. This is something which has been happening all the time. The translation of Milan Kundera’s *The Joke* is another case in point. It is as if the translator decides to unsettle the supremacy of the original text and literally dismantles it to create the target language text, and adopt several strategies to get around the author. Most of the translators get away with what they do and any number of translators can be found engaged in free translation, subverting authorial power. The translator places herself/himself in a position of authority to decide what the target language reader should read. There is the possibility that the translator may suppress, eliminate partially or misrepresent the source language text in a number of ways. In *Chemmeen’s* case all these seem to have worked; and it also appears that the author was privy to what was happening, unlike in Kundera’s case. Writing

as early as in 1981, Sujit Mukherjee was one of the first to observe a peculiar situation vis-à-vis the regional language writer and his/her English translator. Says Mukherjee:

English pays to a fellow Indian who is confident. An instance of “Whatever be the rights or wrongs of an author’s attitude towards his translators, Indo-English literature contains a situation where the translator’s superior knowledge of English persuades him to take liberties which the Indian language author allows out of the usual deference that the Indian who is not confident of his own the translator practically usurping the author happened with the English version of *Chemmeen*.” (Mukherjee 1994)

However, further in the essay, Mukherjee says: “*Narayana Menon, it is said, was in touch with Thakazhi while the work was in progress (ibid: 29),*” giving one the impression that the liberties the translator took was with the knowledge and consent of the author. As quoted by Mukherjee, it was K.Ayyappa Paniker who revealed in an essay that,

“It is not just a literal translation of all that Thakazhi has written. Menon has done a remarkable work of editing....There are numerous other places where the translator, like a good editor, has used his scissors and hacksaw and improved upon the original. On a rough estimate, I have found that about one-fourth of the original has been left out (Paniker 1976)”.

Neither in the Introduction nor in the Translator’s Note do we find any mention of the deletions. On the other hand, in the Jaico Paperback edition, we find the declaration, “*Complete and Unabridged.*”



One is led to infer two things here: either Thakazhi was not a good enough writer in Malayalam, he needed to be improved by the translator who was very good at English, and did so with the consent of the author, because the author never made any complaints; or, someone decided that what Thakazhi wrote was not to the reach of English readership (read ‘*western readers*’) and that it had to be improved upon to suit their tastes. In short, it was either a kind of exercise in subtle marketing, or a case of an Indian writer and translator being beholden to a hegemonic culture or power structure, and ‘*adjusting*’ according to the unwritten diktats of what was considered culturally ‘*right*’, or both. Sujit Mukherjee observes:

“The editing while translating was aimed at ‘improving’ the work, but the translator was surely conditioned by the fact that the translation was prepared for a western audience.” Here he adds a note, a kind of raised eyebrow: “For some reason, it required an introduction by Shanta Rama Rau from which we learn that her mother used to lull her to sleep as a child ‘with long recitations from Shakespeare or (even more soporific) Tennyson.’ Shanta Rama Rau, with a good deal of self-deprecatory rhetoric, was trying to impress the reader that her own country’s ‘famous literature’ was not considered good enough and was not taught in ‘good schools.’ But in spite of her patriotic exercise, Sujit Mukherjee seems to tell us that he has seen through her game of name-dropping, in her attempt to “sell” the book to the West! Obviously, there was an attempt to create a “best-seller” as she stresses in her introduction. This is probably the first attempt, albeit unawares, at trans-national sale of a Malayalam ‘literary product.’ Isn’t this the precursor to the ‘globalised word,’ shorn of all local specificities and cultural ‘rootedness’ and palatable to anyone, anywhere in the world?

Another force at work in this case is that of cultural appropriation by the hegemonic culture. However, it is so complex that it demands consideration from several angles.

The post-colonial experience is the one fought with the passion to assert the nation's identity, seen in the last half-century. It also involves earnest attempts to show to the rest of the world that we are not existing but living. In *Chemmeen*, Shanta Rama Rau's Introduction asserts this. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi say that

“it is an understandable urge for simple self-assertion which in a large measure accounts for the great translation boom currently on in India in which any number of Indians have taken it upon themselves to translate works of Indian literature, both ancient and modern, into English, to show the world (including anglophone Indians) that such works do exist.” (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999:11-12)

Beginning with the “*pride*” the people of each linguistic state of the Indian Union, takes their own language and literature, which ends in language chauvinism, at times even virulent and violent, and crowns it all with the obsession of creating a “*national language and literature*,” Indian post-colonialist vis-à-vis language and literature is an emotional subject. Yet, we have opened ourselves to the opportunities offered in the lands of the erstwhile colonisers, and the neo-colonisers (as the so-called masters of globalisation can be described) who are dazzled by their success and material riches. This has given birth to an ambivalent attitude towards the English language – at once one of hatred, being the language of the colonial masters and then of admiration, as the language of power in today's world ensuring success. The professionally patriotic middle-class young men religiously speak and write Hindi, or the regional language, at the same time watch with envy and also desire the lifestyle of the successful city-boy who has empowered himself with the English language. English, for Indians, has long ceased to be the language of the ex-colonisers; it is a language that went far beyond the pale of Anglo-Saxon ascendancy and has ushered in the age of

the unipolar world. Globalisation has practically become a puppet in the hands of masters and bookmakers who control the play to their target. Free market becomes a free-play of market forces among unequal partners, the most powerful among them calling the shots. The advent of the Internet brought with it, its own hegemony, English being re-consecrated as the international lingua franca, which empowers the individual. The tyranny of English is already there on the scene; the number of people taking crash-courses in the language is increasing day by day. Translation of regional language literatures into English, in this context, resembles the meticulous cleaning, airtight packing and exporting of super-quality cashew or prawn. The hegemonic culture will get hold of all the best things from all parts of the world as Americans proudly tell any visitor to the States. Our colonial past has provided us a ready processing and packaging centre; with our English and our quality-consciousness we certainly have a way ahead. Exporting our cultural items as commodities, or finished cultural products is a blunder happening before our eyes, be it in the form of Kathakali, Kalari or Theyyam (recently there was a news item about Theyyam making a hit in the US). Most of us have taken it as the status of success being achieved. This longing for ranking and recognition abroad is seen all the more in the field of literature, especially fiction. In the wave of the recent boom of Indian English novels, engendered by some authors drawing huge advances from multinational publishers, there are thousands of aspiring hot cake writers ready with their manuscripts, knocking the doors of multi-national publishing houses. The aspiration that Shanta Rama Rau has spelt out in her introduction to the translation of *Chemmeen*, of creating a “best-seller”, has caught on in course of time. Regional writers of creative fiction who get their works translated competently with necessary editing and pruning and get them published by one of these publishers are also falling in line in this queue, often using the guise of the good old ideal of “*Universalism*.” One observes that the

beginnings of these trends can be traced to the translation of *Chemmeen*.

Looking at the scene of literary translation into English after Independence, one finds that translation is heavily biased in favour of the hegemonic language. Hence, the need to strike a balance is evident.

Appropriation of our literature as an exotic cultural product by the hegemonic western culture is placed in perspective in this backdrop. Cultural appropriation in the literary front becomes easy when we are ready to offer free translations to suit international taste-buds; and the difficulties in the form of linguistic and cultural specificities has to be peeled out or removed altogether! All those elements that constituted the resistance to a hegemonic culture have to be done away with, completing the act of homogenization of the text. This is what we find in the case of *Chemmeen*.

This programme began in this country very early during the colonial times, along with the plundering of the riches. The colonisers translated some of the important texts found in the colony for a number of reasons that were mainly extra-literary, like ethnographical, anthropological, and most important of all, for administrative purposes, as Tejaswini Niranjana points out in her book *Siting Translation*, or as is explicitly stated in Dumergue's "*Translator's Note*" in his translation of *Indulekha*. Almost all such translators believed in the superiority of their own language, and most of them thought that the literatures they translated formed the crude. The traces of the continuation of this process are discernible in the instant case as well, in the form of the urge to conform to the tastes of the hegemonic power.

Thakazhi's voice was eliminated through the alteration brought about in the narrative pattern, by systematic deletion of typical passages of the author's exuberant style -- repetitive and explicatory

narration -- as opposed to the implied, subdued narrative style of the West, attempted by Narayana Menon. If it was poetry that was translated, no one would let off the translator. Since *Chemmeen* was fiction, it was looked as a '*cultural product*', a means of entertainment, to be packaged in the most attractive way. The omissions and commissions by the translator have escaped largely unnoticed and uncommented.

Attempts to exoticise the text, by repeated reference to 'bare breasts' in the translated text – apart from the cover illustration showing a young girl standing topless and a similar line-drawing inside showing a girl with a fish-basket on her head, in the Jaico edition – are strikingly obvious. Thakazhi never mentions in the novel that the fisherwomen went bare-breasted. He didn't use the word *mula* which is the Malayalam equivalent of the English word *breast*. He used '*maaru*' or '*maaridam*', the equivalent translation of which would be '*bosom*', which in no way implies '*bare breasts*'. By recurrent use of the locution '*bare breasts*' of standard erotica, the translator has misrepresented the circumspection shown in the original by the use of the equivalent Malayalam word for '*bosom*'. And ironically, as established illustratively above, the local cultural specificities have been planed out through deletions.

A new, complete and unabridged version of *Chemmeen* is needed now, incorporating all that Thakazhi wrote. Let the deleted portions stand and speak independently. The translator should follow a policy of not italicizing culture-specific or locale specific terms and must try to retain as much of the voice of the original author, as possible. There is a clear demand for such a retranslation of *Chemmeen*, in the changed scenario. The translation with an introductory study can be used as a case study in Translation Studies, or as a text in Indian Writing in English Translation. The present writer has embarked upon such a mission.

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# Drama Translation: Principles and Strategies

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Suh Joseph Che

## Abstract

*This paper examines the various principles underlying the translation of drama and the strategies that have been outlined by drama translation scholars. It underscores the prescriptive and descriptive attitudes of scholars underlying these principles and strategies. It asserts that the compatibility and integration of translated plays in the receiving culture are at the heart of the principles of drama translation and the strategies outlined. It argues and demonstrates that scholars who are preoccupied with the fate of the translated drama text in the receiving culture solely from the stand-point of its acculturation and integration in that culture are rather restrictive in their approach.*

Translators of the literary genre of drama, and drama translation scholars have suggested various ways in which drama translation should or could be effected and how the attendant problems should or could be tackled. The various ways suggested can be broadly classified into two main categories: principles and strategies.

Principles could simply be defined here as guiding rules for the drama translator's translational behaviour or action. These principles will be examined from a historical perspective for the

period spanning the last four decades and only the most representative scholars are examined.

In the sixties, in an article entitled “*Some Practical Considerations Concerning Dramatic Translation*”, Hamberg (1969:91-94) outlined certain principles for the drama translator. He says,

“Drama is action [...] and in translating for the radio, television and the theatre it is important to realize what the dramatic theoreticians above all *demand* from the spoken line. It *must* characterize the speaker and thus seem genuine; it *must* characterize time and place as well as social class; it *must* not be ambiguous; and it *should* have been given or one *should* be able to give it the right emphasis so that it leads the attention of the audience in the desired direction. [...] It *goes without saying that* an easy and natural dialogue is of *paramount importance* in a dramatic translation, otherwise the actors have to struggle with lines which sound unnatural and stilted. [...] Even where the author does not indicate in brackets how a line is to be spoken, the translator as well as the stage manager *must* be able to know how. [...] A translator *must* be especially careful with entrance lines and exits.” [Emphasis in italics is mine.]

Following suit in the seventies, Gravier (1973:41-43) in his article “*La traduction des textes dramatiques*” states that

“Le traducteur *ne doit pas* oublier non plus que le texte dramatique, débité à la vitesse normale de la parole, n’est capté qu’une seule fois par le spectateur. [...] Chaque allusion *doit* être transparente, [...] *Il faut* éviter les tournures grammaticales qui tombent en désuétude (par exemple: les verbes au passé simple) et, presque partout les questions présentées sous forme d’inversion sont difficilement acceptables. La proposition énonciative



directe suivie d'un point d'interrogation qui *se traduira par* une intonation appropriée, dans la bouche du comédien, est, dans presque tous les cas, à *préférer*. De même *on proscriera, bien entendu*, toute traduction mot à mot qui déclencherait une crise de fou rire chez les spectateurs. [...] *Que le traducteur* des textes dramatiques *regarde* un peu à ce qui se passe au cinéma. Le doublage des films n'est rendu possible que par une minutieuse étude des mouvements que font les lèvres des acteurs, quand ils prononcent les répliques originales." [The translator *must not* also forget that the words of the play text when spoken at normal speed are captured only once by the audience. [...] Each allusion *must* be transparent, [...] Archaic grammatical turns *must* be avoided (for example: verbs in the preterite) and, in almost all instances inverted question forms are hardly acceptable. A direct statement followed by a question mark which *should* be pronounced by the actor using the appropriate intonation is *to be preferred* in virtually all cases. Similarly, any word-for-word translation likely to provoke the giggles in the audience *must obviously* be proscribed. [...] The drama translator *should* pay some attention to what takes place in the cinema. Dubbing of films is only possible through a very careful study of the movements of the actors' lips when they pronounce the lines of the original play.] [Emphasis in italics is mine.]

In the eighties Wellwarth (1981: 140-146) outlined a series of principles to be followed by the drama translator, categorically asserting that "*there are some guidelines that he must follow*". According to him,

"The dramatic translator [...] *must* have a sense of the rhythm of speech patterns, particularly colloquial ones, as well as the ability to recreate the tension of dramatic situations without falsifying the playwright's intention or losing dramatic credibility within the new context. [...] It is *absolutely imperative* when translating a play to

translate it aloud and to listen carefully to—even to savour—the various versions into which every conceivable line can be translated in English. Having done that, he *should* read his translation aloud to someone totally unacquainted with the play, preferably an actor. [...] What the dramatic translator *must* watch out for particularly is an excess of sibilants in a sentence, or awkward consonantal clusters that may make a line hard to pronounce rapidly and thus may cause difficulties in sound projection [...] the language *must* fall easily and familiarly on the ears of the audience.” [Emphasis in italics is mine.]

Another representative scholar of the eighties, who has clearly enunciated principles to be followed by the drama translator, is Zuber-Skerritt (1988:485-486). He too asserts that:

“A play written for a performance *must* be actable and speakable. Therefore, non-verbal and cultural aspects and staging problems *have to* be taken into consideration. [...] Entfremdung is dealienation of the foreign language by translating it into a language which the author would have used if he/she had lived in the time and place of the target language. There is *no doubt* that the latter is *preferable*, if not *mandatory*, in drama translation for the audience *must* be familiar with the language in order to understand its meaning immediately.”[Emphasis in italics is mine]

From the above review it can be said that on the face of it these principles seem feasible to be followed. However, one may wonder to what extent some of them can be successfully applied in practice by the drama translator, particularly in the case of Wallwarth’s principle which states that “*it is absolutely imperative when translating a play to translate it aloud and to listen carefully to - even to savour -- the various versions into which virtually every conceivable line can be translated*”. Furthermore, the principle that the drama translator must watch out particularly for “*an excess of*

*sibilants in a sentence or awkward consonantal clusters that may make a line hard to pronounce rapidly thereby causing difficulties in sound projection*” does not tell the drama translator what to do in cases where certain sound effects are intentionally introduced in the speech of some characters by the author of the play either to portray them, for exotic effects, to preserve local colour or for some other reasons. Besides, it can be argued that the issue of transferring sounds from one language to another could ideally be handled within the framework of principles and guidelines outlined in phonological translation wherein source language (SL) phonology is replaced by equivalent target language (TL) phonology but there are no other replacements except such grammatical or lexical changes as may result accidentally from phonological translation (cf. Catford 1965:22). For example, a plural such as in “pens” may in phonological translation come out as singular “pen” if the target language has no final consonant clusters. We know of course that par excellence phonological translation is practised deliberately by actors and mimics, particularly when they want to assume foreign or regional accents. It could therefore be said that the drama translation principles offer mainly hypothetical solutions. Most of the time they implicitly attribute a global nature to such principles and seem to apply to translations between/among all languages. When one talks of principles it implies that they should not be breached by individual drama translators. However, the reality is that there can hardly be global principles in translation between all languages. Furthermore, in actual translation practice, whether in translating between two different languages or translating the play for different audiences between the same two languages, the drama translator may use non-identical methods or strategies.

Also, the drama translation principles outlined mainly highlight and project to the forefront the aptitudes the translator should possess in order to transfer to the target text the gestic/action and oral/acoustic aspects of the source text thereby relegating to the background the equally important analytical and interpretative

aptitudes that the drama translator should possess, particularly in the case of the African drama translator. In effect, most African playwrights still use European languages to present or describe the cultural and socio-political experiences of their different countries and villages in which their inspiration and creativity are rooted. Their writings in these European languages could be said to constitute a form of translation from their mother tongues for which there is no corresponding written original but rather only an oral one. The playwrights' texts therefore often carry a double language: the European language and the playwright's mother tongue. The African playwright's special use of language resulting from and reflecting this ambivalent situation is often evident in their plays at various levels (lexical, syntactic, imagery, proverbs, dialogue, rhetorical and other stylistic devices). All this of course has an effect on the translation of the plays as the playwright's indigenous thought patterns and linguistic features in the source text would require that the translator analyses and interprets them appropriately in order to transfer them adequately to the target text.

Another observation with respect to drama translation principles highlighted above is their prescriptive nature. This is very evident from and illustrated by the abundant use of words and expressions (highlighted in italics by me in the various passages quoted above) that carry an injunctive and imperative tone and which converge to give the principles a rather heavily prescriptive tone. It is probably as a result of observation by scholars that these translation principles are rather theoretical in nature and are not often readily applicable in concrete situations that they have found it necessary to direct their investigations in another direction, that of strategies which are effectively used by the practising translator in given circumstances. The most prominent of these strategies are examined below.

As from the nineties, drama translation scholars began to examine the phenomenon of drama translation from the viewpoint of

a different paradigm, that of strategies rather than principles. Contrary to the purely theoretical and prescriptive approach that characterized drama translation principles, their approach is pragmatic and descriptive, examining patterns of translational behaviour through a comparative analysis of performed and published translations of plays of given authors. In other words, instead of prescribing what the drama translator should do, they rather identify and highlight through a contrastive analysis of playtexts what does in reality happen when drama is translated. This shift in focus probably came about as a result of the realization by scholars that drama translation principles ought to serve rather as solid guidelines to make strategic decisions for every specific context of situation.

Before proceeding to examine in detail the main drama translation strategies that have been identified and highlighted by drama translation scholars and in order to enable a better conceptualization of the notion of strategy with respect to drama translation, the following definition is hereby proposed. Drama translation strategies may be defined as actions or procedures on the part of the drama translator either to overcome the problems and obstacles in the way of the communicative process in drama through translation or to ensure that the translation fulfils some specific objectives or functions. Drama translation strategies can therefore be said to be goal-oriented lines of action which operate towards solving a local or global problem or achieving a goal. Obviously, the strategies are carried out within the framework of some specified principles although they do not necessarily have to observe all these principles in their operation.

As pointed out by Aaltonen (2000:4), the study of strategies employed in drama translation shows that while some texts follow their sources carefully and translate them in their entirety, others involve degrees of divergence from them through omissions and additions. In this regard, in research carried out involving a

macrostructural analysis of about 100 target and source text pairs of plays Merino (2000:357-365), for instance, has come up with a useful classification of the texts studied into '*page*' and '*stage*' translations and has been able to determine the main translation strategies used by the translators. She also discovered that these strategies correlate directly with her dual classification of the texts studied into '*page*' and '*stage*' translations. For the stage translations the strategies range from deletion, reduction, merging, omission, adaptation, to other manipulations to conform to specific acting fashions. It is worth noting, however, that these strategies identified by Merino are also used in page translations. In page translations the main strategy she identified is a very close (though not literal) translation of the original, such that the target text when compared with its original every utterance/turn of the original has its counterpart in the translation, and this parallelism is found within each utterance/turn at lower syntactic levels. Page translations favour the source culture and try to get the reader closer to the source author and play. Just as in the case of the stage translations above, it is equally worth noting that the strategies for page translations identified and highlighted by Merino (2000) are also used in stage translations. In this regard, it has been clearly demonstrated by scholars how prominent Cameroonian playwright Oyono Mbia's target texts are on the whole very close translations of the originals, heavily favouring the source culture, with the aim of getting the target readers closer to the source author and plays. Despite this, it has also been established beyond doubt that Oyono Mbia's target texts serve both as '*page*' and '*stage*' translations in the receiving Cameroonian Anglophone culture. Other scholars have also highlighted some or all of the above strategies identified by Merino (2000) and Aaltonen (2000:4) (cf. Moravkova 1993, Upton 2000, Espasa 2000, Kruger 2000).

According to drama translation scholars, these strategies reflect two main opposing trends: foreignization (characteristic of '*page*' translations) and domestication (characteristic of '*stage*'

translations). In her research on the manipulation of otherness in translated drama, Aaltonen (1993:27) asserts that “*in translation, foreign drama is transplanted into a new environment, and the receiving theatrical system sets the terms on which this is done. A play script must communicate and be intelligible at some level, even if it should deviate from existing norms and conventions*”.

Similarly, Ladouceur (1995:31) in her study aimed at evolving a descriptive analysis model for the translation of dramatic texts states that:

“Cette étude descriptive de la traduction n'a donc plus pour objet de déterminer une façon idéale de traduire, mais de voir plutôt comment on traduit, à quelles modalités translatives est soumis le texte afin de pouvoir fonctionner dans la langue et la littérature d'accueil comme équivalence d'un texte d'une autre langue, appartenant à une autre littérature. De ce point de vue, toute analyse de la traduction doit nécessairement se rapporter à la fonction assignée à l'oeuvre traduite dans son contexte adoptif. [The objective of this descriptive translation study is no longer to determine an ideal way of translating but rather to see how translation is actually done and to what translation methods the text is subjected in order for it to function in the receiving language and literature as an equivalent of the text in another language and literature. From this point of view, any analysis of the translation must necessarily take into account the function assigned to the translated work in its new context.”]

For her part, Moravkova (1993:35) in a study of the specific problems of drama translation states that, “*chaque oeuvre dramatique se situe par l'intermédiaire de sa traduction, à l'aide du médiateur - le traducteur - dans un contexte culturel nouveau*” [with the help of the translator, acting as mediator, each translated play is placed in a new cultural context]. However, contrary to the above target culture-oriented assertions, in the translation of African drama

for an African readership/audience there is a clear indication of the fact that the translated drama is not uprooted and placed in an entirely new cultural context but rather in a more or less “*same*” cultural context. In effect, the primary target consumers of the translations are most often African. It can thus be posited that rather than being target-text oriented, translated African drama, and indeed African literature in general, is essentially source-text oriented. Other proponents of the target text/target culture and reception-oriented approach in drama translation include Brisset (1990), Déprats (1990), Bassnett (1991), Lefevre (1992) and Laliberté (1995).

The decision either to “*uproot*” the play from its original cultural context or to leave it “*untouched*” definitely clearly tells on the compatibility and integration of the play in the receiving culture. Consequently, it can be asserted without fear of contradiction that the compatibility and integration of translated plays in the receiving culture are at the heart of considerations with regard to the drama translation principles and strategies outlined.

Drama translation practitioners as well as scholars have all along been preoccupied with the fate of the translated drama text in the receiving culture, in other words, by its compatibility and integration in the receiving culture. This is clearly evident in the various manipulations to which the translated text is subjected as testified by the abundant terminology characterizing such manipulation: ‘*adaptation*’, ‘*acculturation*’, ‘*rewriting*’, ‘*version*’, ‘*transplanting*’, ‘*naturalizing*’, ‘*neutralizing*’, ‘*recreation*’, ‘*transposition*’, ‘*re-appropriation*’, ‘*assimilation*’, ‘*domestication*’ etc.

Scholars (cf. Aaltonen 2000:53-54) think that considerations of the compatibility and integration of translated drama in the receiving culture play a crucial role in the choice of the text to be translated and the translation strategies used. Concerning the choice



of texts, they state that foreign plays are selected on the basis of some discursive structures which either needs to be already in line with those in the target society or can be made compatible with them. For instance, foreign plays which represent either empiricist or emotional reality familiar to the target culture are admitted into its theatrical system more easily than those that are not compatible with its way of looking at the world. Both the choice of texts and the adjustments are carried out in the interests of the integration of the foreign play into the aesthetics of the receiving theatre as well as the social discourse of the target society.

With regard to the translation strategies used, Bassnett (1998:93) cites Romy Heylen who has suggested that in drama translation there is a sliding scale of acculturation that runs from one extreme, where no attempt is made to acculturate the source text that may result in the text being perceived as exotic or bizarre, through a middle stage of negotiation and compromise, and finally to the opposite pole of complete acculturation. Brisset (1990:5) however views the situation differently and asserts that drama texts, perhaps more than any other genre are adjusted to their reception and the adjustment is always socially and culturally conditioned. According to her, *“drama as an art form is social and based on communal experience. It addresses a group of people in a particular place at a particular time. It grows directly out of a society, its collective imagination and symbolic representations, and its system of ideas and values.”* Also taking a contrary stand to Heylen, Aaltonen (1993:27) on her part considers that in translation, foreign drama is transplanted into a new environment and the receiving theatrical system sets the terms on which this is done. She argues that the translated play must communicate and be intelligible at some level, even if it should deviate from the existing norms and conventions. For her therefore, *“neutralization or naturalization makes the foreign more manageable and homely; it makes it possible for the audience to comprehend what is happening on the stage; it removes the threat”*. Several years later, she reasserts that *“acculturation is*

*inevitable in the translation of a playtext and certainly if that written text is seen as one element in the total process that makes up theatre, then it would follow that some degree of acculturation cannot be avoided and is perhaps more visible than with other types of texts”* (Aaltonen 1997; and 2000:55). She further states that in order to make foreign texts compatible with other texts in the target system as well as with the reality of the target society, translation can make use of either acculturation or naturalization in an effort to disguise what is perceived as an obstacle to integration. Acculturation is understood to mean “*the process which is employed to tone down the Foreign by appropriating the unfamiliar ‘reality’, and making the integration possible by blurring the borderline between the familiar and the unfamiliar”* (Aaltonen 2000:55). In her opinion, the drama translator, like any writer of plays, uses a suitable strategy to bring the discourse of the source text in line with that of the receiving theatrical system and the entire target society and thus guarantees its acceptance and integration.

It may be argued that scholars who are preoccupied with the fate of the translated drama text in the receiving culture solely from the point of view of its acculturation and integration in that culture are rather restrictive in their approach and therefore fail to take into consideration other instances of drama translated and performed for reasons that could be referred to as exotic to simply entertain and inform the target audience about a foreign culture without any attempt to integrate such drama in the receiving culture. Such is the case of Oyono Mbia’s plays mentioned above which were translated in Britain, staged in Britain before a British audience and published by Methuen, a British publishing house whose prime objective is to extend the range of plays in print by publishing work which is not yet known but which has already earned a place in the repertoire of the modern theatre (cf. Oyono Mbia 1968). Oyono Mbia’s translated plays have been integrated in the Cameroon Anglophone culture, literature and school syllabuses and not those Britain or the United Kingdom. While Oyono Mbia’s original plays are rooted in his

native Cameroonian Bulu tribe and while Cameroon is a bilingual country made up of Francophones and Anglophones, his original plays and their translations are nonetheless rooted in the same Cameroonian culture. Oyono Mbia can thus be broadly described as translating within a mono-cultural background.

There is also the case of the abundant pre- and post-independence literature (drama and other genres alike) by Cameroonian and other African writers which, even though targeting the European colonial intruders, is integrated and is rooted in Cameroonian and African culture. Both original and translated versions of this literature are normally referred to as Cameroonian literature or African literature. This rather militant literature often attacks the colonial regime and satirizes through the eyes of the Cameroonian or African the European intrusion, invasion and interference with the Cameroonian or African traditional society and its customs. Obviously the best way for anyone to get a message successfully across to another is to first capture his attention and interest in depicting the subject matter. And since it is with the colonialist readership/audience in view that these writers write, naturally therefore, the best means to capture the interest of their readers/audience is to depict the foreign Cameroonian/African society with its exotic culture. Their curious target readers/audience, after having enjoyed reading about or watching on stage the way of life of another society different from theirs, and despite their cultural presuppositions, consciously or unconsciously proceed to a second phase by analyzing in what ways actually that society is different from their own. During this probing stage they come face to face with certain realities, that is, the outside/external and adverse factors affecting that society. And again this may naturally lead them into a third phase, that of self questioning and introspection, i.e. would they like their own culture to be interfered with or even completely destroyed? And of course the ultimate question: How would I react if I were in such a situation? The answers to these questions may be varied from reader to reader or from audience to audience but

chances are that feelings of sympathy (and of remorse as the case may be) would converge towards the affected society and galvanize a change of attitude or policy on the part of the intruder.

Also, when viewed from another perspective, Cameroonian literature in particular and African literature in general is generally considered less developed than Western literatures that have a very long and established oral and written tradition and until recently have continued to serve as creative models for the younger literatures of the African continent.

In the African pre- and post-independence context it seems very unlikely, therefore, that a play written in French with anti-colonial motives and targeting a French audience in France would be translated for an English audience in Britain with the objective of acculturating or naturalizing it in order to integrate it in the English literature and culture.

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# Translating the ‘translated’: Women’s Poetry in Translation

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Anamika

## Abstract

*With her project of translating Hindi women poets into English Arlene Zide, a Fullbright scholar and a poet of eminence, she met a couple of us. This article is rooted in a new shade of sisterhood that we both experienced in our exploration of poems. Working with her one realized that a white woman’s burden is starkly different from a white man’s burden because the motto here is not to dictate terms but to enter into a meaningful dialogue, decode culture and unravel different layers of self-imposed and super-imposed censorships which women suffer the world over primarily because of their good girl syndrome, a performance complex and a hidden urge to excel in all relationships, forgive as much as they can, bear it all with grace and dignity. The sum and substance of all this is to resist washing dirty linen in public. Traveling with texts, we realized that in feminist poetry language equals home. It is home as surely as a roof over one’s head is home, the place where our bodies and minds collide, where our groundedness in place and time and our capacity for fantasy and invention must come to terms.*

All women live in camps. There is a camp in every house on the earth which can be bombed down at the slightest pretext. All women live on platforms from where they can be hounded out any day like unlicensed coolies. All such people who live on the fringes and can be bogged down or hounded out at the slightest pretext, all



who have to '*adapt*' themselves and adjust according to the needs and demands of the Big Bosses, the Great Originals can be called '*translated beings*,' and it is not in Rushdie's<sup>1</sup> sense of the term that one is using the word here. Being a second rate citizen in America is one thing and suffering a second rate citizenship in one's own land, among one's own people is another

Lohe ka swad lohar se mat poocho  
 us ghore se poocho jiske munh mein lagam hai! <sup>2</sup>  
 Translated hone ka matlab Rushdi se mat poocho  
 us aurat, us musalman, us bhangin se poocho jo apne ghar mein  
 beghar hai.

To give you the feel of this "translation" one would begin one's paper with the English rendering of one's Hindi poem "*Anuwad*" and before one does that one would also like to clarify that in the '*arena*' of the '*translated beings*' lie not only the women, the poor and the dispossessed, the dalit, the minorities, the blacks but also the old, the sick, the cripples, the small towners, villagers, translators and all the marginalized sections of this merde'-merde' world of public and private breakdowns. The poem, which contains the abstract of the point I am making, runs as follows:

#### Translation

People are going away  
 Each one from the other  
 People are going away  
 And the space around me is expanding.  
 I translate this 'space'

Not as 'breathing space'  
 But 'outer space'  
 Because I sent my flying saucers out there.  
 Thank you, time  
 My watch has stopped  
 Thank you, window

Just behind the grille a sparrow  
 Is ready to lay her eggs.  
 Whoever, wherever, thanks to all of you  
 This is the time you're all within me  
 I, a little bit in each of you.  
 The harmonium of my empty house  
 Whines its moaning silence  
 This empty time is  
 Filled with work  
 This is the time when I must translate  
 Dirty linen into the dialect of water  
 Then a little while, stand still and think  
 If a sinkful of soapy water  
 Can be translated  
 Into the melody of a raga  
 Frankly, this whole house  
 I'd like to translate  
 Into some other language.  
 But where will I find this language  
 Except in the babblings of my children.  
 By the time I finish, it's evening  
 I'll translate this evening into drawing the curtains  
 The splinters of last light  
 Will fill up all the space  
 I'll translate those splinters  
 Not into outer space  
 But into my breathing space.

[Translation from Hindi by Arlene Zide and the poet Anamika]

### **Translational and Transnational: Beyond Boundaries**

Translation is a revelation, a friendship between poets and also an act of criticism. The translator begins with the advantage of selecting the poem that leads itself to her translation. This editorial choice is formidable.

In the light of the common woman's angst hinted at in the poem aforementioned, one would wish to share an experience or two

of translating Hindi women's poetry into English. But before that one would like to lay down the basic paradigms one has tried to follow:

- Because women face many layers of cultural censorship, deconstructing their text isn't that easy. The act of unveiling the text tries the patience of real love.
- The translation of a poet, unlike that of a scientist, cannot be a word by word rendering of the text. It's an art of *parakaya-pravesh* 'transmigration' and not the surgical procedure of organ transplantation. It is an x-ray and not a xerox.
- Because it's a 'sakhee' talking to another 'sakhee' – translation here is not only a translingual but also a transformational activity. The target here is to reach the core.
- As a feminist translator one would hate to use the word 'domesticate' because there is some violence implicit in it. Even if the target language is one's own, one would not cherish the wish of domesticating the source language like a 'cow'. Translating from English into Hindi is fun. It's like playing hop-skotch with an old friend, an old sakhee. Translating from Hindi into English is also fun but that fun is akin more to the pleasures of playing a cross word puzzle which teases, irritates, challenges and at last boils down to a prestige issue. Still, one resists domestication.

At best one could make it feel at home the way one would make sisters from the other side of the world feel at home if someday they visit our 'angan', 'panchayat', 'chaupal', 'dehri', 'chaubara', 'zenana' or any of these WDC offices in India. We would offer them all that we cook but if it doesn't go with their system, we won't force it down their throat. This is no hospitality: forcing things down the throat, and this is what we have suffered down the ages, so resist we must unless left with no choice.

As feminist translators we also resist a male translator's positivist maneuvering of 'civilizing' the *text*. Ramanujam is a poet-translator of eminence, but when he sits down to translate 'Channa Mallikarjuna' figuring in Akka Mahadevi, the 12th century Kannada Vachana poetess's signature line as '*a white jasmine like Shiva*', one sits wondering why, under which colonial hang up should '*channa*' or '*red*' jasmine be transformed into the 'white' of the colonial master. '*Channa*' is a word of Dravidian origin, 'Mallika' in Sanskrit stands for the pliable feminine principle as does '*Arjun*' for the masculine. A delicate balance of the two in the '*Ardhanareeshwar*' is very well taken care of by '*Mallikarjuna*'. There was no need at all of translating the proper noun for quick consumption in the West. Why should the colonial master deny the subject his name too?

Another very important case in point is H.V.Shivprakash's gender-neutral rendering Akka Mahadevi's tenth verse where she visualizes '*maya*' as '*man*'. All the saint poets, Kabir included, have associated '*maya*' with women: '*Maya Mahathagini main jani*' but Akka gives '*Maya*' a full fledged moustache. As Shiv Prakash himself admitted, his rendering somehow became '*gender-blind*'. On my insistence he read it aloud and I noted it down thus:

“Ugh, this empty show of the world!  
 First of all comes the masked child  
 Saying, “O Daddy, O Papa”.  
 In this middle comes one  
 Moustached mask  
 As if daubed with ghee  
 At the end comes  
 The mask of old-old age  
 The moment your eyesight ceases  
 The play of the world ends  
 O Channamallikarjuna!”<sup>3</sup>

Before I could muse on the point of how important it is for a woman to translate woman or play her midwife, he revised the text, "*O no, as I read it today, it struck me that I could easily retain the 'gendered' flavour of Akka by converting the masked 'child' into a 'masked male child' and 'the mask of the old-old age' into that of the 'old-old man!'*" "*This is called sensitization*", both of us laughed. Only a Gayatri Spivak would know how a '*wet nurse*' can be no substitute for '*a breast giver*'! Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

Responding to Spivak's charge of Western feminist exploitation of the third world women's text,<sup>4</sup> and responding also to Bulmer Josephine's suggestion of evoking the various silences of the hitherto untranslated feminist poems in different linguistic regions of the world,<sup>5</sup> I and Arlene decided to deconstruct some of Hindi women poets by way of translating their lesser known texts.

### **Post-Colonial Feminist Translation: 'Only Connect'**

This we all understand viz. that feminist theory is eclectic: post-colonial in the hunt of the unofficial, off-the-record primary sources, Marxist in the perception of a non-sectarian, non-hierarchical development model and post-structuralist in its notions of language and identity or of its emphasis on refiguring the powerful and sexually expressive relation between psyche and language.

As a bourgeois academic at one point we are also addressed by the liberal humanist version of empowering "*inner resources*" feminism which points to a substantial human essence transcending all forms of socio-economic power play, and then suddenly as sensitive women inhabiting complex multilayered realities, we feel that empowering the inner resources is not enough. Ours is basically a transformative politics with the potential to make change towards a more equitable society. If it may be called an ideology in the

established sense of the term, it is an ideology of support for those who are deprived and exploited by the institutionalized structure and hierarchy on the one hand and its constant battle against division and isolationism on the other.

Poems can best be treated as intellectual, emotional routes by which one comes to Feminism. Poems of the early twentieth century can be approached under the rubric of the daily maintenance politics and those of the late twentieth century under rubric of surgical operation kind! In either case they are poems dialing relational reality, relating the painful moments in personal lives to more general historical or cultural complexities in the brilliant metaphysical flash of lightning and rain!

### **Women's Poetry in Our Part of the World**

Poets are always suspected and a woman poet of the third world more than others. Her subjects may seem superficially women's subjects, yet the point is not the subject but the way she questions the subject. Because all women live in tents and because they are all essentially dispossessed, the figure of the immigrant or refugee becomes an insistent subject for women's poetry, and this is what gives all their writings a political aura. Like any other kind of political poetry, it prompts a deep questioning of identity and affiliation and goes out to affirm that the hand that rocks the cradle can also rock the system. Contemporary women's poetry at least negotiates and questions both meanings of this pun rather than choosing a single way of '*rocking*' the world.

Good adapters as they essentially are, women poets easily adopt multiple identities in order to escape from a single national identity, become stateless, even alien, in order to record a history of oppression. Interestingly this is not a narcissistic '*history*' but an analysis of forgotten or invisible social exclusion where a thing as objective as history also has been subjectified through the techniques

of telescoping which merges the micro with the macro and the cosmic with the commonplace.

Four hundred years after Bharat Muni, performance still attract rapt audiences, they understand. We live in times difficult for creative verbal arts but great for performing arts. So, most of these make the most of sound bytes and visual images drawn from everyday life and in a way they make us hear through eyes and see through ears. As singers both of lullabies and of *bhairavies*, most of them understand that speech rhythms are the unconscious engines of poetry, the pulse or muscle that govern it and also that they have their physical sources in commonplace activities like walking, breathing and heart beat. Though rhythm is more kinaesthetic than aesthetic, it is felt and shared like an emotion, and the energy that drives poetry is the beat, as in the drumbeat (heartbeat) of primitive ritual and dance! In a literate cosmopolitan society with a proliferation of media, the available myths and discourses are much more various and intermeshed than of an oral group, and our poetry is formed of a neutrally controlled range of discourses which the individual writer of poetry appropriates or subverts or enters. This process is perhaps more usually and usefully talked about either as intertextuality or, more politically, as in colonial criticism, as 'writing back' to a dominant form.

All poetry rewrites other texts and the surge of women's poetry this century specifically rewrites myths and folk tales.

Remember Ali Baba. 'Open sesame', said he and the cave opened up, unfolding all his treasures to him. The key mantra to approach the third world's women's poetry is what is called '*biomythography*'. It's a coinage trying to charter the hitherto unexplored twilight zone, the '*no man's land*' falling outside the fringes of a regimented biography, history and mythology where memory plays the role of the prime mover.

This memory approaches you with open arms and helps you activate and revive your own memory. This activation is important. The big rock on the mouth of the cave won't open up unless this memory is revived. Unless this memory is revived, we simply can't enter the privilege to dream and to create counterlives.

Once rekindled it metaphorises all personal losses into the collective losses of language, culture, identity and home. Globalization, with its gilli-gilli-appa effects, (the effect akin to that of Harry Potter's magic world) has turned practically the whole of the 'other' world into a world of nomads. Culturally threatened that all of us are, language itself now equals home, it is a home, as surely as a roof over one's head is a home, the place where our bodies and minds collide, where our groundedness in place and time and our capacity for fantasy and invention must come to terms. Women's poetry is especially sensitive to this. Each and every turn of the phrase, each and every departure in the feminist mould is meaningful. The push and joy of the language with which third world women's poetry combats the '*Poor Liza Complex*' of the yesteryears is remarkable indeed. It successfully refutes even the hierarchy of sense and nonsense, high and low by the cheerful juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

All forceful women poets give birth to words flowing in accord with the contractual rhythms of labour. This combats the brutally impersonal authority effects of the magisterial father tongue. Father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected or heard.

Because the father-tongue is lectures, only lectures, woman's language has got to be conversation, a word, the root of which means turning together, moving in loops and curves like sparrows glissading, bursting with geothermal energies to establish a full fledged relationship and bursting also with anger, an old anger,



which is, in fact the best anger, the meanest, the truest, the most intense:

“Every baby born  
Involved, unwanted is a bill that will come due in twenty  
years with interest.  
I will choose what enters me, what becomes flesh of my  
flesh... I am not your corn field, nor your uranium mine,  
not your calf for fattening, not your cow for milking. You  
may not use me as your factory.” (Right to Life: Margie  
Pierce)

Old anger of this kind is pure because it has been dislocated from its source for so long and has had the chance to ferment. The third world women's poem is fuelled by this very anger. It is a motivator, an explainer, a justifier. Political action and great languages have always been motivated by this unconscious anger of people misused, imprisoned, exploited, crumpled, drilled and silenced, people like Meera and Mahadevi and all the poets of the early years who couldn't speak without masks, who told the truth/ but told it slant,' who had to operate behind the purdas of bhakti, myths parables, riddles and puns to fight that good girl syndrome which glamorizes feminine mystique and the '*aesthetics of silence*' beyond limits and makes one believe that only the second rate and the underclass (prostitutes, witches and slave girls) breach the gap between the private and the public.

As students of post structuralism we also understand that culture, history, family and self are inextricably layered like Suleman's documents, or inseparably folded into each other. So, the Berlin wall between the personal and the political, the cosmic and the common place, the rural and the urban, the East and the West, the '*ghore*' and the '*bahire*', the sacred and the profane, the body and the soul, the subjective and the objective must be pulled down and the tears in the heart of things must be telescoped in the minutest details, the melancholy and angst of life captured through pulsating

word-pictures which surface the idea with the magic not of the extraordinary but the most ordinary of things and nothings of life, things and nothings like birth, copulation and death!

Love, death, home, mothering, sisterhood and the angst of being are six grey areas staging a Copernical shift after the advent of feminist poetry. Like telescopes that bring distant things closer, feminist poetry usually opens with the large historical fact of collective expulsion and exile, alienation and holocaust and then they narrow down to the most ultimate of chit chats.

### **Examples with a Note of Apology:**

Propriety demands that for illustration I refer to poems other than mine. I have translated many from English into Hindi and vice-versa but my handicap is that I have not yet received the permission to publish them formally. Most of them are lying either with the co-translators or with the original writers. In the absence of the formal permission slip, I am doomed to refer to the experience of translating my own poems with Arlene Zide, a Jewish American scholar and linguist who was here last year on her Full-bright project of translating the Hindi women poets.

### **Translating the ‘Other’ in Me**

There is an ‘other’ in the inner folds of my own being. She is a fence sitter. She sits aloof on the fence of her Eden, eating her forbidden apples and sour guavas, all very delightfully. She doesn’t listen to me. And she is sovereign: difficult to tame and translate: “*Maya Mahadhagini Mai Jami*”. Only a yogi like Tagore can dare tackle and translate this shatroopa Maya, this ‘other’ hiding behind the ‘*ghoonghat*’ of one’s own being. Tagore know his Kabeer well and understood the reverberations of ‘*Ghoonghat ke pat khol re took peeva milenge.*’ My Peeva, the essential is lost for ever, I suppose, but my quest for the ‘*Peeva*’ manifest in interpersonal relationships

is alive still. This explains why I have decided to concentrate basically on my experience of translating the 'other' in me, of snapping into that 'other' with the click of a 'chut' as in 'chutputia'. This is one poem where I tackled the other both in me and in 'others' with some success. Basically it was Arlene's idea of retention that worked, and here you can judge for yourself how actually it worked:

My brother explained this to me:  
 Stars  
 Are the snap-buttons sewn on the jacket of night.  
 In my part of the world, snaps  
 Were called *chutputia*  
 Because with the click of a 'chut' one snapped into the other  
 They only worked when all four eyelets on both sides matched up.  
 They had no faith in the high and the low  
 Advocates of equality  
 Neither hooking nor getting hooked up  
 Came together without a fuss  
 In my part of the world  
 Snaps were called 'chutputia'  
 But even the people from my part of the world  
 Behave like snaps.  
 No chutputia here in this alien city  
 Like sweet gourd, satputia jhigune  
 You just can't find them, can't find them anywhere.  
 Chutputia people and chutputia snaps  
 On sari blouses,  
 Tailors in the city sew on hooks, not snaps  
 And there's always a gap  
 Between the hook and the snare of the eyes.  
 No matter how hard you try  
 There'll be no click of 'chut' and no 'put'.  
 Mera bhai mujhko samjhakar kehtha tha – 'Janti hai, Poonam  
 Tare' hain chutputia button,  
 Rat ke angherkhe main take hue!  
 Meri taraf press-button ko

Chutputia button kaha jata tha  
 Kyonki 'chut' se kewal ek bar 'put' baj kar  
 Ek doosre mein sama jate the Ve!  
 Ve tabhi tak hote the kam ke  
 Jab tak unka sathi  
 Charon khoonton se barabar  
 Unke bilkul samne rahe takan hua.  
 Oonch-neeche ke darshan mein unka  
 Koi vishwas nahin tha!  
 Barabari kevak kayal the!  
 Phanste the na phansate the  
 Chupchap sat jate the  
 Meri taraf press-button ko  
 Chutputia button kaha jata tha  
 Lekin meri taraf ke log khud bhi the  
 Chutputia button ki tarah  
 'Chut' se 'put' bajkar sat jane wale  
 Is shahar mein lekin chutputia  
 Nazar hi nahin aate  
 Satputiajhinguni ke tarah yahan ek sire se ghayab hain  
 Chutputia jan aur button  
 Blowse mein bhi darzi dete hain tak yahan  
 Hook hi hook,  
 Har hook ke age virajmaan hota  
 Hai phanda!  
 Phande mein phanse hue aapas mein kitna satenge  
 Kitna bhi keejiye jatan  
 'Chut' se 'put' nahin hi bajenge."

Many an example could be cited of language merging into one another like two sister rivers of different origins. There is a poem in Hindi which reads:

Main ek darwaja thee  
 Mujhe jitna peeta gaya  
 Main utna khulti gayi  
 Andar aye ane wale to dekha  
 Chal raha hai ek vrihat chakra

Chakki rukti hai to charcha chalta hai  
 Charkha rukta hai to chalti hai kaichi-sui  
 Gharaj yah ki chalta hi rahta hai anwarat kuch-kuch  
 Aur ant mein sab par jati hai jharoo  
 Tare buharti hui buharti hui pahar, wrikcha patthar  
 Sristi ke sab toote bikhre katre jo  
 Ek tokri mein jama karti jati hai  
 Man ki ducchatti par.

I was supposed to translate this and I got stuck at '*peeta gaya*'. The words '*knocked*' and '*knocked down*' could not be merged together in English and Ritu Menon helped me out by handing over the plain and simple '*beat me*', and now the lines read,

"I was a door/ the harder they beat me/ the wider I opened."

My *vrihat chakra* she insightfully translated as '*a cosmic whirligig*'. For a moment I wondered if cosmic was essential, but a deeper thought made us realize that without this the line would feel lost like a babe in the woods. '*Vrihatchakra*' has an advantage over it because of the different nuances it bears:

"Chakrawat pariwartani dukhani cha sukhan I cha."

Finally it got translated thus:

I was a door  
 The more they banged on me  
 The more I opened up  
 Those who could come in, could see for themselves  
 The endless cycle  
 This whirling grindstone  
 To the spinning wheel to the needle  
 Something or other all day long, not stop  
 And the a broom  
 To sweep it all up  
 The stards, swept up

Mountains, trees, and rocks swept up  
 All the shards and wreckage dumped in an empty basket,  
 Tossed in the attic of the mind.

(Finally done by Arlene and Ritu)

The third poem that Arlene helped me translate is ‘*striiyaan*’(‘women’)! Here the stumbling blocks were ‘*chanajorgaram*’ and ‘*anhad*’: ‘*Chanajorgaram*’ was retained for its *desi* (=local) flavour. When we get invited to important places, our cards read ‘*nontransferable*’. Some words too bear the stamp of ‘*nontransferable*’. And the translator’s visa office has to be strict about retention. ‘*Anhad*’ clicked as ‘*soundless void*’ but one could do with ‘*Anhad*’ too, and at this point even the footnoting of culture would have been fine. Why is everything fair in love and war? Perhaps because a skilful warrior lover is never faithful to one set of strategies: he has a wide range to choose from: ‘*Sam-dam-dand-bhed*’ (adapt, threaten, punish, break off). And a translator should have the freedom to do the same – atleast the feminist translator, who is also a friend and a sister. She understands the deeper nuances of the poem which only a fellow sufferer can. In this very sense a feminist translator is also a fellow creator who plays into an ‘*anhad*’ or nothingness. This also I have noticed especially during my translation of other women poets: the major ones. Untranslatable lines are natural meadows of translation and yield the best with wild herbs. What has never been done in the adopted language sometimes does expand its thematic and formal boundaries. And it is through these expansions that the translator –artists recognize, recreate and reveal the work of the other artist. Even when famous at home, a translated work comes into the Alien City almost like an orphan with no past to its readers, and it is through these daring retentions, expansions and footnoting that the translator – artist makes poor Dick Wittingtons great Lord Mayors of London.

## WOMEN

We were read  
Like the torn pages of children's notebooks  
Made into cones to hold warm chanajor garam  
We were looked at  
The way grumpily you squint at your wristwatch  
After the alarm goes off in the morning  
We were listened to  
Distractedly  
The way film songs assail your ears  
Spilling from cheap cassettes on a crowded bus  
They sensed as  
The way you sense the sufferings of a distant relative  
One day we said  
We're human too.  
Read us carefully  
One litter at a time  
The way after your BA, you'd read a job ad.  
Look at us  
The way, shivering,  
You'd gaze at the flames of a distant fire  
Listen to us  
As you would the unstruck music of the void  
And understand the way you'd understand a newly-learned  
language.  
The moment they heard this  
From an invisible branch suspended in limbo  
Like a swam of gnats  
Wild rumors went screeching  
"Women without character  
Wild vines draining the sap  
From their hosts  
Well-fed, bored with affluence  
These women  
Pointlessly on edge  
Indulging in the luxury of writing  
These stories and poems –

Not even their own”  
 They said, amused.  
 The rest of the stories dismissed with a wink  
 Hey, Blessed Fathers  
 You blessed men  
 Spare us  
 Spare us  
 This sort  
 Of attention.

(Translated from Hindi by Arlene and Anamika)

The original reads thus:

Parha gaya humko  
 Jaise parha jata hai kaagaz  
 Baccho ki phati copiyon ka  
 Chanazorgharam ke lifafe banana ke pehle.  
 Dekha gaya humko  
 Jaise ki kuft ho uneende  
 Dekhi jati hai kalaighari  
 Alassubah alarm bajne ke bad.  
 Suna gaya humko yonhi udte man se  
 Jaise sune jaten hai filmi gane  
 Saste cassetton par  
 Thasthassa dhunsi hui bus mein.  
 Bhoga gaya humko bahut door ke rishtedaron  
 Ke dukh ki tarah  
 Ek din hamne kaha  
 Hambhi insa hain -  
 Hamen kayade se parho ek-ek akshar  
 Jaise parha hoga BA ke bad  
 Naukri ka pahlavigyapan!  
 Dekho to aise  
 Jaise ke thithurte hue dekhi jati hai  
 Bahut door jalti hui aag!  
 Suno hamen anhad ki tarah  
 Aur sumjho jaise samjhi jati hai  
 Nai-nai seekhi hui bhasha!



Itna sunana tha ki adhar mein latukti hui  
 Ek adrishya tahni se  
 Tiddiyan udi aur apwhahen  
 Cheekhi hui chi-chi  
 'Dushcharitra mahilayen,  
 Dushcharitra mahilayen –  
 Kinhi sarparaston kiedum par phalli-phuli  
 Agardhatta jungali latayen!  
 Khati-peedi, such se oobi  
 Aur bekar bechchain  
 Awara mahilaon ka hi shagal hain  
 Ye kahaniyan aur kavitayen!  
 Phir ye inhone thode hi likkhi hain!  
 (Kankhiyan, ishare, phir kanakhi)  
 Baki kahani bus kanakhi hai –  
 Hey Parampitao, Parampurushon –  
 Bakhsho – bakhsho – ab hamen bakhsho!  
 Conclusion : Is there Any?

I am a minor translator but I have sincerely tried to add a brick or two in the vast translational transnational project of building bridges across languages. I and Arlene have jointly translated Nagarjun, Trilochan, Shamsher, Kedarnath Agrawal, Kedarnath Singh, fellow women poets and many 'others'. And we have translated each other too.

This 'each other' factor must have been a great leveler because at the end of our intense interactive sessions I realized afresh that a white woman's burden is starkly different from a white man's burden because the motto here is not to dictate terms but to enter into a meaningful dialogue, decode culture and unravel different layers of self-imposed and super-imposed censorships which all women suffer the world over primarily because of their good girl syndrome, a performance complex, a hidden urge to excel in all relationships, forgive as much as they can, bear it all with grace and dignity and resist washing dirty linen in public.

Full of anecdotes and riddles, strange stories, witty folklores most of our women poets are profusely sad and unbelievably vibrant at the same time. They sing unending songs, complete today's thought tomorrow and when they speak-strange voices arise from the depths of their bodies and the recesses of their lungs like water gurgling beneath the ground.

Though there is no room in their lives to go far – they spread their arms – one in the sun, the other in the mist and thus we learn from them the art to fill the emptiness of life between non-sensical, sensational events with innumerable little deeds of kindness, well meaning smiles and thoughtful gestures.

We have a unique composite culture, a unique moral geography of their own where gods and ghosts, animals and birds, the flora and the fauna, even the tiniest insets live together in strange amity-under the same rooms as if. Women talk even to trees and rivers, gods and ghosts. They worship them and curse them, fight with them and suffer with them all oppressions and calamities. Despite all caste and class divides, supernatural and human elements here emerge as one family, constantly operating under acute pressures of a lively love hate relationship.

This gives them a unique force of language which a feminist translator must exploit to the full because this would also mean exploring women's relation to oneself, to her psychic and bodily rhythms and the hitherto ignored grey areas of women's fantasy. All forceful women give birth to words flowing in accord with the contractual rhythm of labour. Translating the original feels like translating the Original Sin and one can't help being ticklish and devilish like Mother Eve who sits straight in all creative people, eating her forbidden apple tastefully. Call us what you will but we can't deny Eve the credit of being the first entrepreneur of the world. We are the translators of Eve's kind of digressive, tortuous but meaningful ventures. A little playful and creative at times, we are

also conscious of the fact that the free play shouldn't result in some kind of a Bakhtian '*free play*'. We are also aware of the fact that a translator's job is the tough job of dancing in chains, and the chains are those of the tender feminist bonding, not the shackles that Marx refers to in his famous ode to the workers: '*Workers of the world unite, you've nothing to lose but your chains*'. This bonding of the souls, this sakheewad, universal sisterhood is sensitive to the tortures and pains and conflicts common to all women on earth, so whenever one picks up a feminist text for translation, this urge of playing an interpreter, a '*bhashyakar*', an explainer and a justifier plays a big part in the mind.

There is a beautiful Hindi rendering of the saying "*Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches*". "*Ja ke pair na phati biwai, so ka jane peer parai,*" and parallel to this runs the famous bhajan, Gandhijee's hot favourite "*Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je peer parayee jane re.*" Now how we resolve this paradox is one challenge feminist translators face. The question is one of decoding culture and playing out the softer nuances. Women's poetry is most delicately handled by women translators also because '*khag hi jane khag ki bhasha*' ('a '*bird*' comprehends a '*bird*' better, she alone can play her best emissary'). If there are no interlinear versions possible, playing out silences, shruties, meers, and moorchanas can be handled only through difficult strokes. I have noticed that at times lexical shock renews the third language bones.

Multilingualism, bi-lingualism or even the choice of writing in two different genres is just like opening two or more windows together for proper cross-ventilation. But then that's not all. Like the naughty little girl in Saki's '*The Open Window*' our imagination plays new tricks upon all who wish to preen, intrude, inspect and issue commands.

On the whole, helping the sister writer translate her texts, the translator-artists from a different cultural region play the charismatic

role of Cuban showman who helped a woman through a difficult breech birth. The showman told her a myth whose progress, a struggle between spirits and animals within her, mimes the journey of the child down the birth canal, turning it round so that its head is in the right direction. It worked the baby was safely born and the mythic alligators, tentacled octopus and black tigers were cast away the placenta.

Translation is a second birth, and we all need a narrative that makes sense of the unspeakable physical or psychic disturbance, reconciling the conscious and the subconscious, if we are to move on. Magical is the effect of the power exerted by the symbolic structuring of experience through the narrative of translation. This narration reorders the subjective experience but it must do so by mapping that subjectivity through intelligent language games.

## Notes

1. Castells (1990), 28 “For those who feel they are marginal to the codes of western culture, translation stands as a metaphor for their ambiguous experience in the dominant culture... the sense of not being at home within the idioms of power..led many migrants like Sulman Rushdie to call themselves ‘translated beings.’”
2. Dhoomil, Sansad se sadak tak.

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# Literary and Cultural Translatability: The European Romantic Example

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Ian Fairly

## Abstract

*This essay presents an overview of Western and Central European thinking about translation in the Romantic period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In it, I seek to delineate a convergence of aesthetic and cultural theory in the Romantic preoccupation with translation. Among other things, my discussion is interested in how translation in this period engages debate about what it means to be a 'national' writer creating a 'national' literature. I offer this essay in the hope that its meditation on literary and cultural translatability and untranslatability will resonate with readers in their own quite different contexts.*

One of the central statements on translation by a British Romantic writer occurs in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Reflecting on the achievements of Wordsworth's verse, Coleridge proposes that the "*infallible test of a blameless style*" in poetry is "*its untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning*". This is at once a prescription for fault-finding and an index of immaculacy. A utopian strain sounds through Coleridge's "*infallible*" and "*blameless*", suggesting that an unfallen integrity may be remade, or critically rediscovered, in the uniqueness of poetic utterance.

Where Wordsworth's "*meditative pathos*" and "*imaginative power*" are expressed in verse which cannot be other than it is Coleridge asserts a vital congruence between the particular and the universal. Yet his formula does not preclude the translational recovery of that expressive pathos and power in words of another language. The utopian moment of "*untranslatableness*" shares a kinship with Walter Benjamin's later suggestion, in "*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*" (1923), that access to the "*pure language*" to which every fallen language aspires is "*the tremendous and only capacity of translation*". The test of "*untranslatableness*" is, after all, translation, and in Kantian terms familiar to Coleridge, its recognition appears to translate into an intuition of experience "*in itself*". "*Untranslatableness*" may in turn prove more at home in the German of *Unübersetzbarkeit* or *Unübertragbarkeit*. Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1854-; *Dictionary of the German Language*) locates both words in a distinct late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century world, citing Georg Forster and Friedrich Schleiermacher respectively. In his posthumous *Sittenlehre* (1835), the latter discovers moral community in experiential uniqueness by arguing that reason is revealed as a totality in the very "*untranslatableness*" of one individual's reason into that of any other.

Schleiermacher's lecture "*Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*" (1813) makes explicit what might be called the "*hermeneutic*" turn in Romantic accounts of translation. Raised above mere "*interpreting*", which services commercial transaction, and aligned rather with the ideals of science and art, translation (the "*art of understanding*") is installed as a high cultural project in its own right. For Schleiermacher, authentic translation brings the reader to the author, "*representing the foreign in one's native language*" as indeed foreign but without threatening "*the native well-being*" of that language. The value of this endeavor inheres, as with the *Sittenlehre*, in a totalizing vision which aims to "*transplant entire literatures*" and nurture readers who are able to produce their

own ideal composite of different versions of the same text. Where people grant flexibility to its language, this kind of translation becomes a "natural" influence on the formation and development of the nation.

In its organicist and evolutionary view of language and languages, Schleiermacher's translational programme is consistent with contemporary German scholarship in comparative grammar and philology. Their common moment is one of confident inquiry into and assertion of the German tongue as a mature cultural entity; the constitution of German national identity is here enshrined in a language (and literature) which is not yet that of a modern nation state. Hence Jacob Grimm concludes his 1854 preface to the *Wörterbuch* by urging his compatriots, regardless of the faith or empire under which they live, to "*study, hallow and maintain*" the language in which their "*strength as a people*" ("*Volkskraft*") resides. At the same time, this book of words furnishes its definitions in "*exoteric*" Latin, a lingua franca intended to open it to a circle of peoples otherwise not conversant with German. Attention to family resemblance and difference by extension opens up a new translational space in which relations of linguistic domination and subordination are potentially replaced by dialogue and respect for otherness. For Schleiermacher, non-ethnocentric translation requires both that the mother tongue has become the language of high culture (and thus of the culture as a whole) and that it continues to develop through "*many-sided contact with the foreign*". In this prospect, the German language itself becomes a translational utopia, preserving "*in the centre and heart of Europe*" the treasures of its own and of foreign art and science in a great "*historical totality*".

If Schleiermacher articulates the period's most sophisticated programme for translation, he nonetheless begs characteristic Romantic questions concerning the translatability of theory into practice. His conception of language as the realm of inter-subjective understanding and hermeneutic inquiry sits uneasily with the



translation of that realm into a particular linguistic territory; the protected "*language domain*" ("*Sprachgebiet*") which he reserves for translation into German arguably comes to announce a more imperiously assimilative middle European dominion. It may then follow that his desire to embrace commonality and difference is only sustainable insofar as the utopian end of cultural regeneration remains speculative. Yet this tension describes a dynamic within the wider Romantic practice of translation. For even as Schleiermacher's translational summa recalls Friedrich Schlegel's "*Athenäums-Fragment 116*", "*Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry*" (1798), so Schlegel's "*Universalpoesie*" foregrounds another order of translational wish-fulfilment: the synthesis of "*the poetry of art and of nature*" ("*Kunst- und Naturpoesie*"). And with the endeavour to translate between the languages of "*art*" and "*nature*" we are returned to the most celebrated "*translation*" of the Romantic period, James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760-63).

Debate about the authenticity of *Ossian* shaped its further translation either as a work of folk poetry or of more deliberate art. Thus the first Hungarian version, by János Batsányi (1788), sought a continuing role for the "*bardic*" poet while the nation's integrity was under threat, whereas Ferenc Kazinczy considered translation of the whole work (1815) as a test of his invention in his native tongue. The "*Nordic Renaissance*" which served as a model of national literary renewal across Europe was itself enshrined in Herder's two anthologies of *Volkslieder* (1778-79; *Folk-songs*), where *Übersetzung* into German was also, in effect, *Übertragung* into Herder's neologism of the "*folk-song*". The popularity of European translations of Walter Scott and Robert Burns in turn answered to a populist appetite for the romance of national identity. In the contrary direction, the Gothic novel made its English début, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), by masquerading as a translation from the French, and many early examples of the genre relied on the free adaptation of French, and later German, sources. In

all such instances cultural values and coordinates are also in translation, whether in creating a homogeneous European north (which, with Herder's 1771 essay on Shakespeare, enabled the refashioning of England's national poet as an essentially German dramatist), or in negotiating between Europe's north and south, between Europe and the orient, and so on. Perhaps the most far-reaching of these translations is, however, that between the man or woman of letters and the "*people*", an engagement which inevitably puts the question, in Schiller's terms, of the former's "*sentimental*" idea of the latter as the preserver of a more authentic, "*naive*" ideal.

In the Romantic period, translation variously informs the drive toward and conception of cultural wholeness or unity. Where the foreign is made familiar, translation may be held to overcome dichotomy and difference, yet it can also be seen as constitutive rather than resolving of the division between what is native and what is foreign. As Madame de Staël wrote in *De l'Allemagne* (1810), "to acquire another language is to acquire another world for one's mind". From a hermeneutic point of view, language is acknowledged both as the term which separates cultures and which mediates between them: all is in translation, just as, for Novalis (à propos August Schlegel's translation of Shakespeare), "*all poetry is translation*". But by the same token, translation is a process without end, its gesture toward universal understanding infinitely deferred within the historical process of which it is part. And here the period bequeaths us two quite different responses to what resists translation. The first elects openness to the unknown, and is voiced in one of Goethe's late *Maximen und Reflexionen* (1826): "*In translating, one must proceed until verging on the untranslatable, whereupon one first perceives the foreign nation and its foreign language.*" The second stresses the closure of the unknowable, and its accent falls on Romantic irony. In his novel *Godwi* (1801), Clemens Brentano stages a conversation which begins by defining the "*Romantic*" as the "*perspective*" colouring our view of any object, proceeds through debate about translating Tasso to an analogy between poetry and untranslatable

music, and concludes with the narrator stating that "*The Romantic itself is a translation.*" In the degree to which the Romantic work renders its medium of representation purely musical, it becomes an untranslatable translation. It is on this fine line between apprehension and occlusion of the ineffable that a Romantic poetics of translation continues to engage us. Wordsworth describes it most finely in Book Six of *The Prelude* (1805):

"And all the answers which the man returned  
To our inquiries, in their sense and substance  
Translated by the feelings which we had,  
Ended in this – that we had crossed the Alps."

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- (Quotations from non-English-language texts have been translated by the author. Alternative translations of most of these texts can be found excerpted in Berman or anthologised in Robinson and in Schulte.)

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# Translating Her Story: A Woman in Quest of a Language

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Meena T. Pillai

## Abstract

*Madhavikutti's Ente Katha is an autobiography of a woman who opted to write rather than die. Thus writing becomes an act of self-inscription in a language and culture that tries to silence her sexuality. Ente Katha, by valorizing the female body created a furor in Kerala society in the seventies. For the first time a woman used the Malayalam language blatantly, throwing to the winds a culture's preoccupations and values, in the process critiquing all its dominant discourses. Her potentially subversive act of invoking the semiotic in the Malayalam language and literature paved the way for writing the female body in a way radically different from male writings in terms of linguistic structure and content. But when Madhavikutti translated her story as Kamala Das's My Story in English, she must have encountered serious problems transcreating the female body written into the source language. The strategies by which the category 'Malayalee woman', her multiple subject positions in Ente Katha and the cultural contingency of her experiences of oppression, get translated into the linguistic, historical and cultural specificities of a language such as English, form the scope of this paper. It is an attempt to analyse the process of translation by which the discursively constructed 'Madhavi kutty' of*

*Ente Katha translates herself into the 'Kamala Das' of My Story.*

An autobiography is considered a genre of literature where the umbilical cord between the story and the reality, the writer and the text, the signifier and the signified is yet intact. Kamala Das is one of the few writers in India who could snip this cord with élan, explicating in the process that all writings are constructed and all realities staged in language.

*My Story* is not a literal translation of *Ente Katha*, which was originally serialized in the Malayalam magazine *Malayalanadu* in 1972. And yet the title *Ente Katha* translates as *My Story*. Kamala Das later famously denied *Ente Katha* to be a true story stating that parts of it were fictitious. So whose is the voice that narrates *Ente Katha/My Story*? By positing this self as a fictional construct, by problematising it, Kamala Das actually poses a problem of identity, a problem linked to language, of writing one self in two languages, in the process attempting to evolve a third – a language for writing the woman into existence. By celebrating the functionality of her autobiography Das reiterates modern theories on the genre which stress the “*tautological nature of autobiography*” pointing out that the “*autobiographical self is a fictional construct within the text which can neither have its origins anterior to the text nor indeed coalesce with its creator.*”

James Olney speaks of how it is impossible for an autobiographer to write the image double of her life instead having to create herself afresh at every moment within the text. This might be the reason why Das chose not to go for a literal translation of *Ente Katha* into English but a creative retelling aiming towards textual equivalence. This is what she has to say in an interview

“I have certain firm views about translation, I don't go in far a word-to-word translation. I always try to retain the spirit of the

original in translation.... But I find it difficult to translate people who do not give me the freedom to reconstruct the work because without adding a little or subtracting a few lines I wouldn't be able to manage. I wouldn't be able to make it a finished work because I find in most regional literature certain inadequacies that come with the writer being a little bit too pompous to be a success. Because there are posturings which do not appeal to me. I would like a writer to be as honest as he or she can be."

It is possible to speculate from textual evidence that *My Story* or parts of it were written first, which then formed the base for the translated/adapted/retold *Ente Katha*. The editor of *Malayalanadu*, VBC Nair, in an interview reminisces about Kakkanadan's translation of the first chapter of *Ente Katha* from English. Madhavikutty herself says, "*I dream in English, I am afraid.*" If this be the case, the very act of writing *Ente Katha* becomes an act of translating the self from the source language of English, to the target language of Malayalam, a reclaiming and recentering of identities in a new linguistic and cultural territory.

Chapter 2 of *Ente Katha* begins thus:

*"Yesterday evening in our visitor's room my husband told the Marathi poet Purushotham Rege, 'Kamala has started writing her autobiography'. He asked me to bring the first chapter and read it aloud to Rege. I did not comply with his request. I felt it would be like taking out a one-month-old embryo from the womb and exhibiting it. I never show my poems or stories to anyone before their publication."* (p.18)

The first chapter of *Ente Katha* reads as follows:

*"When my friends came to know that I have started writing pieces of my autobiography, some of them said that no one less than forty years of age should attempt to write an autobiography"* (p.13).

It is significant that no such references to the writing of an autobiography come up in *My Story*. That Kamala Das had started writing her autobiography and her friends know about it contradict the popular belief that it was a story written by a woman on her deathbed. Though this could be partly true, yet the textual evidences suggest that Kamala Das had started writing her story much before she reached the hospital bed and formed a contract with the editor of *Malayalanadu* to serialize *Ente Katha*. So it raises the question of which is the original text and problematises the notion of fidelity to the ‘original’.

In *My Story* Das narrates her early education at home at the age of six,

“We had two tutors: Mabel, a pretty Anglo-Indian, and Nambiar, the Malayalam tutor. The cook was partial to the lady; served her tea on a tray... to Nambiar who came much later in the evening he gave only a glass-tumbler of tea and a few sardonic remarks. Nambiar in our house moved about with a heavy inferiority complex and would hide behind the sideboard when my father passed through the dining room where we had our Malayalam lessons. We learned our vernacular only to be able to correspond with our grandmother who was very fond of us.” (p.9)

But in *Ente Katha* she is only four when the two tutors come to teach the children. The Anglo Indian Mabel becomes the Mangalorean Mrs. Sequeira. The Nambiar of *My Story* who received only tea and sardonic remarks is fortunate enough to receive ‘*Parippu Vada*’ with his tea in *Ente Katha*. And yet it is Nambiar’s inferiority complex in *My Story* that is attributed to the Malayalam language in *Ente Katha*. Madhavikutty writes, “*In those days we felt that Malayalam Language had Nambiar’s colour and his inferiority complex*” (p.16).



As Foucault argues “*all manifest discourse is secretly based on the ‘already said’; ... this ‘already-said’ is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a ‘never-said’, an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath that is merely the hollow of its own mark.*” It can be argued that *My Story* is the as yet incorporeal discourse, the silent breath that permeates *Ente Katha*. The consciousness of an ‘I’ that performs/lives its gender in *Ente Katha* has an altogether different angle of entrance – that of an English language and education. The inferiority complex, which marks the learning of the vernacular, is first attributed to the tutor in the English version and then to the language itself in the Malayalam version in what I argue to be a gradual systematization of concepts, knowledge and experience in language.

*Ente Katha* displays more difficulties of narrating the self because Malayalam provides a cultural frame of reference within which the story is situated. In English the frame of reference is removed spatially and culturally and hence the emotional problems associated with remembering and narrating is lesser. For a woman the weight of patriarchal ideology is more intense and excruciating in her own native language than in English. Hence telling the story is easier in English where value systems, cultural concepts and social norms that model experience are different. As language changes the ideological contexts too change, the process of processing memory changes, and techniques of cognitive mapping change. That *Ente Katha* is significantly less in volume than *My Story* reveals the ideological problem of narrating a woman’s story in Malayalam where the acts of remembering and reiterating have painful emotional overtones. Thus the methodology of remembering the past is weighed down by a political and cultural load in *Ente Katha*, while in *My Story* the process is easier.

The English version of the autobiography has afforded Kamala Das the neutrality, whereas the Malayalam version carries

the weight of markers of native codes like religion, ethnicity and gender. *My Story* is a good example of cultural code-mixing where English is used “*to neutralise identities one is reluctant to express by the use of native languages or dialects.*”

*My Story* skillfully uses the English language to provide referential meaning while escaping Malayalam’s cultural overtones and connotations, thus helping in the process of an identity shift – obscuring the Madhavikutty, culturally conditioned by the Kerala society and discursively constructed as ‘*a Malayalee woman*’, in order to foreground the culturally neutral, more universal identity of Kamala Das. Thus Kamala Das’s transcreation of her story skillfully uses the English tongue to manipulate and control the normative and regulatory codes of Malayalam. The values and norms of English have been used to nullify traditional hierarchies of caste, class and gender. Thus in *My Story* the cultural power base of *Ente Katha* is mitigated to a certain extent. English’s “*power of alchemy linguistically to transmute an individual and a speech community*” is what becomes evident in *My Story* where English transmutes the ‘*self*’ by providing more modernized registers to write the woman in.

In conjunction with the argument that language and social models greatly influence the narrativisation of the self, this paper seeks to illustrate how linguistic and semantic processes, linked to social models affect the construction of gender identity in such a way that the same identity might be projected differently while narrating the same life story in two different languages. By using the possessive pronoun *My/Ente*, Kamala Das/Madhavikutty fuses the author, narrator and character into one self. By denoting it as *Story/Katha* the writer consciously or unconsciously veers more towards a similar genre of the ‘*life-story*’ than autobiography *per se*. Though both genres are the product of a process of narrativisation, fictionalization and textualisation, “*the life story develops specific traits; the orality of the genre produces a system of formal and structural recurrences and the interactional system as well as the*

*stress on the social self, produce reference to socio-symbolic discourse and the social imaginary through which a culture by means of language, maps and deciphers the world, a dimension also present in autobiography, but heavily marked in the life-stories.”*

In the life story, unlike in an autobiography, the author/narrator presumes an interaction with an audience, an audience that shares her models of experience and codes of culture. Though Kamala Das arranges all the important rites of passage charting the course of the evolution of the self and narrates all the events according to a chronological and causal scheme in *My Story*, *Ente Katha* displays certain reluctance to the usual patterns of constructing the life story. It is more complex in its narration. The linear, confessional mode of narrative in *My Story* links it to a modernist form of writing while *Ente Katha* displays postmodern preoccupations in its part non-linear narrative relying on what appears to be a more disjointed memory. The preface to *Ente Katha* titled ‘A Sparrow’s Sorrow’ is absent in *My Story*, and it is in this introduction to her life that Madhavikutty attempts to subtly negotiate the social contract in the act of writing one’s story in the Kerala society of the early seventies. She writes in *Ente Katha*

*“Though I loved my husband deeply, he was unable to love me. At the moment of sexual intercourse with him I wished he would gather me in his arms after the act. Had he caressed my face or touched my belly I would not have felt to that degree the intense rejection I felt after each sexual union. When a woman relinquishes the first man in her life in order to walk up to the bed of another, it is not a contemptuous or immoral act; it is an act of pathos. She is one who is humiliated, wounded. She needs to quench herself” (p.8).*

In subverting the conventions of a woman’s autobiography Kamala Das shows how a woman constructed in accordance with the rigid codes of expectations of femininity can yet deconstruct herself in order to reveal the constructedness of her self. The one page

preface to *My Story* is stretched to nearly six pages in *Ente Katha*, a rather strenuous exercise considering the fact that the Malayalam version as a whole is much shorter than the English one. Madhavikutty in the preface to *Ente Katha* takes great pains to place her narrative identity inside the world of textual conventions and yet outside it. More of a testimony than a confession, Madhavikutty here seems to address a culture whose expectations of conformity to an ideal of the feminine she cannot cater to. In contrast the preface to *My Story* ends thus, “*This book has cost me many things I hold dear, but I do not for a moment regret having written it. I have written several books in my lifetime but none of them provided the pleasure the writing of My Story has given me. I have nothing more to say.*” It is significant that this preface is found only in the Sterling edition published from New Delhi in 1976. The DC Books edition published from Kerala in 2004 omits this preface. The preface to *Ente Katha* begins thus,

“*A few years ago, one day in the afternoon, a sparrow flew into my room through the small window. Its breast hit the turning blades of the fan and the bird was thrown down. Hitting the windowpane, it clung to the glass for a few seconds. The blood from its breast stained the glass. Today let my blood ooze down to these pages let me write in that blood. Let me write without the burden of a future, as only one can write, making each word a compromise. I would love to call this poetry... I always wished I had the strength to write this. But poetry never ripens for us; we have to acquire the maturity for it*” (p.7). Here Madhavikutty is seen to renegotiate Kamala Das’s relationship to the act of writing. The last sentence seems to emphasize that society needs to change in order to accept her writing. She turns the tables on societal norms and yet the pressures of conformity catch up with her as is evident in her many denials later on to the veracity of *Ente Katha*.

The self that is outwardly projected in *My Story/Ente Katha* is a self that tries to fit in, to conform, at least on the surface. This

self is seen to situate and organize society and culture. Yet there is a progress towards a self that attains boldness in negotiating its relationship with the external world. What is achieved in the end is a new sense of identity, a woman who discovers her sexuality and who learns to revel in her multiple selves. But even here there is a difference in the two texts. *My Story* is more unapologetic and direct in its narration while *Ente Katha* is informed by a sense of '*inter subjectivity*' - a consciousness of the self as framed and limited by its interactions with the symbolic order. Wariness towards the audit culture is omnipresent in *Ente Katha*. Probably Madhavikutty is more conscious in her negotiations with the culture of the Malayalam language and its literary repertoire, knowing fully well that there are greater issues at stake in the autobiography's encounter with the social order here than in English. A mere look at the chapter headings will illustrate this point. The Sterling edition of *My Story* has fifty chapters some of which are titled - '*I was infatuated with his charm*', '*Women of good Nair families never mentioned sex*', '*Was every married adult a clown in bed, a circus performer?*', '*Her voice was strange, it was easy for me to fall in love with her*', '*His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin*', '*Sex and the co-operative movement*', '*I too tried adultery for a while*', '*I was never a nymphomaniac*' etc. Again, strikingly, all these headers are changed in the 2004 DC edition of *My Story*. For example, '*I was infatuated with his charm*' is changed into the innocuous title '*The village school*', while '*Women of good Nair families never mentioned sex*' becomes '*The Feudal System*'. None of the original titles find place in the Malayalam version which has chaste headers like '*The meaning of the word love*', '*The season called beauty*', '*Morality and rebirth*,' etc. Thus here we have a writer/translator beset by different levels of cultural intervention while writing/translating in two different languages. Even the year and place of publication assume important dimensions. A female identity constituted by an intense awareness of sexuality is seen to be narrated, however subversively, with an acute awareness of the policing medium of culture which a language represents. Thus the

expectations of conformity to a feminine cultural ideal is more on Madhavikutty than on Kamala Das, and hence disguises and ambiguities at the structural and narrational level of the text is more in *Ente Katha* than *My Story*. This leads to a situation where what is written has not been translated and what is translated has not been written. Madhavikutty's cultural identity often acts as a block in *Ente Katha*, forcing her to take more circuitous routes of narration. For example the first meeting with her would be husband, his sexual advances, their engagement, the subsequent visit to Calcutta, his crude attempts at sexual games, are all described in a simple, chronological straight forward manner in *My Story*. But in *Ente Katha* these incidents are compressed into two pages with philosophic ruminations and forward jumps in time. In all parts of the narrative where gender roles are crucial *Ente Katha* displays a marked transference tension at play, which is not so evident in *My Story*. For example in the description of the rape where the old maid servant plays accomplice to the rapist, the whole incident is left ambiguous in *Ente Katha*, leaving the reader doubting the veracity of the incident. In *My Story* however, the narration leaves no doubt about the reality of the incident. "*The autobiographical tongue in any bilingual context is unlikely to tell the kind of homogenous and singular truth which critics of autobiography, quite contradictorily, seem both to disdain and desire.*" The process of historicizing the subject and illustrating her dependence on the social order is more in evidence in *Ente Katha*, which offers innovative possibilities as far as the question of the specificity of women's writing leading to a feminist narratology is concerned.

Born in rural Kerala, brought up and schooled in Calcutta, married to a bank officer in Mumbai, spending a life divided among the cosmopolitan cities of Calcutta, Mumbai and Delhi, Kamala Das alias Madhavikutty projects a translated self living in translated worlds. An intellectual self fashioned in the English tradition, yet bearing the weight of Malayalam's linguistic and cultural history, her autobiography is both writing to and translating from the

language of patriarchy. Probably it is this translatedness of being that helped Kamala Das to challenge the authoritative codes of languages and cultures. Translation here could be a metaphor for any activity in language that destabilises cultural identities and received notions of selfhood, questioning in the process the notion of finality in translation. She thus uses translation as a tool to deflect the power of language, not only to reflect but also to construct reality. If Madhavikutty is Kamala Das in translation what she does in *Ente Katha* is to earn the right to “*transgress from the trace of the other.*”

Kamala Das’s self translation of the story of her life reveals a writer who is forced to mould herself and her story according to two contradictory sets of cultural and linguistic norms. Culture here becomes a category more of enunciation than representation. Bhabha’s description of translation as imitation comes in handy here, as “*Translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous displacing sense - imitating on original in such a way that priority of the original is not reinforced but the very fact that it can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the ‘original’ is never finished or complete in itself. The originary is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalized prior moment of being or meaning an essence.*” For Kamala Das translation becomes a foundational activity where the unfinished original, both as self and text, is reworked and renegotiated in another culture and language. So fidelity is never a major concern with people like her who write from ‘liminal’ and ‘hybrid’ spaces. The neurosis of nostalgia that one finds in her autobiography is yet not the complete truth. For she is never really at home in Nalappat, often having to escape to Mumbai and then back to her ancestral home again. For an identity, carrying this trauma of dislocation, divided between the other tongue of English and the mother tongue of Malayalam, translation is an activity that best describes her being.

Critics like Mary Jean Corbett argue that autobiography is a way of attaining both literary legitimacy and a desired subjectivity. But the problem is whether this desired subjectivity is different for a writer while writings in two different languages. The literary tradition of the autobiographical genre in Malayalam has been dominated solely by men, especially men like V.T. Bhattathirippadu & E.M.S. Namboothippadu, who have played great roles in the public sphere in Kerala. For such great literary and social figures the autobiography was an unproblematic genre by which they could acquire a desired subjectivity as seekers/producers of knowledge necessary for social amelioration. *Ente Katha* challenges the gendered separation of the public sphere from the private by exposing the so-called domesticity of woman as a social construct. And yet again and again Madhavikutty apologizes or attempts to justify herself. For example she writes in *Ente Katha*

“There are various reasons why I do not subscribe to the laws of morality prescribed by the society. The foundation of this morality is the mortal body. I believe that a supreme or salutary morality ought to be created in the immortal soul or if not, at least in the human mind... By telling lies, acting, cheating and hating many, I too could have covered myself in the blanket of society’s pseudo morality and procured for myself a place of warmth and security underneath it... In a way writing such an autobiography truthfully, without hiding anything, is a striptease...” (p. 87-88).

These apologies and attempts to spiritualize the body are not to be found in *My Story* and betray an unconscious fear of social ostracisation associated with writing the female body. This register of anxieties, this culturally conditioned paranoia is more pronounced in *Ente Katha*, where Madhavikutty employs several such strategies of philosophizing and justifying the trauma of female sexual transgression even as she attempts to transgress the patriarchal norms of representing the female. Despite this which stands out in both versions of Das’s story is the female body, as real, an essence



which is unsymbolizable, an unrepresented, unrepresentable space that challenges the patriarchal text from the margins. What comes through is a quest to retrieve this body lost in translation in the symbolic language. Within the discourse of autobiographical writing Kamala Das uses the body as a space of difference, a space from where she could think femininity beyond the control of the phallic subject.

It is the marginalized semiotic aspect of Malayalam language that runs through *Ente Katha*. The poetry in *My Story* that is integrated into the text of *Ente Katha* makes it at times a non-rational discourse of the self which threatens the order of the symbolic language. Unlike in the male autobiographical tradition in Malayalam, Madhavikutty uses the irrational discourse of the semiotic to deconstruct women's marginalisation from the socio-symbolic contract. Yet it is important to note that such forms of subjectivity, which attempt to subvert dominant discourses are at all times dubbed neurotic and immoral and punished by society. VBC Nair says in an interview that Madhavikutty behaved like a 'street woman' when she stormed into his office alleging that he had twisted her writing to suit his purpose. The choice of epithets is highly significant and suggests the cultural salience's the word woman takes, offering an insight into society's negative attitude to woman and her body. The implication is that the female body should be cloistered at home; in the street it acquires the connotation of free availability. This about an eminent writer in Malayalam is indeed shocking. No wonder the writer felt compelled at some point in her life to say that she had written the autobiography at the behest of her husband for money he wanted, and that she was truly a '*pathivratha*', obedient in her life to her husband. The very usage '*street-woman*' by a man of some social standing is indicative of the male bias of the Malayalam language and its underlying cultural assumptions marked by the stamp of patriarchy. In such a culture the woman's body can only be seen as a tool to oppress her. Such a culture endorses masculinity as dominance and femininity as

acquiescence to male domination, and sex as another act of conquest over the feudal holding of the female body. So the writer whose story reveals that it is the “*discursive production of the nature of woman’s bodies*” that is “*central to the reconstitution of social norms of femininity, the patriarchal subjection of women and their exclusion from most aspects of public life*” is punished by the patriarchal power structures.

What Madhavikutty does in *Ente Katha* is a neat toppling over of the patriarchal ideological base of the Kerala society. By exposing the limits of its domestic contract, the compromises inherent to its social fabric, the pitfalls of its system of education and above all the complete resistance to feminist gender critique, she problematises the relation between the female self and society. All the personal lampooning and hatred that forced Madhavikutty to disclaim the truth of her story points to the fate of all women in the public sphere in Kerala who attempt to construct discursively the experience of sexuality of Malayalee women. Women’s sexuality as a lexical gap in Malayalam literature and language echoes the dilemma of a culture still searching for ways to articulate the experience of womanhood. *My Story/Ente Katha* as the story of Malayalee women, has to be ‘fictionalized’ and made unauthentic to serve the purpose of all social and cultural agents paying allegiance to the symbolic powers. But together, through their open endedness and polysemy, they skillfully displace the masculine symbolic order, making us perceive the need to generate more discourses of the female self in order to reveal the other side of social history.

Mikhail Bakhtin points out that “*Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intention, it is populated – over populated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.*” Like Irigaray’s impassioned plea for a woman-centered language, Madhavikutty’s story has at its base the libidinal impulses of the

female body narrated in a fluid language charged with feminine sexuality embodying all feminist resistances to patriarchal hegemonies of representation. Probably for the first time in Malayalam a woman attempts the '*écriture féminine*', rationalizing the irrational, moralizing the immoral and eroticising women's desire. *Ente Katha* in 1972 seems to be an antecedent to Irigaray's "*When Our Lips Speak Together*," originally published in 1977. It almost reads like a forerunner to the essay, where Madhavikutty indeed begins a '*different*' story in a language different from men's, without letting '*convention*' and '*habit*' to distract her. *Ente Katha* breaks the circle of conventional habit, the '*circularities*' of male exchanges, knowledge and desire, by expressing multiplicities and speaking '*improperly*'. Kamala Das cannot translate Madhavikutty for each is '*several voices*', '*several ways of speaking*,' yet never separable from the other. Like Irigaray they assert that there is no '*possible evil*' in women's sexual pleasure, the only fault being stripping a woman of her '*openness*' and '*marking her with signs of possession*'. But women too should refuse to '*submit*' to male '*reasoning*', refuse to feel '*guilty*', for it is a male strategy to make women feel '*guilty*'. Eliciting Madhavikutty's confession that *Ente Katha* was written with the sole intention of making money, society finally succeeded in the strategy calculated to make her guilty for her story. Yet in another recent interview given to Shobha Warrior for Rediff she reiterates that her autobiography was no fantasy. Kamala Das/Madhavikutty, in writing/translating her story, thus leaves '*definitiveness*' to the '*undecided*', being what she becomes, '*without clinging*' to what she '*might have been*' trusting only the '*certainty*' of the body.

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# Translation and Literary Genres: A Case Study of Poetry in Bengali and Marathi

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Chandrani Chatterjee and  
Milind Malshe

## Abstract

*The paper focuses on the relationship between genre and translation. It is significant to note how certain genres change character while passing from one culture to another. In such a process concepts like adaptation, assimilation and transformation become particularly important. In this paper, apart from some general considerations we have tried to trace the adaptation of the 'sonnet', essentially a European form, into Bengali and Marathi literature. The article perorates with the conclusion that the reception of the sonnet form in the Bangla and Marathi literary milieus has been quite different, the former assimilating it and the latter treating it as a passing phase.*

## I

The notion of translation as a cultural idea is perhaps best perceived in the translation of literary forms or genres. While generic features help one in identifying a particular work as an epic, a tragedy or a comedy, the instability of such terms is also an accepted fact. Genres cannot be essentialized; at best every genre can be said to have multiple distinguishing traits. The character of genres is that they change; the variation and

Modification of convention have historical and theoretical significance.

A study of such variation or modification of forms becomes particularly interesting when the exchange takes place across cultures – in what are called “*cultural encounters*”. The influence, which European models had on Indian writers, has already been recognized. One of the most dominant features of Indian literature, both creative and critical, since the beginning of the colonial period, is a passionate search for modernity. This search was intensified with the increasing exposure to Western thought and literature, and finally culminated in the twentieth century. The ancient Indian literature had categories like i) *prachina* (old) and *navina* (new) and ii) *marga* (classical, traditional) and *desi* (local, folk), understood in terms of chronological order or the degree of stylization. But never was there a strong and conscious attempt to assert one’s modernity and the other’s non-modernity. In the Indian situation, modernity (*adhunikata*), as a category was not a development through phases as the Renaissance and Reformation, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. The idea of modernity emerged in Indian literature from the inner urge of the literary community to create alternatives to the literary models and canons dominating for centuries. Undoubtedly, this process took place under colonization and in the wake of the new British education. At the same time, there was also a desire of trying to understand one’s own cultural ethos. However, so strongly propelled was the urge by the Indian exposure to Western models that modernity came to be viewed, particularly by the conservatives, as synonymous to Westernization. Not only were the European models being used by the Indian writers, but a lot of work was also being done in translation.

## II

A study of the history of translation reveals the ways in which original texts are rewritten and also exposes the routes through which innovations are introduced in the literary field. The colonial context of these works inscribes the asymmetrical relationship between the European originals and their Indian translations. The proliferation of texts translated from European languages, especially English, in colonial India indicates the multiple layers of contact between the two cultures. *A Checklist of Translations of European Texts in Bengali, 1800-1900*, prepared by the Department of English, Jadavpur University, reveals the copious work which was being done in translation around this time. Apart from literature, which is divided into fiction, poetry, drama and miscellaneous works, the checklist includes subjects like Bible translations, biographies and exemplary lives, economics, general science, geography, history, law, medicine and child rearing, philosophy, political tracts, religion and history of religion. The *Checklist* is also an indication of the blurring of generic boundaries that take place while translating across cultures. For example, *Arabian Nights Entertainments* is translated by Nilmani Basak as *Arabya Upanyas* (Part I, II and III). The term ‘*upanyas*’ in Bengali, refers to the generic category of the novel. *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, as we know, is a collection of stories written in Arabic which were made known in Europe by the translation of Antoine Galland (1646-1715). In calling his translation ‘*upanyas*’, Nilmani Basak, was raising in his readers a ‘*horizon of expectation*’ about the nature of the work. Robert Hans Jauss in his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* coined the phrase ‘*horizon of expectation*’. According to Jauss, “A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions...” Significantly enough, Jauss also focuses on the concept of genre as an important way of arousing ‘*horizon of expectations*’. The



*Checklist* also includes other translations of the same work. Satyacharan Gupta, for example, calls his work *Ekadhik Sahasra Rajani*, a closer rendering of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

### III

A study of some of the genres like the epic and the sonnet which were being appropriated by Indian writers reveals not only how genres change across cultures but also the fact that genres have a tendency to diffuse. Though generic formulations guide the process of creation and interpretation, their universality can be questioned. Since the act of translation is in itself a culture-specific endeavour, it is rewarding to ask how one reconciles the universality and culture-specificity of generic translation.

We may examine here the process of appropriation of the sonnet into Bengali literature. Like many other terms current in literary criticism and indispensable on account of consequent convenience, the word ‘*form*’ presents difficulties in the way of a strict and logical definition. It has different shades of meaning, and to use it in any exclusive sense will not be correct. Applied to poetry, ‘*form*’ may be interpreted as the metrical pattern or frame in which words are set, the words themselves or poetic diction; the division into stanzas; the division into rhymed and unrhymed or blank verse and others. In this light, we would analyze the Bengali sonnet tradition., defines a sonnet as “*a poem consisting of 14 lines (of 11 syllables in Italian, generally 12 in French, and 10 in English), with rhymes arranged according to one or other of certain definite schemes, of which the Petrarchan and Elizabethan are the principal, viz.:1) a b b a a b b a, followed by two, or three, other rhymes in the remaining six lines, with a pause in the thought after the octave (not always observed by English imitators, of whom Milton and Wordsworth are prominent examples); 2) a b a b c d c d e f e f g g. The sonnets of Shakespeare are in the latter form.*”

It is clear that there is a distinct possibility of breaking rules and the desire to experiment with the generic conventions. In fact, the doctrine of the purity of genres disappeared with the neo-classical theorists. Thus, though Derrida begins his essay '*The Law of Genre*' by positing two statements "*Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres*", the essay ends on a different note where, according to Derrida, the law of contamination is inherent in the generic law. This tendency of genres to diffuse and to be contaminated to create what may be called '*hybrid*' genres is particularly noticeable in generic translations across cultures.

Of the many forms introduced into Bengali literature through the influence of the West, the sonnet has perhaps succeeded the most. Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873) was the first to introduce the sonnet into Bengali literature. In Michael Madhusudan Dutta's letter number thirty seven, addressed to his friend Raj Narayan Basu, the poet noted: '*I want to introduce the sonnet into our language...if cultivated by men of genius; our sonnet would in time rival the Italian.*' Madhusudan Dutta published a collection of one hundred and two sonnets called *Chaturdashpadi Kavita* (1866), written during his stay in France. In the second poem of the anthology, the poet relates the brief history of the sonnet and its introduction into Bengali literature. Madhusudan Dutta wrote a sonnet in Bengali, tracing the history of a new genre which was being introduced into Indian poetry from European literature. He reminds the reader of the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch, who found this little gem in the mine of poetry and dedicated it to the temple of the Muse. The goddess accepted the gift and rewarded the poet graciously. In a similar fashion Michael Madhusudan Dutta himself wants to offer the gem, which he considers a suitable gift to *Bharati* in *Bharat*. The sonnet in the Bengali original runs as follows:

Italy, bikhyato desh, kabyer kanon,  
 Bohubidh pik jotha gaye modhusware,  
 Sangeet-sudhar ras kori borishon,

Basanto amod mon puri nironore; -  
Se deshe janom purbe korila grohon  
Francesco Petrarca kavi; bakdevir bore  
Boroi joshoshi sadhu, kavi-kul-dhon,  
Rasana amrite sikto, swarna veena kore.  
Kavyer khwanite peye ei khudro moni,  
Swamandire prodanila banir chorone  
Kavindra: prosannabhave grahilo janani  
(mononito bor diya) e upokorone.  
Bharate Bharati-pada upojukto goni,  
Upaharswarupe aji aropi rotone.

My translation of the Bengali sonnet follows:

Italy, the famous country, is the garden of poetry,  
Where various cuckoos sing melodiously,  
Pouring the *sudha rasa* of music,  
Which fills the heart with the ecstasy of Spring;-  
In that land was born  
The poet Francesco Petrarca; with the boon of goddess Saraswati  
He was a famous person, the treasure of the poets,  
He was immersed in the quest for aesthetic pleasures, with a  
golden *veena* in his hands.  
Discovering this small gem in the mine of poetry,  
Offered it to the goddess in his own temple  
The King of poets: the Muse accepted it graciously  
(Blessing him with desired boon) in a similar fashion.  
Considering it a suitable gift for *Bharati* in *Bharat*,  
I now offer it to the Goddess.

This particular sonnet is constructed on the Petrarchan model. The rhyme scheme is as follows a b a b c d c d e f e f e f. However, since Michael belonged to the mid-nineteenth century, he was also aware of the various forms popular in his time. Thus his anthology contains other rhyme schemes as well. The schemes which were part of theoretical constructions for Petrarch had become a

historical phenomenon for Michael. The sonnet, a European form, appeared to Michael not as a genre fixed for all time, but as a changing one because of his historical location and familiarity with several European languages. Michael introduced the Petrarchan sonnet as well as the Shakespearean, and thus opened the possibility of the entry of other types. Finally there was a total dismantling of the structure and a mere adherence to the fourteen lines or seven couplets structure. Michael himself suggested such possibilities when he called his sonnets *Chaturdashpadi Kavitaavali* (the fourteen line verse). The sonnet is thus assimilated into Bengali literature not only through the installation of the historical genres, but also through the actualization of other theoretical possibilities. So far as the rhyme scheme is concerned, Michael did not contribute anything original. However, he contributed a new dimension to his sonnets which refused to be confined to one particular thematic zone. It expressed a multitude of experiences. The third sonnet, for example, titled *Bangobhasha*, is a sort of lament, where the poet realizing the potentialities which his mother tongue has, condemns his going to an alien land and trying to write in English. The sonnet ends with the advice of the Muse and the poet's return to his own mother tongue. The rhyme scheme of this poem is also different from the earlier one. In this sonnet, the poet follows the following rhyme scheme: a b a b c d c d e f e g g. It is more like the Shakespearean sonnet with a concluding couplet.

It is important at this point to understand the process and the moment of appropriation of a particular genre. What the recipient culture considers worth imitating needs to be taken into consideration in this regard. In the case of Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the European form, the sonnet, provided not only a model but also the scope for innovation and experimentation, and thus is in a way an attempt to 'play' with the available genre. The analogy of 'play' needs to be further explained. The aesthetic theory of the European Enlightenment privileged 'play' over 'game' in its free and creative aspects, as an analogy, or even a synonym for art. In his

*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller describes the ‘*play-drive*’ as mediating between the ‘*sense-drive*’ and the ‘*form-drive*’, and producing the realm of art. Art could thus be considered as a form of creative play, with the circumscribed limits of cultural traditions, standards, structures or rules, infinitely repeatable but with new variations each time it is played out. Returning to the question of genre *per se*, one could say that the regulatory and repetitive structures of genre are constantly disrupted by the anarchic tendencies of writing as ‘*play*’. The writer plays with genre. When one considers the dynamics of genre creation, Michael Madhusudan Dutta’s need to deviate from the precedent of the European models available, reveals a new awareness of form and textuality. Thus, the Bengali sonnet must be understood in terms both of similarity and difference when compared to the European practice.

Michael Madhusudan Dutta’s sonnets prepared the way for other sonnet writers like Nabin Chandra Sen and Rabindranath Tagore. Nabin Chandra Sen made a curious attempt in the sonnet form, where the alternate lines were of the same length in the first twelve lines; while in a regular sonnet, the lines are of equal length. It would be worth quoting the sonnet of Nabin Chandra Sen:

### The Sonnet

Tridiv jotsnya devi murti, dhori.  
Aji ki bhutole khoshi?  
Jotsyna sagore jotsnya dahlia  
Shashi korotole udilo shashi  
Pabitratoro? Ki je pabitrata,  
Tridiv madhuri poriche jhori  
Sudhngshu hoyte, sudha angshu jano,  
Pappurno dhora pabitro kori.  
Nidrante dekhinu kaksha andhakar  
Alokiche murti – manabi noe.  
Bhorila hridoy, bhahilo nayone –

Anandoshru;chitto chandrikamoy.  
 Aloki baishakhi-jotsnya-nishi  
 Alope alok gelo ki mishi!

There are four distinct elements to be considered in the sonnet – the length of each line, the rhyme scheme and the organization of thought implied by the same. In all but the last item there have been innovations, with a view of greater assimilation. In Rabindranath Tagore, there are many variations of the sonnet form. There are seven couplets, each containing a different rhyme scheme as in *Vairagya* or *Devatar Viday (Chaitali)*; there are two quatrains followed by three couplets as in *Punyer-hisab* in the same book; there is again, one quatrain followed by five couplets as in his *Didi*. *Naivedya* contains as many as seventy seven sonnets, all consisting of seven couplets. However, in the collection titled *Smaran*, there are many fourteen line poems where each line consists of eighteen syllables and not fourteen, the latter being the convention. In *Utsarga* the two varieties are used side by side, both of seven couplets, but some contain fourteen syllables in each line while in others the number of syllables is eighteen. In his *Gitanjali*, there are many poems of fourteen lines but the rhyme scheme is different.

Jibanananda Das, perhaps the greatest Bengali poet after Rabindranath Tagore was also a practitioner of the sonnet. Jibanananda Das' anthology entitled, *Rupashi Bangla* contain many such sonnets. It is said that, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, Bengali fighters kept *Rupashi Bangla* in their camps and read the poems as a source of inspiration.

Shakti Chattopaddhay (1933-1995) was immensely influenced by the poetic style of Jibanananda Das. Chattopaddhay also composed some poems in the sonnet tradition. In the sphere of modern Bengali poetry, the name of Joy Goswami cannot go unnoticed. He began composing at an early age and his first published collection of poems was entitled '*Christmas O Sheeter*

*Sonnet Guccha* (lit. 'A Collection of Christmas and Winter Sonnets')

All these examples show that the sonnet form has been thoroughly assimilated into Bengali literature, with changes, additions and alterations which the writers of a different culture thought suitable. The Bengali sonnet, far from being a mere pastiche of the European model added new elements unknown of before and thus added a new dimension to the world sonnet tradition.

#### IV

In Marathi literature V.M.Mahajani translated some of Shakespeare's sonnets in *Kavyakusumanjali* (1885). However, the real foundations were laid by the poet Keshavsut (1866-1905) and the lyricist Tambe (1873-1941). Keshavsut called the form *chaturdashaka*. He contributed both independent poems and translations to Marathi literature although his independent poems were more successful. His first '*chaturdashaka*' was published in 1892 and was titled '*Mayurasan ani Tajmahal*'. Some of his other '*chaturdashakas*' include '*Amhi kon*' (translated literally as "Who are we?"), '*Pratibha*' (lit. Imagination), '*Priti ani Tu*' (lit. 'Love and You'), '*Chiraviyuktache udgar*' (lit. 'Exclamation from a permanently separated person') Keshavsut experimented both in the Shakespearean and Miltonic tradition. '*Shradulavikridita vritta*' (a particular combination of short and long syllables), was naturalized by Keshavsut as the conventional form of sonnet writing. However, it is noteworthy, that none of the Marathi poets accepted the Western rigidity of rhyme scheme while writing their sonnets. Thus, it was not a mere pastiche of the European models. The genre was being appropriated to suit the requirements of both the readers and the writers.

The major flourish in Marathi sonnet tradition came with a group of writers called '*Ravikiran-mandal*' (founded in 1923 and the poets of this group were influential during the 1920s and 1930s). This group prolifically produced sonnets on various themes. They also experimented with the sonnet sequence. Madhav Julian's '*Tutalele Duve*' (lit. 'Broken Links'), and Kavi Yashvant's '*Bhava Taranga*' (lit. 'Ripples of Emotions'), were sonnet sequences produced by '*Ravikiran-mandal*'. The endeavours of the Ravikiran-mandal ignited several controversies and debates regarding the form in which the poets of this group were trying their hands. Controversies also centered around what this genre should be called in Marathi. Alternatives like '*chaturdashpadi geetika*' and '*swanitaka*' were suggested. Finally, however, S.B.Ranade and Madhav Julian of Ravikiran-mandal zeroed in on *suneet*, which has been widely accepted ever since (one cannot miss the echo of the English 'sonnet').

A parody of the sonnet tradition was taken up by the poet Keshavkumar (Acharya Atre). He wrote parodies, some of which were sonnets in an anthology called *Zenduchi Phule* (first published in 1925; in 1972, S.G.Malshe edited the eighth edition with a long introduction). In order to de-romanticize and debunk the imitative tradition of the Ravikiran-mandal, he deliberately called his form '*sutaka*' (observation of the post-funeral Hindu rites) instead of calling it '*suneet*'. Parodying the hue and cry raised over the appropriate name for the form in literary circles, Keshavkumar imagines a '*Zendu Pustak Pharmacy*' which prefers '*sutaka*' to '*suneet*'. The emptiness of the discussions and of over-enthusiasm of some of the experiments pertaining to the genre was aptly satirized by Keshav kumar.

Since then there has not been enough experimentation with this form in Marathi literature. However, in the 1960s Vinda Karandikar wrote what he called '*mukta suneete*' (lit. free sonnets). These poems varied between thirteen and fifteen lines, without any



consistent prosody. It was a combination of the ‘*mukta chanda*’ (free verse) with the precision of fourteen lines or so. Thus, the situation in Marathi is that the sonnet form has not really been assimilated into the tradition.

## V

A comparative look at the reception of the ‘*sonnet*’ form in Bengali and Marathi literature reveals that genres change character while passing from one culture to another. This can perhaps be analyzed with the help of the Jaussian concept of ‘*horizon of expectations*’. For Jauss, the concept of genre is an important way of “*founding and altering*” the ‘*horizon of expectations*’: “*The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language.*”

The above case study of Bengali and Marathi literature reveals such a process at work. It appears that the Marathi readers treated the sonnet as an alien form. On the contrary, the Bengali readers appear to be more receptive. The varying degree of reception of the same European form, in two major Indian languages can perhaps be explained as follows: while, the European form has been completely assimilated into Bengali literature, it remained only a passing phase in Marathi literature.

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# The Limits of Creativity and the Translator's Responsibility

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Niranjan Mohanty

## Abstract

*Any attempt to discover or locate creativity in the translator or in translation is likely to cause ostensible debate or even to raise eyebrows. This is precisely because, as this paper tries to argue, of our notions of the translator as a shadowy presence or a negotiator or a compromise seeking agent between two languages and two cultures. Yet, in the act of translation, it is difficult to do away with the idea of the translator's presence in the absence of the SL Text author. The absence of the SL text's author brings in more responsibilities on the translator. Thus the translator's responsibilities are three-fold: firstly, to the SL text or SL text's Target Culture. Within this limited space of creativity and sphere of responsibility, a translator has to work. But his/her primary task would be two-fold: firstly to transplant the spirit or essence of the SL text in the TL text by de-familiarizing the Source Language; secondly to familiarize the SL emerge at this stage of translation. Familiarization of the SL: Culture to the TL culture and its audience depends much upon the political relation between the two countries. If politically the two countries are proactive, meaningfully interactive, then the process of familiarization of the SL culture to the TL culture would not pose any problem. But to be honest, the translator does not deliberately attempt at*

*familiarizing the SL culture to the TL culture. As the translator handles the languages along with the transfer of meaning into another language, certain aspects of culture automatically get transferred into the matrix of Target culture.*

Debates on the nature of translation as a mechanical activity or a creative one, on the transfer of meaning from the SL text to the TL text, on the impossibility of identifying 'equivalence' (both in terms of signifiers and signifieds), on the 'literal' (i.e. word to word) or free translation on the role of the translator in familiarizing or defamiliarizing the Source Language, on the complexities and difficulties involved in translating culture specific items, and finally on the ways and means of deciphering the 'quality' of translation have enriching, and even at times, intriguing effects, both on the translators and experts on Translation Studies. This paper is an attempt to show the limits of the translator's creativity (with the basic assumption that translation is a creative activity, even if some argue that it is an adjunct to creativity), and more particularly, the translator's role, in finding out means, if any, to overcome the difficulties in transferring the culture specific-items of the SL text to the TL text and ultimately to the TL culture.

### **The layer of intention:**

A literary translator's responsibility lies (after identification of the 'text' he/she is to translate) in identifying the layer of intention of the author of the SL text. And this layer cannot be perceived, unless the translator reads minutely, passionately, the whole text and not a part of it. The translator's 'intention' should be to reach, capture and represent the *intention* of the author of the SL text. All other 'intentions' of the translator should be kept low-keyed, should remain elusive. In order to reach the intention of the SL author, a translator has to be a judicious critic, or an intelligent interpreter. In

trying to know this ‘*intention*’, the translator must use his/her critical insight to uncover the tone of voice, the metaphor, the allusions (if any), the similes, irony, paradoxes, shifts and turns and all such devices available in the corpus of the SL text. It is, therefore, not binding on the part of the translator to transplant all such literary devices into the TL text. He can reinvent new strategies, new devices as they are available or conveniently acceptable in the Target Language. His sole objective should be to decode, unmask, demystify, but not completely defamiliarise the literary devices to reach the layer of intention as posited in the SL text.

It is true that literary translation is neither to copy nor to mime the SL text. It is worth noting in this context what the Argentinean writer Jorge Louis Borges once told Gregory Rabassa, one of the most earnest translators: “*Don’t translate what I’ve written but what I wanted to say.*” The tone of voice reflects the author’s attitude towards a particular object or person or experience or incident as presented or depicted in the text. This has to be retained in the TL text. Walter Benjamin considers the intended effect upon the language as the layer of intention. Benjamin writes:

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect (intention) upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet’s work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at linguistic contextual aspects.

Identification of such layer of intention and its representation, its reallocation in the TL text, despite variation in the use of literary devices, remain central to the translation process.

### **The layer of Objective Orientation:**

Bereft of an '*objective orientation*' or the layer of objective orientation, a translator may not achieve the limited creativity in the TL text. A translator has to adhere to what Henrik Gottlieb terms as "*source text typology and transfer typology*". The translator can familiarize himself/herself with specific characteristic features of the SL text to be translated. These are *factuality* (falsifiable/real/non falsifiable text), *function* (informative/persuasive /emotive/logical/entertaining), *provenance* (mundane/divine), *age of the text* (recent/aged/or dated/classical), *setting* (familiar/exotic/magical/completely imaginary/fashionable), linguistic conventions (shared/ different), semiotic structure (mono-semiotic or simple/poly-semiotic or complex), receptivity (actor-defined/audience defined, writerly/readerly), identity of the author (known or familiar/unknown), audience (private/public). The translator has to know or identify the nature of transfer that he/she is to make in the TL text. Such variables include, i) purpose of translation, ii) direction of transfer (into native language or non-native, native form or non-native), directness of transfer (direct/relay translation) preparation (planned/impromptu), balance between semiotic methods (language formal structures, syntactical orders retained/altered), status of the text in translation (translator credited/not credited), target audience (within a country/outside, including the cultures, children/adult, old; elite/merely literate), target language (dominant/repressed), target culture (east/west), publisher (private/celebrity). Recognizing such parameters can always lead to a certain degree of excellence in translation. Such an objective orientation makes the translator confident. Without such assurance or confidence, no translator can hope to achieve excellence, even if he/she is fully aware of the fact that in translation, everything of the SL text cannot be transferred, and that whatever he/she would transfer into the TL text would generate another text, a new text altogether in a new culture. I am at once reminded of what A.K. Ramanujan had to say in the "*Afterword*" of

his *poems of Love and war* (from the eight Anthologies and ten Long poems of classical Tamil) in connection with his experience as a translator in particular and the role of the translator in general:

He has a double allegiance, indeed, several double allegiances. All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and those of making another, caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another, moving between the two halves of a brain, he has to use both to get close to “the originals”. He has to let poetry win without allowing scholarship to lose. Then his very compromises may begin to express certain fidelity and may suggest what he cannot convey. Crossing languages, one ancient or foreign, another current or familiar, searching in one language for forms and tones that will mimic and relieve those of another, he may fashion now and then a third that will look like the one speak like (or for) the other...In translating these poems, I have tried to attend always to the minute particulars of individual poems, the words, the syntax, and through them the world in the words.

This “*double allegiance*” of the translator does not distort or deform his singular intention of achieving proximity with the SL text—at least in essence, in spirit, in intended meaning of the SL text or of the SL author. And in achieving this proximity, the strategies he employs, the devices he chooses to make use of out of the available many in the target language, the translator’s creative role is uninterrupted. What Giovanni Pontiero observed in assigning the role of a translator can bear some meaningful insight:

Literary translation, therefore, is no mean task. It is an art worthy of greater recognition from publishers, critics and readers. The job requires intelligence and experience, but also humility, courage, heart, and imagination.

The translator's imagination or intention must not be restricted only to transfer meaning or to "*convey information*," but to intensify or represent the meaning as does a creative writer with a view to engendering certain creativity to his act of translation. Frances R Aparicio in her study of modern translations in the context of Latin-America maintains:

Translating implies interpreting, creating. It is an analogous process to that of creation and innate to the poetic view of reality. It is a way of seeing and reading our world. It is therefore has a function of a metaphor of meaning, and as such it represents for modern literary criticism the important process of reading as an alternative act of writing.

### **Context of Culture**

Since the translator is engaged with languages and languages are pointers and guides to social reality, and are "*steeped in the context of culture*", any translation unknowingly transfers some aspects of the SL culture to the TL culture. Language is a repository of co-ordinates of culture and is a transmitter of such co-ordinates through then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life energy.

In a paper "*Translation: A symbiosis of cultures*", I asserted, citing my translation of Salabega's (a 17<sup>th</sup> century devotional poet of Orissa) prayer poems:

I believe that it is not the scope of the target language that is expanded but the scope of the deposits of source culture from which the translation originated that is enlarged. In other words in translation two activities happen simultaneously: one of defamiliarisation of the source language and one of familiarization of the source



culture into the target culture. If the values, attitudes and relationships which constitute the source culture are reflected thoroughly in the source language, and the translation is executed with excellence and perfection, I am sure that the initial symbiosis of two cultures at the linguistic level would lead to the same process in the societal level.

I reiterate the same view because much depends on extra literary factors, so far as the relationship between two countries, two languages, two societies and two mind sets is concerned. Hierarchy in relation between two countries or two cultures would invariably affect the status of the translated text. A systematic study of Tagore's reception in the west reveals that his works in English rendering could hardly create any lasting impact on the western mind as his appreciators and detractors uniformly treated Tagore as a sage, -which he was, but more than that- failing to fathom Tagore's subtle human touches, his humility, his zest for life, his probing into human psyche, his celebration of life. I would like to quote here how the reviewer for *The Manchester Guardian* could only discover elements of mysticism in *The Fugitive*, and commented on *Gitanjali* as: "*their message was remote, it was strange or unintelligible. We treasure the volume as we treasure a Persian carpet or a Japanese print.*" The reviewer, to my mind, was honest in the first sentence, but seems to champion an imperialist project or a sympathetic stance in the second. Indeed, what a colonial tribute to the only Nobel Laureate in literature from India! The reason behind citing this example is only to allude to two interesting facts:

- i) The fate of a translated text in another culture which is governed by an imperialist attitude towards the literatures produced in that culture.
- ii) The exoticist attitude to India

In both these facts, as revealed by the reviewer, what is missing is the objective evaluation of *Gitanjali*, which, I believe no western critic can undertake. Is it because his mind-set is different and which fails to unearth the spirit of the poem, the greatness, the universal approach of the poem? Is it because of the absence of English-English in the translated *Gitanjali*?

Is it because Tagore's own translation failed to do justice to his work? Possibly it was because of both that *Gitanjali*'s reception was adumbrated. Reception of a translated text in the target culture inescapably depends upon the power relations between the countries. Even if India is free today and translation of regional literatures has taken a sizeable space, what is lamented upon is the quality of translation. Salman Rushdie in *The New Yorker* article expresses his dissatisfaction over the non-availability of Indian texts in appreciably good translation. Rushdie observed:

Admittedly, I did my reading only in English, and there has long been a problem of translation in India –not only into English but between the vernacular languages– and it is possible that good writers have been ill served by their translators' inadequacies...

The lack of first-rate writing in translation can only be a matter of regret.

Thus even in the period when we are free, the reception of the translated text experiences no better situation. Should we then stop translation or translating our own regional literatures? The answer, to my mind, is categorically 'no' simply because, such translations initiate a symbiosis of cultural-relations, at least, within the country, between one region and another.

For the translator, culture remains always problematic. Every language offers resistance to translation, as it changes its

colour under another sky. It is paradoxical that because of such a culture specific factor, translation becomes a necessity. In the initial stages of translation practices, foot-notes, translator's comments, were used plentifully with a view to bringing the TL text comprehensively closer to the SL text. Neither the translators nor the publishers appreciate today this way of handling a translated text.

The linguistic and pragmatic issues involved in the process of translation can be dealt with in consonance with the choices that the translator has to make and because of the perambulating habit of the translator in finding out the most persuasive choice. I posit creativity to the act of translation. It would be relevant to know what Giovanni Pontiero, as a celebrity translator had to say:

The study of the cultural background of the work to be translated is crucial and, the more important the writer (e.g. Umberto Eco, Jose Sarmago or Anna Miranda to quote but a few), the greater the care which has to be taken. However, there is little doubt that the more research is involved, the more satisfying the task becomes...

The greatest difficulties I have encountered in crossing the cultural frontiers of languages was dealing with the thin line between what is regional language and what is simply exotic or word play, especially when it is based on sound patterns or onomatopoeia. There is also the important role which the music of the word plays in some works, as in the writings of José Saramago or Milan Kundera. While it may be said that, ultimately, it is possible to translate words directly, cultures, on the other hand, can not be translated directly, without grotesque distortions.

While Pontiero fears a '*grotesque distortion*' of cultures in translation, Ramanujan suggests four things, may be even four articles of faith, which can help the translator in overcoming this problem. These are as Ramanujan puts it with explanatory notes on each, "*Universals, Interiorized contexts, systematicity and structural mimicry*". I would like here to quote the explanation given by Ramanujan with regard to the '*Interiorized contexts*', as he argues that a Tamil poem creates an inter-textual web and that every word is rooted to a specific culture and it can, in association and collocation with other words create a second language which is the poem itself.<sup>16</sup> I am not sure, if the kind of solution that Ramanujan offers in explaining the '*Interiorized contexts*' can be meaningfully accepted by the translator's when the language one translates from is not Tamil. Ramanujan observes:

However culture-specific the details of a poem are, poems like the ones I have been discussing interiorize the entire culture. Indeed, we know about the culture of the ancient Tamils only through a careful study of these poems. Later colophons commentaries explore and explicate this and knowledge carried by the poems, setting them in context, using them to make lexicons and charting the fauna and flora of landscapes... When one translates a classical Tamil poem, one is translating also this kind of inter - textual web, the meaning - making web of colophons and commentaries that surround and contextualize the poem. Even when we disagree with them, they give us the terms in which we disagree with them. There is no illusion here of 'the poem itself'.

Neither Pontiero nor Ramanujan nor I believe that no translator can ever present a formulaic solution to the problematic area of culture in translation. A certain strategy to overcome the problem in a particular text cannot or may not necessarily hold good to another text. Moreover, spatiality and temporality also matter

much in the context of culture, which a translator must bear in mind when translating a particular text. There's possibly no solution; there are only hints and suggestions about the reiteration of the problem. A translator, therefore, has to be flexible, dynamic flanked by his/her ability to comprehend the rich nuances of SL culture and TL culture, so that by understanding and interpreting one, he/she can have the competence to create a context of transfer and then transfer the culture-specific items to the TL text. How to create this contextualization is dependent entirely on the translator's competence in making right kind of choices in order to achieve artistic excellence. Paul St-Pierre highlights the problems that culture unleashes to translation as such and suggests some ways out:

The dilemma faced by translators then is the following: obliged by the differences between languages and cultures to make choices as to how to render them, translators are unable to justify the choices they make purely in terms of the text they are translating. The text forces them into the uncomfortable position of having to intervene and choose, whereas the motivation and justification for the choices made come from elsewhere, not from the text but from the society and culture in which translators are immersed.

This is precisely why I am inclined to credit the translator with creativity - even if it is limited.

### **The Context of Creativity:**

A translator's creativity stems his/her ability to *create* a new text in another language. His/her creativity allows him/her to do away with the existing structure – in case of a poem; it can be its stanzaic form. If the translator is unaware of the contemporary reading habits, and translates a 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century poem into English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the manner or style of the SL poem, he/she would be *risking* the translation. When free verse is in the

vogue of contemporary taste, by transplanting the SL text's structure or form, which has become either obsolete or *hackneyed* in the TL context, the translation would appear genuine. Even by free verse translation, one can create a new kind of order, a new kind of movement, a new kind of musicality. This would be a more meaningful exercise than otherwise. In my own translation of Salabega, Bhakta Charan Das, Surya Baladeva Rath, I have digressed from retaining the formal structures of the Oriya poems. If rhymes came automatically in the linguistic flux, I retained them. Similarly, once I tried to translate a few Oriya sonnets into English. I could not keep the line length within fourteen, nor could I maintain Petrarchan or Shakespearean model. I had to abandon the idea of translating those sonnets. It would be interesting to make a mention of Tagore's translation, because it evidences his creativity. Tagore was never proud of his English or English rendering of his poems. In a letter to William Rothenstein, he wrote:

I am not such a fool as to claim an exorbitant price for my English which is a borrowed acquisition coming late in my life. I am sure you remember with what reluctant hesitation I gave up to your hand my manuscript *Gitanjali*, feeling sure that my English was of that amorphous kind for whose syntax a school boy can be reprimanded.

Bikash Chakraborty in a seminal study shows Tagore's intentions behind translating his own poems:

To begin with, the question of fidelity to the original text is perhaps the least aspect of Tagore translation, although the other half of the condition that is, the translated text must look like a text in the target language- was certainly a part of his intention. The question of 'enslavement' to the source text, therefore, does not arise in case of Tagore's translation.

Tagore's experience as a translator of his own poems was described in a long letter written by Tagore himself to Ajit Kumar Chakravarty on March 13, 1913. Tagore wrote about his *creative* role as a translator:

... What I like best is when I do my own poems into English. I find the task gripping to the point of intoxication. In the act of translating into an alien language, I seem to find a new flavour in what I had written originally in Bengali. It is almost like a bride's reception at her husband's home- after the wedding is over. By that time the two have already been united in holy wedlock. But the bride must meet and must make friends with the community to which she must belong henceforth. Only after the assembled guests partake joyfully of the feast from the bride's hand, her union with the husband receives the society's sanction. When I wrote originally in Bengali, it was merely a poet's wedding with his muse. Or, in other words, I did not have any clearly defined objective before me other than my poetry. Now that I have got down to translating my poetry into English, it is like sending forth an invitation to everyone to partake of the feast from my bride's hands.

Therefore, the flavour of this joy is somewhat different from what it was before.... *The fact is, one cannot really and truly render one's thoughts into another language.... What I try to capture in my English translation is the heart and core of my original Bengali.* That is bound to make for a fairly wide deviation. If I were not there to help you out, you must probably find it impossible to identify the original in translation. That, to my mind, is only natural. In her Bengali grab, my muse has to make her appearance bedecked with all her finery and splendour that the resources of the language can command.... But, suppose, that she has to voyage to a far away land on

her honeymoon; unless she discards the major part of her ornaments and jewellery, these may well prove a burdensome encumbrance. Or suppose she was to go out on a pilgrimage. In that case, she must travel light and not trundle her trousseau about...

I have, therefore, assigned myself the task of disadorning my Muse. The traditional symbols of her marital status- the Vermilion mark at the parting of her hair and the simple iron baangle-are still there. Nor has she been converted into a be-gowned memsahib... How can a Bengali bride cast off her bridal veil! Only the surfeit of ornaments has been drastically cut down to give her a new look of simplicity. Therefore, when my English readers shake their heads in violent protest and claim that this transformation cannot be construed as mere translation. I cannot lightly dismiss what they say. Translated, my Muse could at best find accommodation in some wayside inn or her sojourn abroad... But no, she has been made warmly into their homes, not as a visiting stranger but like a friend and a relation.

They have read something in her face which they see only in the face of a blood relation. They refuse to regard her as an outsider: 'she is our own, our kith and kin,' they say.

As my task of translation is oriented towards this aim, I derive a creative joy afresh out of this exercise. (Italics mine)

What startling paradigm shift in terms of the attitude, stance and practice of a translator and that of the poet as a translator of his own poems! A new set of metaphors could be traced from Tagore's enthusiastic letter. That the translated text for the poet-translator is a "*bride*"; and this bride can offer a '*feast*' to the '*community*' to be accepted finally as the legitimate '*wife*' of the author. Tagore



possibly was mistaken to suggest that the bride got warm welcome into the community's home, not as a visiting stranger but like a friend and relation. Tagore's euphoria ended soon, as his letters written to Amiya Chakravarty and Thomas Sturge Moore reveal. Tagore wrote to Amiya Chakravarty on December the 21st 1934:

Glancing through the pieces I found how carelessly I had once translated them. I feel ashamed today that I did not give time enough to notice the extent to which the originals were divested to their intrinsic value in the process of transference to another language.

In another letter written to Amiya Chakravarty on January 06, 1935, Tagore honestly expresses his views against translation, as it is deceptive and admits that he is ashamed of his own translation:

You know when a cow stops giving milk after the death of the calf, a new straw - stuffed shape with the hide of the calf is made so that with the appearance and the smell of it milk trickles out. Translation similarly is the shape of a dead calf which deceives and does not invite. I regret it and am ashamed of it.

To Thomas Sturge Moore, Tagore wrote on 11 June 1935, reiterating this metaphor of deception in another way:

Translation can ... only transfigure dancing into acrobatic tricks, in most cases playing treason against the majesty of the original ... As for myself I ought never to have intruded into your realms of glory with my offerings hastily giving them a foreign shine and certain assumed gestures familiar to you.

Nabanita Dev Sen aptly sums up Tagore's position, in the Western literary scene, even after the Nobel Prize:

Rabindranath only became a temporary craze, but never a serious literary figure in the Western scene. He was intrinsically an outsider to the contemporary literary tradition of the West, and after a short, misunderstood visit to the heart of the West, he again became an outsider.

Salman Rushdie in his *The New Yorker* article observes:

Of India's non-English-language authors, perhaps only the name of the 1913 Nobel Prize - winning Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore would be recognized internationally, and even his work, though still popular in Latin America, is now pretty much a closed book in the United States

Despite the bride's (I mean the translated version of *Gitanjali*) 'honeymooning' trip or 'pilgrimage' abroad, Tagore remains a Bengali poet as is Pablo Neruda, a poet from Chile or José Saramago a novelist from Portugal. Bikash Chakravarty rightly observes:

But it is more interesting to see that Tagore's translations, often distantly related to the source, are governed more by consideration of ideas than by a principle of form and imagery. In other words, bilingualism in the case of Tagore did not mean that he could write either in English or in Bengali as he chose. He remained a Bengali poet all through his life. When he decided to translate into English he did so because he wanted to put across on a metropolitan plane.

The 'choice' of the poet has to be respected, whether he intended to put across his ideas on a metropolitan plane or universal plane. Our non-acceptance of the translated *Gitanjali* - and the ideas in it would amount to a great loss in multiple ways hardly to be compensated. When a poet translated his own poems, he/she looks at

it from one angle, one perspective - i.e. how to re-present the 'core' of the poems in another language. When a translator does it, he/she takes into consideration many aspects of the poems, of the SL culture and TL culture. Pontiero's piece of advice cannot be brushed away:

My own view is that the good translator should be as sensitive as any writer without trying to impose his or her own style.

In Tagore's case, or for that matter in any poet/writer-translator's case, the poet/writer dominates over the poet / writer - translator and hence the lack of desired objectivity leading to the metaphor of the surrogate inanimate calf.

### **Issues unresolved as yet:**

The enormity of the complexities involved in translation as shown by Theodore Savory long ago in his *The Art of Translation* (1957) remains even undiluted today as we do not have a clear cut choice in the list of choices mentioned by Savory:

- A translation should render the words of ray have additions and deletions.

There can not be any either or situation in adhering strictly to one answer, because no translation is final. Every translation bears a tendency to be appropriated by a time-scale. I am disposed to accept that translation is a progression from exposition towards expansion. Any translation, I am inclined to assert at the end of this paper, locates a context and recreates that context, without failing to allude to the location of the translator.

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# Re-Evaluation of Lin Shu (the Chinese Translator): A Systemic Approach to Literary Translation

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Xu Jianzhong

## Abstract

*The 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies provides a new perspective for studies on Lin Shu and his translation — the cultural perspective. The present article, framed within the framework of Lefevere's systemic theory, examines how ideology, patronage and poetics exerted influence on these works. Through qualitative analysis on abundant data, the article comes to the conclusion that Lin Shu and his translated works can be justly and plausibly evaluated by referring to systemic theory. Lin Shu and his translation are greatly influenced by various cultural elements in early modern times. The thesis intends to provide a new dimension for the study and the evaluation of Lin Shu and his versions.*

Lin Shu (1852-1924) was one of the most influential translators in China. Not knowing the ABC of any foreign language, Lin Shu, in collaboration with those who were well versed in foreign languages, translated more than one hundred and eighty works by ninety-eight writers from eleven countries. Among one hundred and sixty-three fictions he translated, approximately forty ones were world classics. It was Lin Shu who first introduced Dickens, Shakespeare, Scott, Irving and other literary legends into China.

**Introduction:**

Despite much infidelity to the original, Lin Shu's versions in classical Chinese opened a window of foreign literature to Chinese and imported new ideas, literary concepts, styles and techniques from the West. These, in turn, played a significant role in the development of Chinese society and the modernization of Chinese literature in particular. It's Lin Shu's translation like a grinder to the original that widened Chinese horizon and resulted in the turbulent tidewater of literary translation since the New Culture Movement (1915-1919). It can be said that Lin Shu initiated regular literary translation in China.

Nevertheless, the criticism of Lin Shu's translation has usually been negative, highlighting its unfaithfulness to the original. Moreover, many a research has focused on the analysis of distortion in his translation to the source text and the discussion has rested upon whether he is worthy of the honor a "*translator*". In this kind of research, the traditional notion of "*faithfulness*" is adopted as the criterion to evaluate Lin Shu's translated works. So his translated works were often criticized. The concise classical language Lin Shu adopted to produce his versions is also one focus of the debate.

All these studies highlight linguistic and literary elements of Lin's translations. The dualistic division between a source language text (SLT) and its target language text (TLT) is employed in the process of research. Nevertheless, these studies focusing on the faithfulness or equivalence can not elucidate the impact of Lin Shu's translated works on Chinese society at the turn of the twentieth century. Though with much infidelity, why did Lin's translations greatly promote the development of early modern China and Chinese literature in particular? Why did Lin Shu distort the original so much?



Obviously, more extra-linguistic or extra-literary factors should be taken into account in the study of Lin Shu's translations. The majority of Lin's versions came into being in early modern times, when China witnessed great changes. In the late Qing Dynasty (about 1890), foreign aggressions brought on serious social crisis in China. Some intellectuals began to realize the inferiority of Chinese culture to Western civilization. As a means of importing Western civilization so as to build up national strength translation became flourishing.

Furthermore, traditional feudal ideology was not the only dominant ideology in the early modern China. National salvation and reform became the central idea of the prevalent ideology. Meanwhile, Chinese literature could not keep pace with Chinese social development. Thus Capitalist Reformists launched "*Literary Revolution*". To respond to the call of social development and "*Literary Revolution*", translated fictions by Lin Shu came into existence.

Evidently, the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translations cannot be interpretative, appropriate, objective and plausible without taking the status quo of China in the late Qing Dynasty into consideration. It gives a hand in uncovering the influence of socio-cultural factors on Lin's translation. This thesis attempts to re-evaluate Lin Shu and his translation from a cultural perspective. Through the examination of the influence of ideology, patronage as well as poetics on Lin's translation in particular, the article tries to elucidate what socio-cultural elements affected Lin's translated works. In brief, the intention of the thesis is to provide another perspective beyond linguistic level for the study and the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translation.

In Lefevere's concept, literary systems do not occur in a void, but in the ideological milieu of an era (Gentzler, 2004: 136). This system is one of society, a constellation of systems. The literary

system is under the control of two mechanisms. One is from the inside of the literary system to keep order within the system. Here the determinant factor is poetics. The other is from the outside of the literary system to “*secure the relations between literature and its environment*” (Hermans, 2004: 126). Here the key term is ideology. Lefevere defined ideology as “*the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time and through which readers and translators approach texts*” (ibid: 126-127). By patronage, Lefevere means “*something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature*” (Lefevere, 2004: 15). Ideology is the main concern of patronage (ibid.). Poetics is “*the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society*” (Hermans, 2004: 127). Lefevere claimed that “*rewritings*” including translations “*are of crucial social and cultural relevance because they determine the ‘image’ of a literary work when direct access to that work is limited or nonexistent*” and “*all rewritings, then, take place under the constraints of patronage, ideology and poetics*” (ibid: 128). In sum, Lefevere thought of ideology, patronage and poetics as more important constraints on translation than linguistic differences.

This article further examines and elaborates how ideology, patronage, and poetics influence Lin’s translations respectively.

### **Ideology and Lin Shu’s Translation**

There’s a certain relationship between ideology and translation, and ideology imposes great impact on translation. (Lefevere, 2004: 41). This part seeks to expose how ideology influences Lin Shu’s translation through the analysis of Lin Shu’s choice of text for translation and the translating method he adopted.

## **The Era Background in Lin Shu's Time**

Lin Shu was born in 1852 and died in 1924. The transgression of the Chinese society was at its peak when he lived. The Opium War in 1840 had plunged the whole nation into the depths of suffering from the exploration and oppression of feudalism and imperialism. Soon after the second Opium War, the Sino-French war and the Sino-Japanese War broke out in succession. In 1900 Beijing was sacked by the armies from the U.K, the U.S, Germany, France, Japan, Italy and Austria. Owing to the corrupt and inept Qing government, these wars all ended in a series of treaties beneficial to the foreign invaders.

At home, Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) was crisis-ridden and its government on the verge of collapse; in the meantime, the world capitalist powers began to invade overseas to plunder rich resources and struggle for the lion's share in the world market. Compared with these capitalist powers, feudalist China was so undeveloped that it couldn't withstand a single blow from foreign invaders. Consequently, Chinese in early modern times had dual burdens, that is, to conduct a set of reforms to make China strong in the world and to resist foreign aggression. This background determined the prevalent ideology of that period.

## **Prevalent Ideology of Chinese Society at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

In general, ideology refers to the mainstream belief, doctrine, or the thought that guides an individual, movement or group of a certain society at a certain time. In light of weak national power and foreign invasion, the mainstream ideology of Chinese society at the turn of the twentieth century was to enlighten the populace and seek to reform (Wang Yougui, 2003: 12). During this

period, the focus of translation in China shifted from science translation to fictional translation owing to the social function of fiction.

## **Ideology and Lin Shu's Translations**

Ideology prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century, to a large extent, influences Lin Shu's choice of text for translation as well as the translating method adopted by Lin Shu. Furthermore, traditional Chinese ideology also has an impact on Lin Shu's manipulation on the original.

### **A. Ideology and Lin Shu's Choice of Text for Translation**

Ideology plays a part in the decision-making and behavior of an individual or a group. The mainstream ideology in early modern China greatly influenced translators in that period, first in what to translate. This part mainly investigates the effect of ideology on translators' choice of text for translation.

It's well acknowledged that translation career in early modern China (about 1930) started with translation of Western science and technology as a by-product of Westernization Movement. Round about the Hundred Day's Reform, reformists cast much attention on translation of Western thinking and literature. In accompany with political reform, they launched "*Literary Revolution*", among which "*Fictional Revolution*" played the major part. Fiction was chosen to be a tool of social reform for its social function instead of its literary or aesthetic values. Fictional translation was first seen as a tool to arouse the populace's patriotism and to enlighten the masses.

Lin Shu's whole life was spent in a society with weak national strength. Reforms and enlightenment are the mainstream

ideas of that society. Intellectuals at that time expressed their patriotism in various ways to make the nation strong. Under the influence of “*learning from the West*” and bringing the social function of novels into play, Lin Shu started his translation career. Just at the end of the nineteenth century, Lin Shu had his Chinese version of *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandra Dumas Fils published. It was the first influential fictional translation in China. To a certain degree, the novel was anti-feudal, that is, against the rigid social stratification, which got a ready response among Chinese youngsters fettered by the feudal ethics. Since 1903, Lin Shu successively translated three novels with wars as the main content. He thought it was the shame of French defeat in Waterloo that inspired French to master knowledge and then made France avoid the loss of national sovereignty (Zhang Juncai, 1992: 98). Lin Shu tried to tell readers that Chinese should be ashamed of national defeats and weakness so as to make efforts for the prosperity of the country. Lin’s Chinese version of *Ivanhoe* was a broad hint for Chinese because at the turn of the twentieth century Chinese had the same experience with Anglo-Saxons. Through his Chinese version of *Le tour de la France par deux enfants* (1907) he hoped that Chinese youngsters could promote industry to build up national strength so as to save the nation from being defeated. He also produced *Ai Si Lan Qing Xia Zhuan* (the Chinese version of *Eric Brighteyes*), *Shi Zi Jun Ying Xiong Ji* (the Chinese version of *The Talisman*) and *Jian Di Yuan Yang* (the Chinese version of *The Betrothed*) to spread martial spirit in China so that Chinese could fight bravely against foreign invaders.

In short, the translated works by Lin Shu greatly reflected the ideology of reform and enlightenment so as to strengthen the nation. As he expressed in preface to *Bu Ru Gui* (a novel translated from Japanese) he translated foreign fictions to waken Chinese populace to save the nation (Guo Yanli 1998: 209).

## **B. Ideology and the Translating Method Employed by Lin Shu**

In the early modern China, translators, including Lin Shu mainly adopted domestication. Lin Shu's choice of translating method is primarily embodied in his constant adaptation of the original to the perceived needs of Chinese culture and the acceptability of his translations to Chinese readers. Here ideology also played a part in Lin Shu's choice of translating method. Lin's intention was to consolidate Chinese culture by applying Western learning.

In early modern times, Chinese intellectuals looked to Western civilization. Translation was prosperous and it attained a primary position in the Chinese literary world. It was usual and predictable for translators during that period to break traditional Chinese conventions and adopt the mode of foreignization. Nevertheless, translators including Lin Shu still conformed to the existing norms and employed the domesticating mode of translation for the most part. This was partly due to the necessity of the social ideology in early modern China as well as the traditional Chinese ideology. Lin Shu produced a domesticated translated texts for Chinese readers' convenience. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, some characters were reformed by Tom's behavior and come to believe in Christianity. However, in its Chinese version, their change is explained from the perspective of morality instead of Christianity. Unlike the original that demonstrates the victory of Christianity, Lin Shu's version shows that the change of Sambo and Quimbo is based on the famous Chinese idea that human beings are born to be kind (Martha P. Y. Cheung, 2003: 17).

Lin Shu's main concern in his translating enterprises was not to be faithful to the original, but to follow the ideology of his times and consolidate the traditional Chinese ideology. Thus he

manipulated the original according to the Chinese readers' demands and expectations. He let foreign writers approach Chinese readers. As a result, he used the domesticating method in translation.

Once a text functions as a tool of ideology, its significance can be distorted so freely that readers can accept the ideology of the author or the translator. The historic context of the text is ignored and the intention of the author is not considered as the central point.

### **The Role of Patronage in the Shaping of Lin Shu's Translation**

Patronage is the most important among the three elements according to Lefevere's systemic theory (Yang Liu, 2001: 49). Lefevere regards ideology and patronage as the two factors that govern a literary system from the outside to ensure that "*the literary system does not fall too far out of step with the other subsystems society consists of.*"(Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004: 123). Lefevere defines patronage as "*something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature*" (Lefevere, 2004: 15).

Patronage consists of three components, among which "*ideological constraints on form and subject matter, economic provision for writers, translators and other REWRITERS, and the bestowing of status on these individuals*"(Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004: 123). Among the three ones, ideology is the primary concern of patronage.

Before the late Qing Dynasty, fiction had been on the periphery of Chinese literary system. Just at the turn of the twentieth century, fiction assumed the central position and attracted the populace's attention. Capitalist reformists are the important patrons of fictional translation in China. They admitted fiction to be the canon of Chinese literary system. And fictional translation as a means of national salvation and mass enlightenment, was flourishing

in China. Under the circumstances, Lin Shu chose fictional translation to contribute to the strengthening of China, and to “boost Chinese patriot aspiration” (ibid: 124)

*Tongcheng* School was opposed to the *bagu* (eight-part) essay (stereotyped writing) with stereotyped form and hollow arguments. The school preferred simple but graceful style and the expression of genuine feelings. The literati of the school were also influential figures in the late Qing society. As a member of *tongcheng* School, Lin Shu produced his translated works by following the doctrines of the school to cater to the taste of the school’s literati and to gain their support. Thus Lin Shu frequently adopted simplification. A case in point is that Lin Shu put eleven Chinese characters to describe the doctor whose gentle character was exaggerated by Dickens in one hundred and twenty-seven words in Chapter I in *David Copperfield*.

“*Fictional Revolution*” in the late Qing Dynasty made the publisher print and sell novels publicly without worrying about being exiled. Talking about novels had become a new social trend (Chen, Pingyuan, 2003: 18). Consequently, large number of people became readers of fiction. In the meantime, the great headway made in the development of the printing industry made it easy to print books and newspapers (ibid: 255). Literary periodicals and newspaper supplements which mushroomed greatly promoted the translation of fiction. From 1902 to 1916, fifty-seven kinds of literary periodicals emerged (ibid: 258). Translation of fiction shared some sixty percent of some periodical’s content. These literary periodicals needed writers and translators to produce more novels. Thus authors of creative fiction came to be highly paid. Lin shu earned such a large amount of money by having his translated works published that his bookroom was called a “*mint*” by his friends. It’s true that Lin Shu quitted pursuing official position through imperial civil examinations due to the political circumstances obtaining in



China. Another undeniable fact was that Lin Shu could live comfortably by translating fictions. Moreover, Lin Shu's translated works were printed again and again, from which Lin Shu benefited a lot financially.

The third element of patronage is concerned with the status component. In early modern China, patronage of fictional translation was differentiated. On the one hand, prevalent social ideology was controlled by capitalist reformists who regarded fiction producers as the persons rendering outstanding service to enlightening the populace. From this point of view, the status of fiction producers including translators was greatly promoted in Chinese literary history. On the other hand, the income of fiction translators was dependant on private publishers, unlike science translators sponsored by the Qing government. Patrons of fictional translation were weak in political and economic power, which led to the humble status of fiction translators. Lin Shu was no exception. When the version of *La Dame aux Camélias* came out, his true name was not printed on the front cover. Instead, it was published in his literary name, Leng Hong Sheng.

### **Poetics and Lin Shu's Translation**

Lefevere conceives literary system as a subsystem within a society which is a conglomerate of systems. A literary system is governed by a dual control mechanism. Besides ideology and patronage, the factors governing the literary system from the outside, poetics keeps order within the literary system (Hermans, 2004: 126). Poetics is "the dominant concept of what literature should be, or can be allowed to be, in a given society" (ibid: 127). This part goes on to probe into the influence inflicted by poetics of Chinese literature on Lin Shu's translations from three aspects: the language system, narration modes and literary style.

## **The Poetics of Chinese Literature in Early Modern Times**

Translators and target readers live in the target culture. The mainstream literary form and popular poetics affect the whole process of literary translation to a large extent (Yang Liu, 2001: 48). Poetics of Chinese literature and popular literary form in early modern China greatly influenced Lin Shu's translation.

### **1.1 A. The Change of Literary Theory in Early Modern China**

Chinese literature in early modern times is a kind of transitional literature. On the one hand, it is the continuation of classical literature; on the other hand, it is the base of modern literature. Great changes occurred in Chinese literature during this period.

In Chinese literary history, literature has always been conceived as a vehicle of Way (*Yi Wen Zai Dao*). Specifically speaking, literature has been a tool to spread Confucian ideas. However, in early modern times the content of "Way" changed.

Just before the Opium War, famous scholars such as Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) and Wei Yuan (1794-1857) paid much attention to the practical knowledge of managing state affairs. They criticized the status quo of Chinese literature in which literature lost contact with reality (Guo Yanli & Wu Runting, 2003: 101). After the Opium War, Wang Tao (1828-1897), Feng Guifen (1809-1874) and other literati stressed the close relationship between literature and reality as well as the social function of literature (ibid: 106). During this period, "Way" was understood to be the practical knowledge which was concerned with the call for saving the nation through industrial development (ibid: 107).

At the turn of the twentieth century, theories of evolution were to the fore in China. Chinese literature was also challenged by evolutionism. Liang Qichao first espoused literary evolutionism. He put “*old literature*” at the opposite position of “*new literature*”. The idea in literary evolutionism was to root out “*old literature*”. The advocating of “*New Fiction*” was only part of the literary evolution. He also held the idea that literature should be an efficient instrument to propagate new thoughts and to transform the old world (ibid: 117). Until then, the “*Way*” conveyed in Chinese literature referred not only to Confucian ideas, but also to ideas of national salvation and democracy.

Lin Shu’s translation followed the principle that literature must be a vehicle of the “*Way*”. He understood “*Way*” as national salvation and feudal ethics as well. A case in point is the Chinese version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. First he treated the novel as a political novel to rouse the Chinese populace to save the country. At the same time, he also educated his readers with traditional Chinese ethics. In order to propagate traditional Chinese morality of repaying a debt of gratitude and to cater to the taste of Chinese readers who were not familiar with doctrines of Christianity, Lin Shu distorted the original.

## 1.2 B. Literary Form Prevalent in Early Modern China

At the end of the nineteenth century, capitalist reformists launched “*Literary Reform Campaign*”. “*Revolution of Fiction*” was one part of it. From then on, fiction challenged the central position of poetry in Chinese literary system and began to have the lion’s share in Chinese literature. The number of readers of fiction was much more than that of other literary forms. This can partly explain why Lin Shu transformed Western dramas into fictions. Hu Shi (1891-1962) thought of Lin Shu as “*the worst offender to Shakespeare*” because he translated dramas by Shakespeare into fictions. During that period, fiction served as a tool of wakening

Chinese populace to save and strengthen the nation. On the contrary, Chinese dramas could not fulfill this duty owing to its slow rhythm and stylized form of artistic performance. Furthermore, the prevalence of fiction made fiction writers and translators get paid while drama producers could not benefit financially. Lin Shu, as a famous fiction translator, could get the highest pay among fiction producers. So Lin Shu would rather change the style of the original.

### **Poetics and Lin Shu's Translations**

Poetics is concerned with linguistic and literary levels in a given culture. To better deal with the relationship between poetics and Lin Shu's translations, this part investigates the influence of poetics first on language system, then on narration modes and finally on literary style.

#### **A. Language System and Translation Strategies Adopted by Lin Shu**

Translation first involves the transformation between two languages. Translated works convey the content of the original through the medium of target language. How a translator successfully transforms the original in the target language is certainly related to the language environment of his time. At the same time, characteristics and limitations of the target language surely dictate a translator's choice for certain strategies.

Classical Chinese had long been the dominant language style in Chinese language system. Fiction translators at the turn of the twentieth century including Lin Shu and Liang Qichao produced their versions in classical Chinese in that classical Chinese could enhance the status of fiction that had been despised by most literati for several centuries. At that time, no one, especially a political

figure or a literary celebrity, would like to read a translated version if it was translated in vernacular Chinese (Hu Shi, 2004: 139).

It's interesting that classical Chinese was, at first, used to spread the new ideas from the West; these ideas then hastened the decline of classical Chinese and the adoption of vernacular Chinese. Most translators at the turn of the twentieth century employed “*sense translation*” due to the discrepancies between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. Lin Shu used a kind of language combining classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese (Xi Yongji, 2000: 342). Lin Shu realized that Western fictions could not be translated unless regulations of classical Chinese were slackened. For the sake of translation, Lin Shu used some spoken vernacular Chinese in his versions. Lin Shu usually employed addition, deletion, substitution and extraction at the cost of faithfulness to the original in order to make convenience for Chinese readers.

In Lin Shu's time, classical Chinese still maintained the dominant position in Chinese literary system. Thus there were obvious marks of classical Chinese in his translated works. When lexical blanks occurred in Lin Shu's translating practice, Lin Shu used loanwords besides deletion. Lin Shu also adopted transliteration to make his translated works have a foreign taste. He directly transliterated those words which had been familiar to Chinese. Sometimes he added notes to those words that were not familiar to Chinese after he transliterated them.

## **B. Narrative Traditions and Lin Shu's Translation**

Besides language system, fiction translation is also subject to literary traditions in a target culture. Traditional Chinese narrative techniques have impact on Lin Shu's translation. This part will investigate this kind of influence from three aspects, namely, narrative point of view, narrative time, and narrative structure.

Owing to the influence of *huaben* (script for story-telling in Song and Yuan<960-1368> folk literature in China), Chinese classical fictions were written in omniscient narration and from the third person's point of view (ibid: 73). In other words, Chinese classical fictions are all told by an omniscient storyteller. However, it is usual for Western fictions to be narrated from the first person's point of view. So Lin Shu, in his translating, changed the first person's into the third person's.

Traditional Chinese literature is characteristic of lineal and chronological narration. The narration in chronological order can tell a story from the beginning to the end, to which Chinese readers were accustomed in early modern China. On the contrary, flashback and insertion are often used in Western fictions. Lin Shu dealt with flashback or insertion in Western novels by adding some information to indicate the narrative time for readers.

The narrative structure of Chinese classical novels basically focuses on characters and plots, but the narrative structure of Western fictions emphasizes not only characters and plots but also settings. Chinese readers in early modern China were fond of reading novels with cleverly structured and complicated plots. They paid little or no attention to descriptions of natural environment or the characters' psychology (ibid: 109). Considering readers' reading habit, translators at that time including Lin Shu usually deleted descriptions of settings which Chinese readers did not expect to read.

### **C. The influence of Traditional Chinese Literary Style on Lin Shu's Translations**

In early modern China, the inner structure of the Chinese literary world changed a lot. As the result of this change, fiction

assumed the central position in the Chinese literary system, which made it possible for Chinese fiction to draw upon from other traditional literary styles. Lin Shu borrowed much from Chinese jokes in producing his translated works.

## **Conclusion**

Studies on Lin Shu's translation, confined to the principle that a target text should be faithful to its source text, have been mainly conducted at the linguistic and literary levels without considering extra-linguistic factors. These studies can not completely interpret the distortion in Lin Shu's translation and its impact on Chinese society and literature.

On the basis of the Polysystem theory, Lefevere proposed his '*systemic theory*', which in sum states that poetics, ideology and patronage enormously influence a translated text. These three factors affected Lin Shu's choice of text for translation, the translating method he adopted, the language style and the narration modes he employed.

Lefevere's systemic theory provides a cultural perspective to evaluate Lin Shu and his translated corpus. Compared with previous research into Lin's translated works at the linguistic level, systemic approach seems to yield more results. The present article is a tentative study in the application of systemic approach to Translation Studies and intends to serve as a milestone on the road towards a more reasonable and feasible study of Lin's translation. Furthermore, the article provides another dimension for translation criticism on the evaluation of Lin Shu and his translated works.

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# The Performability and Speakability Dimensions of Translated Drama Texts

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Suh Joseph Che

## Abstract

*This paper highlights the divergent views drama translation scholars hold on the issues of performability and speakability in translated drama. It argues and asserts that since drama is essentially rooted in a given culture, instead of seeking to determine universals of performability in all drama texts indistinctly, the researcher could attain more pertinent findings whose syntheses and applicability could be more readily and concretely related to the given culture, period and drama type. Finally, it posits that drama translators and scholars could achieve more useful and concrete results by examining closely and analyzing what directors and performers in each culture/region actually do to the text for it to be performable or speakable in conformity with the norms and conventions of the given culture/region.*

Drama translation scholars have been interested in the specific characteristics of drama which distinguish this genre from the other literary genres and are thus expected to have an incidence on its translation. Prominent amongst such characteristics are performability and speakability. These two notions, often regarded as fundamental to and characteristic of drama, and which represent the gestic/action and oral/acoustic dimensions of the drama text, have animated discussion amongst drama translation scholars over

the past three decades and indeed continue to sustain active debate amongst them.

As Bassnett (1991:99) has pointed out, in the twentieth century, the notion of a gestural dimension that is seen as inherent in the language of a theatre text has become an issue of considerable importance. And this is evident from the fact that many scholars and theoreticians (cf. Wellwarth 1981, Ubersfeld 1978, Elam 1980, Helbo 1987, Bassnett 1991, Moravkova 1993, Aaltonen 2000, Upton 2000) have successively, over the years, attempted to define the nature of the relationship between the verbal text on the page and the gestic dimension somehow embedded in the text waiting to be realized in performance.

Susan Bassnett stands out as one of the scholars who have consistently given this aspect in-depth and critical thought (cf. Bassnett 1980, 1991, 1998). The first issue raised by this eminent scholar with respect to the notion of performability is that of its definition. In effect, she asserts that:

“The term ‘performability’ is frequently used to describe the undescribable, the supposedly existent concealed gestic text within the written. [...] It has never been clearly defined, and indeed does not exist in most languages other than English. Attempts to define the ‘performability’ inherent in a text never go further than generalized discussion about the need for fluent speech rhythms in the target text. What this amounts to in practice is that each translator decides on an entirely ad hoc basis what constitutes a speakable text for performers. There is no sound theoretical base for arguing that ‘performability’ can or does exist (Bassnett 1991:102).”

Several years later, still rejecting the term performability altogether, she declares, “*it seems to me a term that has no credibility, because it is resistant to any form of definition*” (Bassnett 1998:95). In stating that in practice what this amounts to is that each translator acts on an entirely ad hoc basis she does not seem to sufficiently take into consideration the two important factors of general context and situational context surrounding any dramatic text or its translation. Interestingly, as she herself (cf. Bassnett 1991:109) points out, theatre anthropology has established the fact that all forms of theatre vary according to cultural conventions and what needs to be done in each case is to investigate and determine the elements that constitute performance in different cultures. To corroborate this, it can even be argued and asserted further here that in addition to investigating and determining the elements that constitute performance in different cultures, such elements should also be specifically determined for each of the drama types. For instance, African drama, South of the Sahara, alone comprises many types. There are sacred dramas whose subjects and aims are religious. Sacred dramas are in turn sub-divided into ancestral or myth plays, masquerades, plays by age groups and cults, rituals, etc. There are also secular dramas distinct from sacred dramas and include sub-types such as civic dramas, dance and song dramas, etc. Just from this brief and inexhaustive inventory of drama types in the sub-Saharan African region, it is evident that African drama is very varied and complex. It is also evident that each of these types of drama has its own distinctive performability and speakability characteristics which clearly differentiate it from the other types. In this connection, Melrose (1988, in Bassnett 1991:110), theatre analyst and translator, has argued that *gestus* is culture-bound and cannot be perceived as a universal. In research conducted and which involved working with a multicultural group in workshop conditions, she discovered that the *gestic* response to written texts depends entirely on the cultural formation of the individual performer, affected by a variety of factors, including theatre

convention, narrative convention, gender, age, behavioural patterns, etc.

It is Bassnett's very assertive and categorical position with respect to the notion of performability as highlighted in the above quotations that have probably prodded and led other scholars to equally accord the notion in-depth reflection. Espasa (2000:49-61) for instance, and in contrast to Bassnett, examines and analyzes the notion of performability from textual, theatrical and ideological perspectives. In an attempt to clearly circumscribe the notion which Bassnett considers to be "*resistant to any form of definition*", she starts by synthesizing the terminology related to it. She thus asserts that, "*from a textual point of view, performability is often equated with 'speakability' or 'breathability', i.e. the ability to produce fluid texts which performers may utter without difficulty*" (Espasa 2000:49). Similarly, she points out that performability is synonymous to and interchangeable with theatricality, playability, actability and theatre specificity (cf. Espasa 2000:49-50). Having related all these terms to the notion of performability she asserts that performability is firstly conditioned by textual and theatrical practices, and that the following definition of theatricality by Pavis is perfectly applicable to performability:

"Theatricality does not manifest itself [...] as a quality or an essence which is inherent to a text or a situation, but as a pragmatic use of the scenic instrument, so that the components of the performance manifest and fragment the linearity of the text and of the word (Pavis 1983, in Espasa 2000:52)."

The above view of theatricality or performability, running counter to Bassnett's view on the same notion, Surely opens up the debate on this issue. In effect, instead of viewing performability as

the “*gestic dimension embedded in the text, waiting to be realized in performance*” (Bassnett 1991:99), Pavis and Espasa consider that it is not a quality or an essence inherent to the text but rather a pragmatic use of the scenic instrument. According to this “*pragmatic use of the scenic instrument*”, one cannot therefore talk about an abstract, universal notion of performability and this is bound to vary depending on the ideology and style of presentation of the company or the cultural milieu. It can thus be said that Bassnett’s (1991:102) preoccupation with the notion that “*if a set of criteria ever could be established to determine the ‘performability’ of a theatre text, then those criteria would constantly vary, from culture to culture, from period to period and from text type to text type*” need not be regarded as negative but could rather be considered a characteristic of drama and a constraint manifested by this genre which should be taken into consideration in its treatment by the drama translator.

Since drama is essentially rooted in a given culture, it could further be argued and asserted that universal applicability of a set of criteria established to determine performability need not be the main issue. Instead the focus could be on the predictability of such established criteria for a given culture, period or drama type. For instance, in the Cameroonian context and more specifically in the culture of the Bafut tribe for example, the immediate concern of the researcher could first of all be to establish performability criteria in Bafut drama and to determine the predictability and possible generalization of such criteria to all types of Bafut drama. Only subsequently could attempts be made to further extend the generalization to the entire country, i.e. to Cameroonian drama as a whole drawn from all the other diverse regions and tribes of this country. And pursuing his investigation still further, the researcher could keep broadening the circle, depending on the results obtained, to include the entire African continent and possibly the world. In other words, instead of seeking to determine universals of performability in all drama texts indistinctly, the researcher could attain more pertinent findings whose syntheses and applicability

could be more readily and fruitfully related to the culture, period and drama type in question. Obviously, such a case by case approach as advocated here seems to confirm and justify the prevailing situation which Bassnett (1991:105) rather highlights with disapproval whereby “*most of the existing literature on theatre translation consists of case studies of individual translations and translators, translators’ prefaces [...]*”.

Espasa (2000:49-56) also further opens up perspectives on performability by asserting that performability involves negotiation and by placing theatre ideology and power negotiation at the heart of performability. For her, performability is thus shaped by consideration of status and the ‘*crucial*’ question from this perspective then becomes who has power in a theatre company to decide what is performable and what is ruled out as unperformable. However, analyses of the distinct roles of the drama translator and the director as well as the drama communication chain seems to suggest that the above question is not that ‘*crucial*’ or does not even arise as it is evident that such power naturally and logically devolves upon the director and the company, and not the translator except the latter, after effecting the translation, were to go on to direct or perform the play himself.

The issue of the performability and speakability of the drama text may not be simply discarded as advocated by Bassnett (1991, 1998). In effect, as prominent Cameroonian playwright and scholar Bole Butake (1988:202) has pointed out, “*the ultimate aim of writing a play is usually to see it performed even though it is not always that a play script which is even published finds its way on stage for a number of reasons*”. In the same vein Makon (1988:262) asserts that:

Un texte théâtral qui n’a pas la possibilité d’être  
représenté scéniquement est semblable à un monde



imaginaire, à un projet (aux grandes idées peut-être) dormant dans un tiroir. Il sera lu, relu, mais pas vécu. Il ne sera jamais un ‘moment de vie partagé’. Aussi, un créateur théâtral qui se veut constructeur, écrit-il dans la perspective d’une réalisation concrète pour un public. [A play that cannot be staged is like an imaginary world, a scheme (perhaps with lofty ideas) lying in a drawer. It will be read and reread but not lived. It will never be a ‘moment of shared life’. Thus, a playwright who wants to be constructive writes with the aim of seeing the play actually performed for a particular audience.]

In this regard, Totzeva (1999:81) has rightly described the play as “*a text conceived for possible theatrical performance*” and she too has examined the issue of performability or theatrical potential of the dramatic text from a semiotic perspective stating that “*in recent semiotic approaches, theoreticians refer to theatricality as a relation between dramatic text and performance*”. Theatrical potential is understood to mean the semiotic relation between the verbal and nonverbal signs and structures of the performance. She goes on to assert that:

“In a dramatic text this semiotic relation is already to some extent present as a concept through given theatrical codes and norms, although the performance does not need to follow it. [...] Theatrical potential (TP) can be seen as the capacity of a dramatic text to generate and involve different theatrical signs in a meaningful way when it is staged. [...]. The problem for translation as an interlingual transformation of the dramatic text is therefore how to create structures in the target language which can provide and evoke an integration of nonverbal theatrical signs in a performance. (Totzeva 1999:81-82).”

The form of the play itself thus demands dramaturgical capacity to work in several dimensions at once, incorporating visual, gestural, aural and linguistic signifiers into the text. As Brater (1994) points out in his book *The Drama in the Text*, much of the material in drama often makes more sense when spoken and heard than when simply read and silently digested. It can thus be argued that when a play is written it contains the characteristics/qualities of performability and speakability which the drama translator strives to identify and to preserve in the translation, even when, for reasons deemed justified or not, such characteristics are subsequently subjected to various manipulations by the other persons intervening downstream in the drama communication chain. In effect, it is a well known reality that the original drama text itself as well as its translation are also affected by interpretation on the part of the director, actors and staging devices which influence the mood and atmosphere of the production, such as stage type, pace/movement, light/colour, costume, mask/make-up, music, etc. In this regard, Bassnett (1998:101) has also pointed out that there are a whole range of different ways of reading of the drama text: the director's reading which may involve a process of decision making and the constraints and possibilities offered by the text would be foregrounded in his/her interpretation of it; the actor's reading which would focus on a specific role such that an individual's role is highlighted and other roles perceived as secondary or instrumental; the designer's reading which would involve a visualization of spatial and physical dimensions that the text may open up; the dramaturgical reading and readings by any other individual or group involved in the production process; the rehearsal reading which is subsequent to initial readings and will involve an aural, performance element through the use of paralinguistic signs such as tone, inflexion, pitch, register, etc. It can thus be posited that by paying particular attention to and by examining closely how these different persons of the drama communication chain effect the various readings and by integrating these reading strategies into his own reading and translation

strategies, the drama translator will offer to the target language director(s) and actors (who in effect constitute the first consumers of his translation before it gets to the audience watching it on stage) a translated version of the play which will, to a large extent, meet their performability expectations.

At yet another level, it can also be asserted that the drama translator's strategies and translational behaviour should equally be informed by the prevailing theatrical practices in the target culture given that these practices often differ from one culture to another. In the Cameroonian context, for instance, directors and actors often introduce or resort to theatrical practices not necessarily built into the play by the playwright. In general, Cameroonian theatrical practices are identified by certain main characteristics. First, there is the introduction by directors of certain characters, who, often feature regularly and prominently in their performances. For instance, there is the narrator/commentator whose role is to render the play in a lively manner and to constantly sustain the attention of the audience. In most plays this character constitutes the heart of the action. He evolves both on the stage and in the hall amongst the audience. He thus serves as a physical bridge between the imaginary world of the actors and the real world of the audience thereby eliminating the barrier that separates the two distinct spaces traditionally reserved for actors and the audience in Western theatres (cf. Doho, 1988:70-1).

Another regular and prominent character introduced in Cameroonian theatrical performances is the witchdoctor. René Philombe (in Doho, 1988:76) notes that:

“Qu’il s’agisse de comedies on de tragedies, le sorcier-querisseur et diseur de bonne aventure Est Presque toujours present. Dans 70/100 des pieces de theatre comerounaises on le voit apparaitre et jouer un role important. [Whether in comedies or tragedies, the

witchdoctor and teller of tales of good fortune is almost always present. He features and plays an important role in 70% of Cameroonian play.]”

From the textual point of view or from that of staging, the Cameroonian dramatist or director always distinguishes this character from the others by making use of certain signifiers. First, there is the costume, which is usually made of Hessian and old blackened synthetic bags. Then there is the hair-style of long unkempt plaits. Both the costume and hair-style are completed with other apparel such as animal skin and accessories such as cowries, animal horns, snakes, etc. The witchdoctor’s appearance is designed to conjure up something strange, unusual and out of the ordinary. Thirdly, there is the speech which comprises two dimensions, depending on whether he is talking to visible or invisible beings, in which case it is either ordinary speech or incantations respectively. If incantations, the language is symbolic and can only be decoded by those who have been initiated into it, since it is such language that he uses to communicate with spirits in the invisible world. The incantations are usually poetic and onomatopoeic and take the form of songs.

Apart from the introduction of the narrator/commentator and the witchdoctor in Cameroonian plays, a third characteristic of this drama and theatrical performances is the introduction of songs and dancing by the dramatists themselves or by the directors. Anyone travelling across the Cameroonian national territory will notice that there is no event in the life of the Cameroonian that is not accompanied by singing and dancing. In the Bafut, Bamileke, Bassa, Bulu, Douala and other tribes the Cameroonian sings and dances in times of joy and in times of sorrow. One can therefore understand how difficult it is for the Cameroonian playwright or the director not to take into account this reality in his/her dramatic composition(s) or performances as the case may be.

The fourth characteristic of Cameroonian drama and theatrical performances resulting from the introduction of the narrator/commentator and the witchdoctor is the bridging of the gap between actors and spectators. In the Western classical set-up the theatre is composed of two distinct areas: the stage and the hall. The hall is for the audience, for those watching the play, while the stage is the space for the actors where the micro universe of the play is reconstituted. There is usually a barrier that separates the two spaces. In Cameroonian theatrical practices on the contrary, there is no barrier separating the actors from the audience such that the narrator/commentator or the witchdoctor can freely move from the stage to the audience in the hall, or for the audience to freely move to the stage and join in the singing and dancing. Gaining inspiration from the oral tradition, Cameroonian dramatists and directors therefore strive to eliminate the communication gap between actors and the audience such that the latter not only watches and listens but also actively participates in the drama event.

The unity of place of action as it obtains in Western classical drama is also violated in Cameroonian drama and theatrical performances, particularly as in their dramatic compositions or performances most Cameroonian playwrights or directors tend to be fluid in the use of space and time and the plays when performed may sometimes go on for hours on end. In this connection, Mbassi (1988:109) has pointed out that:

“Il y a lieu de retenir que la tendance générale dans le théâtre Camerounais est celle non du lieu unique, mais celle d’une géographie éclatée. L’action, mobile selon les événements se déroule sur une scène multispaciale et renie du coup toute parenté avec la scène classique. [It is worth noting that the general tendency in Cameroonian drama is not that of unity of place but that of several locations of place of action. The action,

which is mobile and shifting depending on the events, takes place on a scene made up of several locations and has nothing in common with the classical scene].”

It is thus evident from the above characteristics and as asserted by Doho (1988:80) that:

“Le personnage de sorcier est une donnée dramaturgique importante sur le plan de l’écriture et de la représentation. Il entre donc, tout comme le conteur, l’espace scénique éclatée, etc. dans la grammaire dramaturgique que proposent les dramaturges Camerounais. [The character of the witchdoctor is one of the important dramatic elements in dramatical composition and performance. Just like the narrator/commentator, the multiple locations of the action, etc., he is an integral part of the dramatic language that Cameroonians dramatists present to the public.]”

At a more practical and pragmatic level, therefore, it may be argued and posited that instead of continuing to spill much ink on the much debated issue of the performability and speakability of translated drama (i.e. whether or not the notions should be discarded, whether or not performability can or does exist, the difficulty and even the impossibility of determining and transferring this dimension to the target text, etc.) drama translators and scholars could achieve more useful and concrete results by examining closely and analyzing (with respect to the various reading strategies and theatrical practices) what directors and performers in each culture/region actually do to the text for it to be performable or speakable and for it to be effectively performed in conformity with the norms and conventions of the given culture/region. From this perspective, they could then be in a better position to determine and describe for a given drama type within a given culture/region the

criteria that render the drama text performable. Corresponding guiding principles and strategies could then be outlined for the drama translator based on such established criteria.

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# Translation as Empowerment

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Vijaya Guttal

## Abstract

*The article emphasizes the need for a feminist translation of texts which rather creates meaning than reproduce the original. On the other hand the paper encourages feminist translations to give a distinguished description of women issues, particularly, child widows. With the illustrations of two prominent Kannada novels, being translated, the article exemplifies the need for feminist translations which acts as a preponderant element in breaking the ties of male cultural hegemony in the society.*

In so far as translation is considered as a mode of engagement with literature, it involves not merely linguistic and technical issues, but goes on to create new pathways for cultural communication. Scholars have recognized the curious connection between translation studies and feminist theory as both have been assigned secondary status in the field of literary studies. As Sherry Simon comments, *“The hierarchical authority of the original over the reproduction is linked with imagery of masculine and feminine...”* (1996:10). Simon also says that both are tools for a critical understanding of the difference as it is represented by language (1996:8). The trajectory of the growth of translation Studies is said to closely parallel the development of feminist history in the 70s. N. Kamala points out, *“This obviously led to the practice of what is now termed ‘Feminist Translation’”* (A. Rahman ed. 2002:34). It may be observed that in the post-colonial context both have broken the bounds of secondary status and gained new voice through their greater relevance in the modern world. Feminist translation foregrounds the question of the secondary status both of

translation and women in society while perceiving translations as projections of equivalence.

As Helene Cixous points out in “*Women’s liberation goes/starts through language*” (A. Rahman 2002:30), if women are to express themselves, they are forced to resort to the language of male discourse which is strongly patriarchal in nature. Barbara Godard writes, “*Translation in its figurative meanings of transcoding and transformation, is a topos in feminist discourse used by women writers to evoke the difficulty of breaking out of silence in order to communicate new insights into women’s experiences and their relation to language*” (A. Rahman 2002:29). Women writers are evolving new strategies to challenge or subvert the dominant patriarchal ideology in order to represent other images of female sexuality. Translation is one such strategy that represents women’s experience extending the idea of ‘*dialogue*’ between languages in the widest sense. It opens up communication and helps to break the silence and begins to speak to others. As is well known, all acts of translation are rooted in politics. The feminist translations attempt to “*map the conversion of submission into resentment, resentment into resistance and resistance into representation*” (Brinda Bose 2002: xix). The articulation of women’s experience in itself becomes a site of resistance and when women’s experience finds representation through the translational mode, this challenge has implications for rewriting the hegemonic history. Having joined force with women’s writing, translation becomes an important strategy of articulation and a powerful site of resistance, empowering the silenced and the dispossessed.

Feminist translation attempts to question the notion of authority and patriarchy by projecting the presence of women who have been silenced in language and in society. While acknowledging the political and interpretative dimensions of feminist translation, women translators become active participants in the creation of meaning. As N. Kamala records, their intervention takes many forms

which Luise Von Flotow elaborates as “*supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and ‘hijacking’*” (A. Rahman ed. 2002:37). Supplementing is a strategy that compensates for language differences especially to make the woman visible; feminist translators provide proper perspectives of the subject in their interpretative prefaces and footnotes, and ‘*hijacking*’ is a term, which is being used for feminist translations. Feminist translators attempt all strategies to make language speak for them and even attempt to recover old terms with negative connotation by turning them into positive tropes. Terms like ‘*Virago*’ or ‘*Kali*’ have come to stand for creative energy.

It is clear that “*resistance*” is the fulcrum of feminist activism in contemporary India and resentment and rebellion are read into representations that defy traditional gender norms. Translation of women’s writing becomes a gendered intervention that forms part of the process of interrogation of patterns and norms that have been traditionally patriarchal. Every new translation, which recreates feminine images, reinforces the history of resistance and translations that recover narratives of silenced voices through the act of ‘*remembering*’ form part of feminist historiography. Feminist translations bridge the interlanguage space in a true sense, and make expressions of resistance available to readers outside one’s own language, and help to construct a female tradition for ourselves. The translation of *Phaniyamma* and *Breaking Ties*, two Kannada novels into English, acts as a message transmitter as these are two powerful narratives of women’s exploitation in the traditional Indian social context. *Phaniyamma*, written originally by M.K. Indira, an early progressive writer of the second generation of women writers in Kannada, and *Breaking Ties*, originally titled *Chandragiriya Tiradalli*, by Sara Abubackar, a progressive Muslim woman writer of the modern period, document women’s experience of two different periods and two different communities but sharing across the barriers a common heritage of oppression. The novels strongly portray the plight of women caught in the coils of rigid social and

religious traditions which are overtly patriarchal. The two novels share deeper correspondences in so far as they reconstruct sages of pan and outrage where the feminine sensibilities are ruthlessly ground down in the name of tradition.

The sensitive translations of *Phaniyamma* by Tejaswini Niranjana and *Chandragiriya Tiradalli* by Vanamala Vishwanatha as *Breaking Ties* into English help to reinforce the 'binding vine' of female tradition in its struggle against the mechanisms of patriarchy and make way for social awareness and change. The translations like the original novels join hands with the efforts to prioritize and promote gender equality.

*Phaniyamma*, published by Kali for Women, and organization known for its promotion of women's writing, is a narrative that reconstructs the story of a real life character *Phaniyamma*, a child widow and an ancestor of the author who lived during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Phaniyamma's* story is a rediscovery within a fictional framework of a Brahmin child-widow's fate at the time and it raises questions highlighting the marginal gendered positions. The religious forces postulated the subordinate position of woman in all walks of life and denied her an identity, reducing her to be merely a tool in the hands of man for the fulfillment of the traditional Indian values of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Her fulfillment was seen in the fulfillment of the values of obedience, subservience, service, sacrifice and tolerance. *Phaniyamma* reflects the rigid social and religious practices and hypocrisies, which held the colonial Indian society in its clutches and which became the principal source of the oppression of women. In recreating the history of *Phaniyamma*, the novelist represents both her heroine's conformity in the given circumstance and also her silent resistance, which is the result of her instinctive awareness of the plight of women in general.

*Phaniyamma*, the central character of the novel, becomes a widow at the age of nine, as her boy-husband *Nanjunda* dies of

snakebite. The tradition bound elders of the house helplessly connive with the elder of the village who represent the patriarchal power structures, to reduce the child to the state of a widow, wearing a white sari, after breaking her bangles and wiping her kumkum. Unaware of her tragic fate, the nine year old *Phaniyamma* cried because her beautiful bangles were broken. At the age of fourteen when she begins to menstruate, they arrange to shave off her head and make her a 'madi' (cleansed) woman and force her to join the group of old widows at home. In one sense, life comes to an end for her. Doors are closed on all the ordinary joys of life which others live. From then on, life is one long tale of constant toil and suffering as it is for all widows, broken only by her inner awakening. Although she assists at the innumerable marriages, childbirths, festivals and feasts celebrated in their joint family, she herself lives on one meal a day, thought to be proper for a widow. And in later life, she reduces it to only two bananas. She is a spectator of the incessant procession of life in her ancestral home of which she is not a participant. Yet she grows inwardly and silently questions the blind beliefs, vindictive religious practices perpetrated on women and the hypocrisy of the male society, which imposes restrictions only on women in the name of morality and purity while keeping themselves out of it. The gentle *Phaniyamma*, though silenced and relegated by the repressive society, finally grows into a person of great moral strength and creates an identity for herself. She becomes a rallying point for other women in their trying times. She opposes the shaving of head of another young widow in her desire to stop the repetition of another tragedy like her own; although a Brahmin, she delivers the child of an untouchable mother and reaches out to other women in various ways. At the center of the narrative, female consciousness is visualized at multiple levels. Though shackled by patriarchy yet it receives strength through bonding.

*Phaniyamma's* tragedy began when she had gone to the Tirthahalli fair with the whole family after her marriage. In the darkness of the evening some thief had cut her plait to steal the gold

ornament she was wearing in her hair. It was an ill omen and the family, terribly upset, cut short its trip and returned home. Soon after they learnt that *Phaniyamma's* boy –husband *Nanjunda* died of snake bite. Her father *Tammayya* went to *Sringeri Math*, the religious center, for advice. The Swami's unequivocal decision was communicated to him, "*Since the girl is a child, remove the signs of marriage on the eleventh day and have her wear a white sari. Don't touch her hair. She shouldn't show her face to anyone until she menstruates. Nor can she perform any 'madi' task. The fourth day after she menstruates, her hair must be shaved off and she must be made to take up 'madi' for the rest of her life. If these instructions aren't followed to the letter the entire household will be excommunicated*" (p.46)

The patriarchal hegemony left no choice for the family and they reduce her to the status of a child-widow toiling away in the dark birthing room till she reached puberty. At 14 when she was blossoming into youth, her head was shaved off. From then on, until she dies, "*she would have to eat one meal a day and live with a shaven head*" (p.49).

The inhumanity of the social practice and the tragedy of the child widow, robbed of a normal life are juxtaposed in the narrative with the manner in which *Phaniyamma* is still able to create an identity for herself in spite of her misfortune. Gentle by nature, she shares her meager evening snack with the children of the house and lives an extremely austere life. Once, tired of periodic sitting before the barber half naked for head shaving, she applies the ummathana fruit juice to her head. She had heard it caused hair fall. The next day all her hair fell off releasing her from the necessity of facing the barber.

By chance traditional Brahmin woman of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, she instinctively reaches out to all women in pain and



suffering, thus forming a binding vine of love and affection. *Phaniyamma* creates for herself an image of quiet strength.

The feminist discourse at the center of the novel is obviously the dominant motive for the choice of its translation and *Tejaswini Niranjana* won the Sahitya Akademi award for her translation of *Phaniyamma* in 1993. Her rendering is a good instance of feminist translation that supplements the language and ‘hijacks’ the narrative. M.K. Indira puts her text in the fictional framework, revealing her real life connection with her protagonist *Phaniyamma* only in the last paragraphs of the novel. The translator shifts these last paragraphs to the beginning of the novel and by doing so she invests the text with a conscious feminist project. At the beginning of the novel, she places the first three paragraphs of the translation in italics, which appears almost like the translational manifesto. The original text begins with the evocation of the colonial social context of a remote rural area. It thus locates the text within a certain socio-historical framework, arousing in the reader expectations other than feminist concerns. Whereas *Niranjana’s* translational strategy of shifting the last paragraphs of the original in which the novelist reveals her connection with *Phaniyamma* through her mother *Banashankari* establishes at the very outset the theme of female bonding and the translator’s intentions of tracing the female tradition through its mothers and grandmothers. The creation of feminist historiography is a strategy that actively operates throughout the novel. This strategic shifting ‘hijacks’ the narrative, which projects *Phaniyamma* as one who silently offers resistance to the society that had silenced her, by inwardly questioning the double standards of patriarchy and its sanction of inhuman practices against women. She is seen here not merely as a victim but also as someone who draws strength from her suffering to reach out to other suffering women, and creates an identity for herself.

The translator creates an atmosphere of Indian domesticity and at the same time, maintains the individuality of the text by

preserving the flavour of the specificities of local customs, culture and language. The translation dismantles the male discourse by supplementing the language difference through culture-specific terms like ‘*madi*’, ‘*atte*’, ‘*happala*’, ‘*sandige*’, ‘*mangalasutra*’ etc. There are also culture-specific terms like ‘birthing room’. The translation conveys effectively moments of shared communion characteristic of female experience as when *Phaniyamma* consoles *Dakshayini*, another child widow, supports and encourages *Premabai*, a young Christian midwife and helps an untouchables’ daughter in a difficult delivery. As N. Kamala puts it, “*Laying the cards on the table right at the outset is the main characteristic of feminist translation*” (A. Rahman ed. 2002:39). Niranjana’s translation of *Phaniyamma* clearly projects a feminist discourse right at the outset and contributes remarkably to the creation of a female tradition. In recalling the words of *Phaniyamma*’s brother “*that no other woman like his sister Phani had ever been born or would be in the future*” (p.1), the text is not really playing up to the dominant male ideology and in the absence of any overt rebellion, nor is it reinforcing it. On the contrary, the translation successfully represents the gestures of defiance and subversion implicit in it.

Sara Abubackar, the author of the novel *Chandragiriya Tiradall* (= On the banks of the Chandragiri), is a first generation Muslim woman writer in Kannada who successfully voiced the helpless plight of Muslim women subordinated and oppressed by the patriarchal hegemony at social and religious levels. She speaks on behalf of the countless Muslim women who remain voiceless victims of male ideology and male interpretations of the religious scriptures. In the preface to the 1995 edition of the novel she earnestly urges for an impartial study and reinterpretation of religious prescriptions. *Chandragiriya Tiradalli* foregrounds the Muslim woman’s burden of inequality in social and religious spheres. The fictional narrative represents the tragic plight of the central character Nadira, the helpless and young daughter of an egotistical and dictatorial father. It is about Mohammad Khan, who

does not hesitate to ruin his own daughter's marriage for selfish reasons. Because his son-in-law is unable to give him money when he needs, he takes it as an affront and takes revenge by separating the loving couple through *talaaq* (=divorce). On the other hand, Rashid arranges to have their child kidnapped in order to force Nadira to return to him. It breaks Nadira's heart. She can neither defy her father nor can she give up her husband. Mahammad Khan who terrorizes the women in the house in the end realizes Nadira's misery, and is ready for the reunion of the separated couple. But this time, religion stands in their way. As per the religious code, Nadira can reunite with Rashid, her husband, only if she goes through the ritual of marriage with another man and gets a *talaaq* from him. Though it terrifies her, Nadira in her desire to go back to her husband and child reluctantly consents. But the sight of the man with whom she is to spend one night so fills her heart with terror and despair that she goes and ends her life in the pond near the mosque. The patriarchal order works itself through the institutions of family, society and religion systematically and Nadira defied it in the only way in which she could.

*Breaking Ties* is clearly a feminist text and projects the female body as the site of struggle. The novel provides a glimpse of the Muslim woman's world and gives expression to the subaltern experience of oppression of the poor, uneducated Muslim women victimized by Muslim patriarchy.

Mahammad Khan's brutal treatment of his child-wife on the first night is heart-rending and more so because the father and the *moulvi* support Khan and not the scared child-wife. "*Scolding and spanking her, Fatimma's father had carried her to Khan's room himself and consoled him!*"(p.5). Equally powerful is Nadira's predicament that reflects the psychological trauma arising from the conflict at the center of which again there is the female body. Mahammad Khan who ruins Nadira's marriage and wants her to

marry a wealthy old husband the second time, stands for the masculine principle that negates the feminine totally.

Vanamala Viswanatha, the translator, provides a fairly informative introduction locating the novel and comments on *Chandragiriya Tiradalli* as a woman's narrative. She employs the modern techniques of translation to 'represent' the Muslim woman's world and it may be observed how the translation becomes the agent of voicing subaltern consciousness. The translator explains in the introduction the change of the title to 'Breaking Ties': "*The title could have been translated into English as "On the Banks of Chandragiri" to reflect its Kannada source. But since it sounded too literary to reflect the political edge of the book and somewhat familiar....*" (2001: xix). She goes on to say, "*After a prolonged discussion on the implications of the title, we selected the more neutral and nuanced title Breaking Ties.....*" (xxi). In a way it "lays the cards on the table right at the outset" as it were, representing the feminist project symbolically. Like Niranjana in *Phaniyamma*, Vanamala too retains culture-specific terms like talaq, mehar, abba, umma, etc., for which there is a glossary at the end.

The narrative leads towards a reinterpretation of the religious codes which the patriarchal hegemony has used against women for its own convenience. The novel critiques the patriarchal order and argues for reform and justice for women.

Resistance to patriarchal ideology is implicit in the question which points out absolute disregard for the woman as an equal partner in marriage or for her feelings.

Nadira is expected to suffer the ordeal of spending the night with another man before she can remarry her first husband, Rashid. The very idea brings aversion to her. At the heart of the novel is the question Nadira asks herself silently, "*But what kind of law was this that the man who called himself 'husband' should pronounce talaq*

*three times from wherever he was and the marriage null and void!*" (p.75). It is a loaded question that attempts to deconstruct the concept of marriage.

It is important to note that the writers, translators and the translation editors of these novels are all women who seem to have joined hands for the common cause of equality. In both the novels "...*patriarchy is a common hegemonic structure within which women live and struggle; the particular kinds of oppression women face differ depending on their location in caste, class, region and religion*" (*Breaking Ties*, p.xvii). Translations act as powerful agents in the task of deconstructing the predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience enabling the marginalized voices to find utterance. If *Phaniyamma* chronicles and questions the traditional Hindu codification and exposes the inhumanity of the social and religious rituals practiced against women, *Breaking Ties* similarly translates the religious codes against women and the harsh patriarchal attitudes of the Muslim community that all but stifle the female voices. By taking these texts to a wider public, the translators not only underline the articulation of the implicit resistance but become participants in the creation of meaning.

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# The Virtues of Demobilization in Translation Studies

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Probal Das Gupta

## Abstract

*The paper attempts an articulation of translation as a scientific process. Translation keeps itself far from the syntax of structuralism and also beyond the reach of the 'cultural turn' as it stands. But as in structuralism, the article accepts the need for codes in translation. The technicality in translation helps it in the conscious reading of languages, the article emphasizes the structuralist and post-modern reading of English. The phonological and syntactical description of English and the aspects of civilisation and deep communication in translation are discussed in the article.*

## The Theme

The by now old and established commentaries on the supplement tell the story of how writing as a supplement to speaking turns the self-sufficient image of speaking on its head. But literature itself is often enough imaged as a necessary supplement to the technical knowledge that are indeed written but do not count as true writing. This imaging oscillates between an art for art's sake aesthetic and a deployment of literature as political or intellectual weapon. In this oscillation, as an old song once put it, "*we are guided by the beauty of our weapons*".

But it is surely not necessary for knowledge to be deployed in the military mode. For art to seek to attract is, likewise, optional.

Whatever the suspicious may say, I find valid the contemporary search for a reasonable exit from the gendered world of beauty products for typecast women and military wares for stereotyped males. Now, it is obvious that a reasonable exit cannot afford to be reason-free. The trouble is that we seem not to have a usable species of reason at our disposal. To rehearse the details of this absence, the dream of a universal reason died in the early twentieth century, and the literary-philosophical episode grounding existentialism in phenomenology had failed to get its act together by the time the Parisian fashions swung from Sartre to Levi-Strauss. From structuralism onwards, the very idea of a generally usable reason has been in a state of free fall. Now that we need one, we see this quite vividly, and are duly sad. Can we do anything about his unavailability?

In the present intervention I shall argue that it is necessary, for the larger enterprise of public space regeneration, to fashion a take on translation studies which at the very least bridges the gap between two characterizations of translation theory itself. I am responding here to the way the characterization of translation that the cultural turn sponsors in the literary wing of the endeavor sharply contrasts with the characterization that computational approaches accept as a default. My point is that once linguistics recasts itself as a translation-focused project, this renewed and respectified enterprise can begin to satisfy the needs of those translation theorists who rightly turned away from the structuralisms of yesterday and even to reintegrate the translation studies domain itself at a level that lies beyond the reach of the cultural turn as it stands.

Fashioning a public space of knowledge that is casual enough about what counts as knowing has to begin by being generous without going all gushy over how to welcome all these guests. We have to find the right tone of voice if we wish to really ask how literature, ordinary speaking, technology, science, art,



politics might all be envisaged fluidly as ways of knowing. It is okay to accept the readily available unifying rhetoric of an intellectual republic if we imagine this republic of knowledge in a federal, democratic mode. This means imagining its provinces as capable of self-interestedly initiating mutual contact at points of maximal need. I now plunge into such adventurous imagining. Please wish me luck.

Human lives are lived in terms of meanings largely provided by the stories we listen to and tell. These stories are language. We are living in a context shaped partly by the institutional fact that every nation X sponsors either a unique national language X or several languages X1, X2, X3 as its cultivated literary arenas. Every nation manages this sponsorship at several levels. The nation's literary committees award prizes for star performers. Schools force all literate children to hear about the stars of the past and some of their canonical writings. These phenomena are familiar.

What have we done with these familiar facts? We have tried, sometimes innovatively, to understand just how this state of affairs has come to seem as normal as it has. In the typical commonwealth country's colonial history, there came a moment at which modern language cultivation achieved a recognizable take-off. This moment launched the modern national management of language and literature in institutional formats recognizable to this day, although what then flourished was a classical style. Literary analysis correspondingly relied on classical models for tropes and sense making.

Once this national language management system had its coordinates under control, for a short while and in a few places the elite felt comfortable, free, and able to spread its wings. Let us call that the moment of national modernism. That brief moment of apparent autonomy allowed many forms of the examined life to flourish. These ranged from various high modernisms, through new criticism, and the existentialisms, rooted in phenomenology or

otherwise, to several left-wing forms of literary practice and analysis. The possibility of the autonomous critic in the independent nation requires national modernism as a crucible, one that corresponds to the notional and practical possibility of independent critics of the state.

The overall format in which national modernism at its inception typecast literary analysis and the critic continues as a sort of default. But it is a troubled default. My project here is to address this sense of trouble. For the early impression of autonomy gives way to the rise of scientism and professional expertise in the great mobilization visible from the sixties. Expertise in the study of literature begins to rest its case on psychoanalytical or materialist or mythographic premises anchored in some social science willing to use literary data for its theorizing. Can we see this transition in terms of visibility shifting from the nation to its fragments? But systematizing cognition's take-over of literary analysis only partly suits the interests of those critics who wish to fracture national modernism's premature unifications of the public space. Being marginal, the fragments cannot ride the mainstream's expertise horse. Their peripheral interests and the centre's focus on expertise pull literary analysis in opposite directions. Literary studies are left in moral disarray and in a state of disregard for the niceties of the social sciences whose tools they borrow.

This mess, often called the postmodern moment, wears the specialist overalls of a redescription of literature. But its knowledge claims are best constructed as an antifoundationalism adopted out of pique. Commentators were reacting against the visible falseness of national modernism's packaged open spaces. Such pique and its over intellectualized expressions were too unstable to last. They gave way to a moment of the media that could do more with images of the woman and of the subaltern. At that insufficiency-troubled moment, literary theory's flirtation with the popular amounted to a half-hearted reopening of the public space, which it saw as contested

between the texts and their farming. I would suggest that the moment of the media and the postcolonial turn are closely related sequels to the postmodern intervention.

The moment of the media reacts against the postmodern apparatus at the level of abandoning the serious appeal to social scientific expertise, but fails to reestablish a public space of possible space of possible intervention. It sponsors a tendency to ethnographize various aggregates by narrating them into communities. This is an understandable temptation, for such activity may appear to work against the hegemonies that keep margins marginal.

As a maneuver, though, the ethnographizing move seeks community but creates ghettos. These get in the way of the public space of rational history-making that might otherwise emerge. Yet we do need communities, which surely only the tools of literary analysis in their current mobilization can seriously empower. This is one of the major dilemmas we face as we try to exit from national modernism.

The form of the dilemma is easy to describe. You have been stuck with an inappropriate arena, the nation. You wish to pledge allegiance to humankind, which is much larger, but inaccessible. You are now doing the next best thing, which is to look within the nation and identify with sub national collectives where the bonding is real, persons find a sense of community, and domineering elite cannot easily emerge. This has the desired effect of undermining the hegemony of the nation's elite. But the boundaries around each subnational allegiance suddenly begin to look stronger than they should. Your dilemma takes the following form now. Do you persist, and run the risk of letting your communities turn into barricaded ghettos? Or do you abandon all bounded units and build transnational channels? The dilemma is too big to address directly, of

course. I identify here a particular traffic jam surrounding the study of languages and literatures. Attaining some clarity about this problem will move us closer to resolving the larger dilemma of identity politics and analytical systems that implement it.

### **The Traffic Jam**

In the present intervention I focus on the intellectual content of the language-literature divide as the current enterprise acts it out and experiences it. I argue that we are caught in a traffic jam that we can begin to sort out if we recognize the perils of half-hearted expertise for what they are. I propose that we in the language-literature analysis enterprise negotiate new equations between domains where we need techno-scientific expertise and domains where we desire a public space emphatically detechnicalized.

Using the metaphor of a helicopter surveying the traffic jam and trying to guide the drivers, I shall pretend we are in the sky. In other words, I offer first some elements of a possible exit, thus introducing the terms on which my formulation of the traffic jam is based.

One ingredient in the egress I visualize is a state of permanent translation that recognizes and tames the codes. The codes, or the particular languages, that are postulated and cultivated in literary texts, become less dangerous if we label them self-consciously as constructed objects of cultivation. This move begins to revise the equation between the cultural objects of literary analysis and the naturalistic subject matter of linguistics.

Moves related to this prototypical move make possible a principled rather than merely expediency-based taming of expertise as such, not merely of certain experts. In order to get ready to truly demobilize the civil space, one must first mobilize sufficiently,

making expertise as technical as its content calls for. What then makes possible the demobilization the public space requires is the systematic practice of translation? To the extent that cultures are in a state of translation, they are civilized.

Translation operates as a liable means of permanent demobilization if its growth keeps up with the growth of the technical. This does not happen spontaneously. It has to be done. Translators work for specific constituencies. There is no general procedure. Particular users find this or that text hard to tackle for detectable reasons. To translate for them involves understanding what can give just those users access to the text. This understanding of the easy and the difficult must take on board clearer pictures than we now have both of the linguistic material and of the users.

As we rearticulate our pictures of what is easy or difficult for whom, we are helped by the major advances linguistics has made in our understanding of language as a single, indivisibly human object of natural study. But it does not help that we typically package the material on the assumption that “*one language at a time*” can validly stand in for “*language as a whole*”, eliding the act of translation. A code is a singularly ineffectual means of imagining human language, a point that is made in much more detail later in the argument. One remedy is to insist on translation’s active role in the process. Another is to give a constructed transcode (such as Esperanto) a new status in keeping with the new emphasis on the constructed character of all codes in a theoretical space that domesticates our ethnicities in non-naturalizing ways.

As we imagine being above the fray in order to take an aerial view, the flight of fancy that keeps us afloat specifically fantasizes that we can, as true civilians, perform a coup. This, if successful, reverses the militarization, the inappropriately medium-degree technicalization, that we have inherited from the structuralist roots of the postmodern moment. As long as we don’t

have a liable army under civilian control, we are all semi-armed, a halfway house that denies us the advantages of the true soldier. I am taking the helicopter down now, and splitting it. Half of me is asking, how we can become true civilians cheerful enough to tame the grim military element we cannot do without. The other half is equipping itself with the tools we need so that the public space can be tool-free. The split helicopter, now on the jammed ground, begins to do a walking survey of the traffic jam I promised to take a closer look at.

I shall first introduce the notion of being in deep communication as part of the definition of civilianhood. If my argument comes full circle, I will eventually be able to show that individuals can work within codes but not get trapped in them if deep communication keeps them connected to all possible codes. We must explore these issues if we wish to demobilize. Only as a democracy of connected citizens can the citizens of a republic reverse a military takeover. People in a world of literary inscriptions can undo the technical mobilizations now in place only by becoming civilians. Civilians are citizens constitutively engaged in deep communication. This phrase invokes the theme of language, which, if duly addressed, takes us to arena of literary discourse where the public expects this work to take place. It is disingenuous to try to correct the public on this matter.

Wherever you look, in and outside the literary arena, there is a deafeningly quiet consensus on the proper approach to the study of languages. You always pick one language at a time. It makes no difference whether you are a technical linguist or not. Whoever wishes to make a point standard chooses a piece of this or that particular language. The specifics of a Hindi or English are made to stand in for all languages, for language in general.

For tactical reasons, I state the following obvious objection to this practice. Call the objection Exhibit A:

“What this practice gives you is a picture without perspective. Surely you should not pretend that the facts about Hindi are what they are, regardless of how much or how little Hindi your addressee knows. For suppose you are coming from an English base. The sentence <Ram will eat fish> is transparent to you. But its Hindi equivalent, <Raam machlii khayegaa>, is at a distance that you are approaching from an English baseline. So situated, your attention contextualizes Hindi for you relative to English. You regard Hindi as a practice, but as the practice of some other. When you take an endocentric view, you conduct your analysis entirely in Hindi, thus considering the use of Hindi as a practice of some ourselves.”

Does this obvious objection address you? Do you have any use for the idea that the study of language needs to situate itself perspectivally?

My obvious point elicits a postmodern counterpoint, which runs as follows, Exhibit B:

“That simple-minded perspective proposal would equate a study from an English baseline towards a Hindi object with a study from a Hindi baseline towards an English object. Such a proposal mechanically misreads the power/ knowledge geometry of the world and leaves linguistics in the grip of an Anglo-American takeover. The postmodern response encourages us to move beyond the provisional use of English that somehow governs even the discourse of these objections to objections.”

Exhibit B as a postmodern response to Exhibit A’s perspective proposal makes the right kind of sense in the right context, no doubt. But the toy perspective revision I have presented and this somewhat mindlessly generated auto-response I have added to illustrate the usual discourse both miss what I see as the real point.

Namely, even a linguistic description that is couched in English and discusses material from the same language in fact performs bilingual labour. The site of these bilingual operations is where we have the real option of getting a grip on what we are doing and then radicalizing it to a new degree of seriousness. We seem to want a solution that has both practical consequences and theoretical significance. This means we have to identify the monoglossia problem exactly where it is most acute and easiest to address.

That a description of English that seems to employ only English actually operates bilingually becomes obvious in the grossest details of its instrumentation. I am choosing limited examples with toy descriptive devices to make my point.

Consider phonology. A phonological study picks up the expression *<tea leaves>*, transcribes it as something like /ti:#li:vz/, and builds bridges with phonetics. These bridges ensure that people who say [t<] with aspiration and those who don't, speakers who pronounce *<tea>* with a diphthong [ij] and the ones who use a simple long vowel [I:], still meet at the same /ti:#li:vz/, a phonological compromise spanning their phonetic diversity.

Now consider syntax. A syntactic description so analyses the sentence *<The ticket which I clearly remember I bought in June cost 458 rupees>* that the verb *<bought>* ends up with an object in two places. One job of the description is to stretch the verb *<bought>* so that it governs the overt object *<which>*.

The other task is to keep a silent copy of that word

*<which>* somewhere between *<bought>* and *<in June>*

Exactly as in the parallel sentence *<I bought THE TICKET in June>*. The two object sites come out as



follows in one labeled bracketing representation: S[

NP[ NP[ Det [the] N [ticket] CP[NP[which]  
S[NP[I]VP[Adv[clearly]

V[remember] CP [S[NP[I] VP[V[bought]  
NP[WHICH]PP[P[in]NP[June]]]]]]]

VP[V[*cost*] NP[Q[458] N[*rupees*]]]]. I have shown the silent  
WHICH in capitals.

The first point to notice here is that the levels of description, such as phonology and syntax, are marked by distinctive formal instrumentation anchored in a universal vocabulary. In the case of phonology this vocabulary comprises features of pronunciation. Syntax uses a vocabulary whose elements are categorical features that categories like verb, preposition and noun phrase break down into. Each level of description associates the material of a particular language like English with the thoroughly unprovincial formal vocabulary driving that descriptive level. This work of associating is a translation operation. Phonology translates words into significant sound features. Syntactic description ferries between the phrases of some language and the universal format of categorically labeled bracketing representations. Linguistic description at each level is formally a translation and thus works bilingually. This was my first point.

My second point is that linguistic description works the examples from particular languages not into a pristine universal gold, but into usable currency that hugs closely the diversity it makes sense of. The phonology of *<tea leaves>* notices and interconnects the various ways you can say these words and be understood. These various ways thereby end up counting as equivalent. The syntax of the sentence *<The ticket which I clearly remember that I bought a month ago cost 458 rupees>* emphasizes the two places at once. The syntactic type of diversity and

equivalence is not quite what you just saw in phonology. Each level has its own way of making sense and connecting. This always involves some going to and fro between the things it connects.

It is therefore inaccurate to say the translation like operation of describing just goes back and forth between the particular stuff of a language and the general format of phonological or syntactic description. You cannot afford to typecast your instrumentation and your data by calling the described stuff provincially opaque and the descriptive format universally transparent. The drama of describing stages many little acts of translates connection. These engage with opacity and transparency at each site. Linguistic description not only translates. That had been my first point. It also consists of translations. This is the second point.

This had always been a latent problem with any kind of linguistic description anywhere, within and outside formal discipline of linguistics. Here you are, working with a translating apparatus at every level of your description. Yet, ironically, you consider it normal to apply it to what is visualized as one particular language at a time. If all is translation and diversity, just what are these particular languages? Must we take them seriously?

The rosy response is to hope that this question will release a radicalism enabling linguisticians and literarians to embrace each other and achieve a spectacular peace. But you steel yourself for reality. The UG or Universal Grammar that contemporary formal linguists swear by may well invalidate the notion of particular languages. But the way UG does this gets into a traffic jam with standard forms of the postmodern enterprise. My road map metaphor in response to this traffic jam marks my faith in the redemption still within reach.

Let us get back to the universal formal vocabulary of a linguistic level like phonology or syntax. What work does the

universality of this vocabulary do? Suppose I grant that a describer translates from English (or Hindi, or any) words into a universal language of second feature configurations, from English sentences into a neutral medium of syntactic category geometry. Well, who speaks this language? If it is a piece of scientific notation, what have you achieved by inventing it? Does it, in fact, help you to understand matters of perspective in the sense of the simple-minded question in Exhibit A, and to get around Exhibit B?

Early formal linguisticians were ill-equipped to pose or answer such questions back in the fifties and sixties, which was the last time literarians read them with any care. Human agendas being what they are, literarians got put off, stopped listening, and continued to perform well in their own work. I am using the bantering tribal terms *linguistician* and *literarian* to indicate that it is time the two tribes got back together again for reasons that pertain both to what has been done and to what is now waiting for a joint effort.

Since the eighties, there has been a functioning UG (Universal Grammar) that is more than just a set of symbols. This UG is a demonstration that languages really are, at the formal human level and not merely at a historical cultural level, so closely connected that it technically makes no sense any more to recognize distinct languages as units. There is, formally, only one human language with various words attached that make it look as if we speak different languages.

Paradoxically, this by itself is no basis for an instant alliance between current linguistics and current postmodern discourse. UG does of course make it impossible to sustain a theoretical base for the tired national modernisms that the public still lives by but postmodern theoreticians have long abandoned. But UG also renders pointless the familiar forms of this abandonment. The problem is that if there are no national languages then, a fortiori, there cannot be

any sublanguages either that might require rescue from their hegemony. The rescuable victim categories and their theoretico spokespeople find themselves in the position of that French high school student. She went home after listening to her teacher Simon de Beauvoir's eloquence about how there is no such thing as a Jew or a Gentile, there are only people. This Jewish student then said to her Jewish mother, "*Mummy, Mummy, my philosophy professor says we don't exist.*"

I see the problem as follows. The main issue in the literarians' enterprise at the promo moment has been how to make theoretical sense of various distortions in the flow of textual expression. If you make sense of the distortions, you can find ways to remove them. This enterprise, if successful, encourages all addressers to express, and all addressees to receive with sympathy, the distinctive viewpoints reflecting the situations and experiences that flesh is heir to. From such a viewpoint, it looks as if the task of removing barriers must include pushing technical formal studies of language off the agenda. For literarians tend to be relativists, uniformly suspicious of all universalisms. To such a gaze, the very premises of any of any linguistics look like obvious effects of hegemonic forces. Formal linguisticians have found the cultural studies approach exactly like earlier literary scholarship, strongly but unreflectively committed by default to older forms of linguistics. Someone who has not reflectively adopted a new theory obviously tends to keep the old ones that pass for common sense. One problem in the present case is that attachment to old defaults locks literary theories into national modernism as the ultimate horizon of the imaginable. All the talk of crises leaves the cultural studies enterprise in a self-defeating posture as long as it does not move into a linguistic that has truly abandoned the national imaginary. Conversely, logisticians stay attached to old defaults about literature, along the lines of national modernism, and lock them into self-defeat. This is the shape of our traffic jam.

Let me make the failure more concrete in a way that picks on linguisticians. Consider the following sentence: “*The ticket which I distinctly remember that I purchased it a number of weeks ago cost 458 rupees.*” A linguisticians is likely to hold this up for inspection and to claim that it exemplifies Indian English. She will go on to say something serious and syntactic about how the word <*it*>teams up with the word <*which*>. The point she will make is of genuine theoretical interest and even betokens a radically non-national linguistics that our literarians can learn from. But the moment she calls this an Indian English sentence, she invites the inference that there should be an Indian English community. Her subtext is not a room of one’s own, but a literature of one’s own for which the community’s real members count as the primarily responsible cultivators. The implication is that there are real and unreal members.

Our linguisticians has fully grown wings ready to fly in an unpossessed sky. But she walks on territory whose ownership documents she unreflectively fails to contest. She sometimes even endorses these ownership claims to avoid hassles that might impede what she considers her work. This assumption of a literary community defeat that backs such possession boundaries is where her self-defeat mirrors that of the literarians. For the libertarians are trying to address dispossession, and the form of their efforts conjures up old images of possession that they attribute to a default linguistics. Neither linguisticians nor literarians have fashioned an enterprise that avoids the lazy assignment of defaults. But the means for doing this already exist. The point is to use them.

The point is to consciously create defaults instead of vaguely attributing them to somebody else’s expertise. Such defaults can only reflect a normative public enterprise of fashioning tentative and revisable canons and of sponsoring the verbal cultivation that

linguistic and literary education leads all citizens into. Both linguists and literarians know that the old public enterprises wrongly pretended that the forces underwriting the standard modern canons and cultivations could implicitly speak for entire communities. Heterogeneity is now recognized as such and invites negotiation. The codes to be cultivated on such a negotiated social basis are spaces we build. But such constructing presumes that the citizens who wish to work this out understand not only the culture of literature but also the nature of language. Unless expert advisors arrange for this presumption to come true, the public stays in a state of ill-informed anxiety, and the negotiations fail to get off the ground. Therefore the old normativities continue, although we all know that the justifications for them are obsolete.

To summarize, I propose postulating the code as a space of cultivation. But the soil is a natural given, whose parameters yield only to scientific inquiry, which we have just seen happens to involve translation of one sort. It pays to notice that literary cultivation has always been translative in a closely related sense.

Of course the translation that go into literary analysis look very different from what I pointed to when I was talking about linguistic description. But the two kinds of translation share a vitally important strand of work. Both linguistic and literary analysis try to image clearly certain formal objects at which very different personal actions and experiences meet. In the literary case, these formal objects are texts; in the linguistic case, they are words and sentences. What the formal object does in both domains is bridge the gaps between experiences that differ from each other at the detailed level but get connected at and through the formal object expressing their connectability. A speaker who pronounces [tʃ ɪjvz] and one who says [ti livz] both know that the phonology of /ti:li:vz/ puts them in touch. This knowledge is attached, as a meaning, to their action of pronouncing and of hearing others. A reader who identifies with a baffled English recipient of advaita philosophy in *A Passage to India*

rejoices at a passage such as “*In other words anything is everything, and nothing is something*”. In contrast, a reader who finds *advaita* normal and English bafflement a malady to be cured reads the passage calmly as a symptom. These two readers are connected at Forster’s passage and know that they are. Literary analysis must image this knowledge of theirs and associate it with Forster, which is a step more complex than the task of linguistic analysis. But I have taken up these simple examples with some rigorous gestures to point out that both literary and linguistic analysis involve translative connection as well as explicit or tacit knowledge of the fact of substance-to-substance connectability through language and literature as form.

We need to get a grip on this identity of knowledge and connectability. It will yet find us a way for humans to sneak past the cultural tariff barriers and reestablish civilization. Cultures thrive on writing that is loud in principle. The reality of civilization lies in the quiet informality of speaking across writings. If the writing constitutive of culture is a secondary supplement to supposedly primary or natural speaking and if deconstruction gives the lie to this binary, then in such a picture civilization comes out as the much quieter tertiary speaking beyond that supplement.

Achieving this conversational quietness is tantamount to becoming true civilians, who are constitutively in a state of deep communication.

## **Civilization**

Actual communicating is confined to what you end up being able to do. Deep communication has to do with the potentials that make sense of what you do as well as of what you end up not finding for. To be in deep communication is not necessarily to perform a new action called deeply communicating. For the cognitively interpretable connectability between actions embedded in the formal

objects of cultural cultivation to count as the civilizational dimension need not imply that beyond cultures we are trying to postulate a new type of entity called a civilization.

What I am trying to point to, as I press the terms Civilization and Deep Communication into a type of service that stresses what translation contributes to the labour of understanding that goes into every bit of language, is the inappropriateness of our current arrangements. We act as if the words we give and take are the property of this or that provincial language. We apologize for transgressing boundaries we speak of loanwords and other borrowings.

One way to exit from this bizarre and by our own lights obsolete style is for us to emphasize the conventional, constructed, postulated, cultivated nature of each linguistic-literary arena. As we stress the need to revise the old cultivations by way of expropriating their elite sponsors and so forth, we can use the convenient promo machinery to affirm the cultivatedness of the literary arenas that the public wishes to call languages. If we are able to pull this off, the relevant public systems (national or subnational, as the case may be for a particular language) openly recognize that they construct their hold on the imagination through specific means such as films, fiction, entertainment, prizes. That this is a political, commercial, sentimental fashioning of human cultural space will stop bothering people if serious commentators in the domain help us all to take this in our stride. I visualize literary analysts at the heart of such an endeavour, in dialogue with expertise partners in the social sciences, both generalists and experts recognizing each other's crucial contribution. On this take, literary analysis can validly exist only as a metapolitics clear about its general role as a public philosophizing.

But recall that I regard such work as fit for quiet, composed civilians rather than passionate mobilizers driven to such passion by their secret manipulators. I associate this composure with knowledge as connectability. Recall that the connections work through



translation. In that part of my depiction, what I visualize includes lower and higher operations of translation that put this self-consciously fashioned analysis of cultural-textual fashioning in touch with language as a natural reality and with language as civilization.

To put it differently, I persist in imagining a natural initial spoken language on which the supplement of writing supervenes. Despite the illusory character of this image, I find it a convenient format for the postulations that the social processes envisaged here encourage people to share. The secondary supplement mocks the initial self-image of speech as a self-sufficient primacy. As I redraw the picture, this mocking is gentle, for both terms of the binary are constituted differently at the tertiary trans-supplement, the point at which civilization subverts culture.

Civilians are citizens of nation like cultural spaces who see themselves as capable of this gentleness and who nonetheless are willing, perforce, to live with the loudness of modern cultural fashioning as long as the public finds it necessary to keep the volume at these impossible levels. Civilianization works by initiating conversations in the speech that does not precede writing, but plurally follows and therefore subverts it in a translative mode.

In my book, civilianizing translation cannot avoid maintaining an ironic relation with the basic translations into universal phonetic and syntactic notation familiar from linguistic description. As the civilianization process strives towards a new transparency that does not flinch from dealing with all the opacities of our world, it touches base with the universality available in the human alphabet itself that language rests on. It thereby pays homage to the duly mobilized linguisticians who guard that base and to the emphatically demobilized literarians who surround it with music.

May these and other tribes continue to flourish, and to serve what lies beyond our national worship systems?

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Translation and Globalization

Michael Cronin

London & New York: Routledge, 2003. Rpt. 2004. 197 pages.

Let me begin with an ‘unlikely’ question: What has body snatching of saints in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D to do with translation? The question is important for the negotiation of distance, which is what translation also does. This sets the tone for Michael Cronin’s exploration of translation’s *locus standi* in the era of globalization. He sets out to locate the body of translation in the digitized global era. Only, he leaves translation as a living, vital, throbbing enterprise performing its miracles in a radically different socio-cultural context. Especially striking is the way translation practice is contextualized in the current discourse of the organization of society under the sign of global capital to study the consequences of such a shift for translation and translators. For this purpose, the book recognizes and underscores the ‘ecology’ of translation as it describes the relationship between speakers, translators and texts from different groups and classes of linguistic existence to show how there is translation “into and out of their languages.”

Translation activity itself is ‘translated’ into languages that speak to voice where and how translators and translations belong in the transnational, global world that lives more than 6000 languages. To this end, he understands translation as “a channel of transmission over time” and yet emphasizing plurality, language difference, and interdependence. This pointedly addresses the question of the role of the translator in the twenty first century. A crucial concern that emerges here relates to the way translation and translators negotiate the question of agency in the space of flows that describes the contemporary world order. The translator is a mediator whose work

emphasizes the transmissive dimension that speaks the instantaneous language of flows stressing the critical position of agency in this cultural enterprise. It is not difficult to see Cronin's location of translation practice in the age of informationalism as a continuation of the enactment of what it traditionally has done enacting "the therapy of distance."

A significant area of enquiry in the book concerns the relationship between translation and censorship in the age of globalization. An age that overwhelms us with obvious forms of censorship, Cronin argues, can also ignore translation experience. This is a much more damaging form of censorship; in the age of instant communication, removal from public view is death itself. It is important to recognize here that in times of exposure to cultural diversity across time, when faced with diversity of experiences of language, the city is a cultural text for translation.

The book also draws attention to the impact globalization has on the "future politics of translation" and looks at the pressures that come to bear on translation processes. It is not surprising to find discussions of how machine translation and similar computer assisted translation impact on our thinking to draw out the relationship between technology and creativity in translation. In this context, Cronin examines in detail the crucial question of the invisibility of the translator and 'clonialism'.

Appropriately stressed is the need to consider minority languages in translation today. What the discussion calls for here is a new direction in translation practice, a new translation ecology. Cronin convinces us that "Our narrative imagination – our ability to try to imagine what it is like to be someone else from another language, another culture, another community or another country – is itself a mere figment of the imagination if we have no way of reading the books, watching the plays, looking at the films produced by others." Therefore, "any active sense of global citizenship must

involve translation as a core element.” While emphasizing what translation and translators hold out in our era, Cronin also draws attention to our failure to relate to other voices and texts. This is an important insight, much like the old Chinese saying ‘The window is important for what it does not contain’.

It is important to emphasize that globalization does not signal the death of the translator or translation; rather there is a renewed demand for translators and translations. Cronin earlier on draws attention to what he calls the ‘neo-Babelian’ project that speaks a dangerous nostalgia for one language that reaches the skies trying to complete the incomplete project of modernity. Neo-Babelianism is the “desire for mutual, instantaneous intelligibility between human being speaking, writing and reading different languages.” What it implies has serious repercussions at levels of agency and even the existence of cultures and languages for in the Babelian construction site, translation ends all translation. It is for this reason that he rightly argues that translators can make legitimate interventions in culture, society and politics.

And so, the function and role of translation continues as it has done in the past. While critically engaging with immediate social, cultural, political discourses to locate the enterprise of translation, the book re-states the relationship between translation and conservation of cultures. It is a call to remember the challenge in the practice and the need for it today. Cronin has consistently underlined throughout the persistent increase in translation between languages as he brings together the various strands of his argument not just to give a compelling reason for translation practice, rather locate the distinctness and interrelatedness of creative interaction in the world order we shape for ourselves.

It was surprising, however, to discover a printer’s devil in the first chapter in this Routledge publication.

The book slides with admirable ease through the intricate world of globalization as it gives ample illustrations from a whole range of translation scenarios to establish the importance of not “to be condemned to the sounds of our own voices.” The book is truly a meditation on the direction of Translation Studies in particular and opens new avenues in Cultural Studies. This engrossing book is a compulsory read for those who care for translation and Translation Studies.

**Dr. B. Hariharan**

Dept of English,

P.G. Centre,

University of Mysore,

Hemangothri, Hassan – 573 220.

## **Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language.**

Steven G. Yao (2002).

New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Steven Yao's argument in the book under review is that Anglophone modernism, in its constitutive moves, established distinctively literary translation as a critical and creative enterprise whose politics reconfigures not only nation but gender as well, affecting even the gendered position of canonical literary production itself. He formulates his argument in relation to specific translations by Pound, H.D., Yeats, Lowell, the Zukofskys, adding Joyce to make the point that *Finnegan's Wake* is a case of translating from English into a linguistic heterotopia. The fact that Yao reads Chinese and is able to comment on the Pound corpus from that point of view gives his Pound chapters a particular, philological type of authority. He uses this authority, however, to undermine the conventional belief that textual accuracy checking grounded in knowledge of the relevant languages has a crucial role to play in evaluating literary translations. By framing his Pound chapters in a larger argument, he further underplays the specific points he makes that depend on his knowledge of Chinese.

Yao's main point is that a literary translation is a textual production activity that takes place specifically in the target language culture and must be read primarily in relation to that site. He defends the right of literary translators to deploy their translation as an intervention in their time and place and to do to the text whatever is necessary to accomplish this. In his view, this makes it appropriate for them to ignore strictures emanating from philologically minded purists whose conception of proper literary production in the target language is always a couple of generations out of date and who are therefore seldom competent to comment. It follows that literary translators need not regard the source language

text as their starting point; they can and often must use a rough initial rendering into the target language, instead, as the basis that they shall rework. Given this reasoning, it follows further that a literary translator's repertory need not include a sound knowledge or even any knowledge at all, of the source language.

To be sure, Yao is not celebrating ignorance *per se*. He sees the modernist disengagement of literary translation from philological exactitude as a necessary first step towards the more appropriate model of translation by two persons representing the two cultures and adequately acquainted with each other's languages. However, his concentration on the issue of language, precisely because he wishes to open up the discussion, leads him to sidestep the question of whether it is also legitimate for a literary translator to ignore not just the language but the history and milieu of the source culture. This omission is related to the fact that he focuses on how Yeats or Pound, translating from Ancient Greek or Latin or Mediaeval Chinese, deal with the criticism they face from British classicists or Sinologists (either Anglophone or writing for the benefit of an Anglophone readership). If Raymond Aron had translated Yevtushenko into French, and if Yevtushenko or other Russians had critiqued the specifics of such a translation, the discussion that Yao seems to wish to initiate would include looking at how someone from the translated time and space talks back. The fact that Yao chooses examples vitiated by this asymmetry makes one wonder why he does not reflect on the consequences of this choice, and on what the issues look like when the range of examples is expanded.

To put the matter differently, does Yao in fact succeed in framing the Pound material in a larger interrogation by placing it in the company of Yeats, H.D., Joyce and so on? It seems to me that in fact his quest for other and contemporary examples of a Poundlike move ends up dissipating and diffusing his question. One does not make better sense of Gandhi by considering his parents and his brothers as potential political figures.

Yao chooses to place Pound in H.D.'s company (they were once engaged) or in that of Yeats (Pound had been his secretary) without interrogating Anglophone Modernism at a level that charts its intersection with France. He also chooses to bracket the activity of translating from Mediaeval Chinese to English with that of translating from Latin and Ancient Greek without asking what is involved in the Anglophone assessment of Chinese civilization as a "classical" site in some rigorous sense.

These choices blunt the instruments that any author seeking to advance our understanding would need to use. Yao's book is too polite to the Anglophone readership and publishership, to the point of allowing them to circumscribe what counts as enounceable in his discourse. The absence of any reference to modern texts in Chinese (it is not possible that scholars in China, writing about literary issues in Chinese periodicals, have had nothing relevant to say about Pound's work) is one index of this excessive politeness. Another is his decision to eschew coordinates drawn from any contemporary or other body of literary theory that might help place his sense-making enterprise in the framework of a larger and continuous labour of literary theoretical scrutiny. A third index is the absence of the theme of American culture and literature as a matrix of literary practice and reception whose presence shapes Yao's reception of the material he has reworked with such rigour and care, but shapes it in ways that go unnoticed in a study that strains so hard to notice so much else.

There is a cultural subtext to this, given the reputation of East Asia as a traditional nurturing ground for the highest levels of politeness in all civilizations. However, the problem in this case is that there is a self-defeating element to this particular exercise. Yao as a critic is practising a certain type of cross-boundary transmission of textual material close enough to translation to make his own ideas applicable. You would expect him to transmit into a recognizably contemporary and therefore theory-laden space. But this expectation



is not met. Practising the conventionalness that the protagonists in his narrative oppose and supposedly overcome, his exposition itself hugs closely, and exclusively, the ground on which his Anglophone Modernists walked.

One might, however, wish to defend these decisions by Yao, methodologically, along the following lines. His project is to ensure that the canonical methods of evaluation in the Anglophone academy are revised specifically on the matter of ranking original writing relative to translation in the constitutive moves of modernist practice and its standard interpretations as factors shaping what critics today can do with the textual corpus of modernism. In order to accomplish this, Yao needs to leave nearly everything intact so that his intended readers are forced to concede that even if other factors are held constant his point about the constitutive importance of translation does stand, within the framework of Anglophone Modernism itself. If we construe Yao's intervention in this fashion, it becomes possible to retrieve a viable point by contextualizing it vis-à-vis highly specific interlocutors and perlocutionary trajectories. However, such retrieval is hardly a straightforward or routine job. We need to reopen his questions at several points and extend his inquiry.

Pound's espousal of a certain Confucianism is an invocation of history that counterpoints the resistance to historicity that constitutively characterizes the brave and free land of manifest destiny. One cannot usefully read this invocation in isolation from the counterpoint role it is structurally compelled to play in an American mind. A literary comparatist might with profit focus on Cordwainer Smith's (1975a, 1975b, 1978, 1979) science fiction to explore the matter in greater depth. Science fiction in general is a domain where American narrative talent has achieved serious peaks that reflect the sense that living as an American is a permanent experiment.

Choosing Cordwainer Smith as an example in this context is pertinent in at least three ways. First, he was an American who grew up in China. Second, Smith's fiction draws not just on the Confucian tradition but on the twentieth century experience of coping with unsettlement. Third, his work too represents major explorations in the reconfiguration of gender under the circumstances of a total experiment, explorations clearly continued in the widely known more recent work of Donna Haraway and Octavia Butler, which however lacks Smith's Chinese background. What is striking about the Smith corpus in the context of comparative inquiry with Pound in mind is the cyclical narrative, combining intracyclic historicity with themes of cross-cyclic renewal rooted in perennial principles of a broadly Confucian type.

At the level of what the narrative holds up for our direct inspection, Smith's perennial principles and Pound's rather different take on Confucius both appear at first blush to belong to the pretheoretical genre of an ahistorical quest for human universals. But things are seldom that simple. Smith's and Pound's invocations of the perennial are imbricated in very different histories. They reflect contrasting stances towards the second world war, towards the use of heroic and antiheroic figures as narrative devices, towards the gender interpellations that drive fictional construction, and towards the larger utopian project of constructing a real political basis for an intelligible, if cyclical, future. Consequently, somebody who does undertake a comparison of the two corpora will be forced to ask in just what ways the imaginary of science fiction and the postulated seriousness of Modernism make contrasting use of strikingly similar materials in a project of a broadly utopian sort.

The operative words of course are Seriousness and Imaginary. Both Pound and Smith make evident use of certain subgenres of the American willingness to play around with what traditional cultures hold in reverence; they both display on their

lintel the Emersonian declaration “Whim”. But they are circumscribed by generically different compulsions.

Pound’s Modernism inherits a certain seriousness from the liberal humanist project through which the British imperial mantle, problematically at a level unexamined in Yao, enters all Anglophone modernist projects. Smith postulates a remote and much palimpsested future where the sheer succession of formats of glory has compelled a distancing from the categories of the classical state, and where the management of extremely varied pursuits of happiness has reached the point where those who exercise a managerial hold over events realize that they cannot possess power. However, both of these interrogations assume an overall Americanization of global history as a default.

It is this shared postulate that will become the focus if comparative work is undertaken. For Pound’s formalization of seriousness and Smith’s formalization of fantasy unpack some of the same modes of work and play as they formalize generic opposites and thereby subtend a shared genological stage (in the sense of genology as the formal theory of genres). It may be unnecessary to add that a study that juxtaposes Smith with Pound will need to do business with Smith’s fellow science fictionists and with Pound’s comrades in modernism, and will have to disaggregate and reassemble them in ways that the easy generic labellings do not encourage. Now that tools from the politics of gender and race have forced a repositioning vis-à-vis the once axiomatic unseriousness of science fiction, this is perhaps obvious to many readers.

What is less obvious is the translationlike place of science fiction in the literary critic’s imaginary. The science fiction writer J.G. Ballard has suggested (these words are not Ballard’s own, but mediated by Burgess 1978: vii) that “the kind of limitation that most contemporary fiction accepts is immoral, a shameful consequence of the rise of the bourgeois novel. Language exists less to record the

actual than to liberate the imagination.” Literary criticism has only recently begun to view science fiction as a valid creative enterprise. If we are to extend Yao’s argument to the point of rendering its logic visible, we must ask if the reranking of science fiction in relation to conventional fiction is in any way cognate to the reranking he advocates between translation and original writing. Yao would have us stop regarding translation as secondary and on the contrary give priority to it as a constitutive strand in literary production. Where does the reranking of science fiction stand on such a road map?

Where we stand on this matter has everything to do with how American we think the global future is. Where Heidegger and following him Derrida posed the issue of an unavoidable Europeanization of the planet (“all thought must pass through the Greek element”) at the moment of Nietzsche’s “last man”, our period has been compelled to reformulate this as an Americanization process that other forces can only hope to modify or inflect, never actually reverse or prevent.

The term “liberal humanism” in literary theory, especially in the context of translation studies, becomes uninterpretable if its users do not articulate it in relation to neutrality with respect to national identities and heritages. Anglophone America has provided an explicit set of images of what neutrality can come to mean, a specific anti-historical economy that downsizes national narratives into little stories fitting limited attention spans, an economy that claims thereby to overcome the hang-ups of nations and to empower the free individual. This formally neutral world is the default utopia implied by Anglophone literary criticism’s vectors, including a comparative literature and translation studies enterprise focused on translations into English alone and deploying critical apparatuses in English as the sole medium of critical discourse. If we are to change this default, we have to work to change it. As Mao Zedong once wrote, “If you don’t sweep it away, dust doesn’t move away on its own.”

It is most reasonable for us to make the choice of trying to read Yao as working towards articulating a non-American default utopia and a correspondingly non-formalistic literary critical methodology. However, he is doing this within a disconnected or abstract subenterprise that does not, as it stands, build bridges with its counterparts elsewhere. As we take up and use his work, we will need to make it concrete by doing such bridge-building ourselves, as is often the case with useful ideas. Originators are seldom in a position to provide the continuity factors that many users need.

In this sense of the terms abstract and concrete, America is emphatically an abstract utopia. Its economy plays out an aesthetic of peaks. It is a country where people are taught from day one to cheer for the fastest runner in the world or the biggest building in the world or various other maxima, to exaggerate numbers (“the driver in the car that is slowing us down must be 290 years old”), to buy the best brains from everywhere, and so on.

This hyperbolic mode of speech and living does not bore a triumphalist mind. America is designed as a centre from which a planetary triumph will spread to as much of the cosmos as this fervour can populate. The basis of American anti-historicity is the fervent rooting for this active future, an activity that has set its coordinates in terms of putting all human achievements together in one place and deliberately forgetting their irrelevant roots.

This forgetting is forged in the hedonic crucible of play and childishness. American irreverence is a reaffirmation of the fact that in forsaking the old world every true believer has said goodbye to forces that thought they owned him (and that now know they have another think coming). The economic migrations of later centuries may not have mimicked the psychological content of what the early seventeenth century pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower* thought they were doing. But their narratives as immigrants joining the American formation took on the same format of abandoning old, rooted,

ethnic, historical hopes and forging together new, scheme-focused, ethnicity-despecifying, history-cancelling expectations, the same format of using a universal economy to destroy particularistic histories. That format inherits the religious history of the English-speaking white settlers. American playful irreverence is steeped in, and indelibly angry with, the old reverences. The wow and yay adoration of secular biggests and fastest and tallest is a displaced version of the forms of counterworship that the early white settlers had pitted against the religious beliefs of their various persecutors in Europe.

It is disturbing to see that many people today buying into the notion of an English-language globality or even some of their opponents who critique what they call American imperialism in Marxist terms (but consenting to use English as their language of critical reference) fail to notice the character of the beast that they love or hate. For even an “opponent”, if she swears by scholarly or moral excellence as she inveighs against the American empire, may get locked into the same coordinate system of seeking to build coalitions of the excellent, and thus committed to constructing simply another America repopulated by her own friends. If one imagines a utopia with the same geometry, it does not matter which faces flesh out the dots on one’s diagram: if you let your adversary dictate your format, you lose the deeper war that has to do with choosing the kinds of challenge you wish to accept.

It is now possible to turn to Yao for aid. I find in the part of his work that looks at the gendered location of literary self-fashioning a direct counterpart to the substantivist take on history, rationality, and conceptual parsimony in theories and practices. Space prevents me from rehearsing here (see Dasgupta 1996) the full apparatus of that formulation of the substantivist notion of economy. Its main point is that the rationality that drives an actor’s historicity must come from that actor’s sense of herself as an active inhabitant of her concretely co-managed place as a home, not from an

ethnicity's official historical narrative or American-style despecification of old narratives, both of which would be patriarchal alibis. In the present context, suffice it to say that a person's act of concretizing her adoption of a conceptual structure involves shaving all the Platonic beards as she begins to own that structure's categories, thus bringing Occam's razor to life in her active resistance to the conceptual content of patriarchal codes that keep trying to preempt her self-fashioning. To the extent that she does this Aristotelian labour (as any anti-Platonic manoeuvre is bound to take on such a colour) as part of a self-conscious renunciation of unchosen commitments and privileges, she disengages herself from strategies that she would otherwise buy into by default. This enables her to move from strategic action to communicative action, to use an enlightening pair of Habermasian terms. Once she has become her own communicator, she is then able to choose to inhabit a history that she has begun to own, one that is concretely continuous with the time and place she has chosen to continue to fashion with significant others.

Does such a utopia perhaps root for Esperanto rather than for English? For many readers of a text such as this, such a question may look too abstract to form part of this exercise. For me, it is entirely concrete, as I find that Esperanto enables its users to imagine a world-forming process that differs from the Anglophone hegemonic systems in the ways that many English-using opponents of the American empire find congenial. But this is an issue that individuals need to address in their own contexts, as these contexts expand to take on board the viewpoints of colleagues with whom the necessary bridges have not yet been built. However, Esperanto is very close to the concerns that Yao would like us to take seriously, for China and Japan have cultivated the internationalism of Esperanto on a much larger scale than other Asian countries, and have from day one engaged white users in a civilization-level dialogue that their presence has prevented from degenerating into Eurocentrism. Those of us who wish to take up and continue Yao's

enterprise will need to do business with the voluminous and rigorous translations of Chinese and Japanese classics into Esperanto by Chinese and Japanese translators, and to compare what happens in these translations with the work of a philological Waley or a poetic Pound. This is yet another point at which Yao limits his inquiry to the point of forcing us to withhold assent until others have enlarged his scope and continued the fresh (and welcome) modes of scrutiny he brings to bear on much-revisited texts.

While we are on the subject of Americanization and its others, I must underscore the fact that Yao's extended study of issues of Irishness in relation to Yeats cry out for connection with the America question, for the Irish element in the formation of American history is one of the frequently studied strands of the troubled relation between Anglo and American partners in the English-using literary system. If Yao's project needs to tease apart various strands in the standard hegemonic characterization of this system, then continuations of his project must interrogate not only how Irish contributions have helped shape twentieth-century British literature, but also the way in which the peculiar partial freedom that the Irish have had to manage within the British Isles has impacted on the equally idiosyncratic sense that America has of being autonomous *vis-à-vis* Britain and *vis-à-vis* continental Europe and yet of remaining caught up in and dependent on its definitional troubles.

One way to make sure that Anglophone literary work becomes self-conscious has been to resort to linguistics and its various spin-offs. Yao has worked at such a vast distance from these resources that it is hard to turn the argument in this direction. And yet eventually his project will have to engage with those of linguist colleagues. The sense of balance and proportion that he seems to seek cannot be even formulated if one excludes these participants, as he and many other literary critics. However, that discussion will



have to be initiated elsewhere; we must, most of us, reached the very end of our attention span.

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**Probal Dasgupta,**  
**Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies**  
University of Hyderabad.  
Hyderabad

## Translation Reviews

Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya's *Aranyak*, translated by Rimli Bhattacharya *Aranyak of the Forest*, Seagull Books Calcutta, 2002.

**Chandrani Chowdhury**

Indian Institute of Technology

Mumbai

In trying to analyze Rimli Bhattacharya's translation of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya's novel *Aranyak*, we first need to understand the basic tenets of translation particularly in the Indian context.

- a) Chronologically, a translation comes after the original. That is to say, the original and the translation seldom appear simultaneously. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya's *Aranyak*, for example, appeared as a book in 1939, after being first serialized in *Prabashi* between 1937 and 1939. Rimli Bhattacharya's translation appeared in the year 2002. In some ways, a translation is an extended version of the original. The word '*anuvad*' ('speaking after' or 'following after') may best be used in this case. That is, chronologically, a translation can be produced only after the original has been written. It follows the original and is thus a speaking after the original. In that sense, a translation is a looking back, a reconsideration of the original. Therefore it also becomes a commentary on the original.

- b) To be a commentary, a translation needs to be more explicative. By nature, translations are more explanatory than the original had been. What the author of the original may have taken for granted from his readers, needs to be explained (often with notes), in a translation. The notes, along with a select glossary and a translator's note, in Bhattacharya's translation, may be taken as a case in point.
- c) A translation is not merely the meeting place for two different languages. It in fact provides the platform for two different cultures. Two different groups of readers come together in the act of enjoying a literary artifact. As Benjamin notes, in the seminal essay 'The Task of a Translator':

...Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.

Thus, several cultural concepts, which the readers of the source language could relate to, need explication for the readers of a translation.

- d) Towards the beginning of his article, Benjamin posits a fundamental question for any translator: "Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?" Benjamin does not explicate his answer in the essay. However, he is of the opinion that this question and an answer to it would give some insight into translation.

"This would seem to explain adequately the divergence of their standings in the realm of art."

It is almost clear, that the lack of knowledge mentioned in the above question can be of two types – the lack of knowledge of the language of an original and the lack of

knowledge of an original while knowing the language. Is a translation then meant for bilingual readers? If we say that a translation is meant for people who do not know the language of the original; how then can we evaluate a translation or its ‘fidelity’ to the original?

- e) The other word that is used as a synonym for translation in India is ‘*rupantar*’. The word means ‘changed in form’ or ‘in changed form’. Inherent in the very word equivalent for translation in India, is a claim of deviating from the original. Fidelity to the original is not an Indian concept. As Sujit Mukherjee notes in *Translation As Discovery*:

The notion that even literary translation is a faithful rendering of the original came to us from the West, perhaps in the wake of the Bible and the need felt by Christian missionaries to have it translated into different Indian languages. We have hesitated until recent times to translate our own scriptures – who but another god would presume to translate the word of god? – and thus managed to confine their knowledge to the chosen few, who were obliged to learn the original language. No such choosiness affected the western (i.e., the Christian) world for long, and translating the Bible must be the largest language industry the world has known... A much greater contribution by Bible translations to India’s literary culture was that it brought the printing press to this land, made the printed word possible, and turned Indian literature into a matter of books at last.

However, as Sukanta Chaudhuri notes in his *Translation and Understanding*, the notion of fidelity has troubled translators down the ages:

The act of translation has traditionally been seen in a moral light. Opinion has differed down the ages as to whether the writing of poetry, or any other kind of ‘original’ text, involves exercising or imparting some species of moral virtue. But the translation of existing texts has commonly been viewed in ethically loaded terms: whatever the moral standing of the original, the translator is expected to adhere to it in a spirit whose definition is essentially moral... The classic expression of this syndrome is in the recurrent appeals to ‘truth’ and ‘fidelity’...

Rimli Bhattacharya’s translation of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya’s *Aranyak* has clearly passed this test of fidelity. So far as content and structure is concerned, Bhattacharya strictly adheres to the Bengali text. In Sujit Mukherjee’s words, the work belongs to the category of ‘translation as testimony’. In such categories, there is the least tampering with the original. Rimli Bhattacharya’s translation, I feel may be placed under this category.

Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya’s novel is based on the writer’s experience in Bhagalpur. Though the novel chooses Satyacharan as the narrator, one can hardly miss the autobiographical element in *Aranyak*. The plot or rather the structure of *Aranyak* is devoid of any complexity. In fact, the simplicity and naivete of the people of the forest is also captured in the simple story line. Initially, the narrator, perhaps the central protagonist, Satyacharan, finds it difficult to adjust to the life of the forest. However, as Gostho-babu explains the mystery of the forest and its mesmerizing power soon takes the better of Satyacharan. The following conversation between Gostho-babu and Satyacharan illustrates the process at work:

‘Gostho-babu looked at me and gave a little smile. ‘That is just it, Manager-babu, you will soon find out... You are newly come from Calcutta, your heart

longs to fly back to the city, and you're yet young. Spend some more time here. And then, you will see...'

'What will I see?'

'The jungle will get inside of you. By and by, you won't be able to bear any kind of disturbance or put up with crowds. That's what has happened to me. Just this last month I had to go to Mungher for a court case, and all I could worry about was when I'd be able to get away.' (Bhattacharya: p 11).

Satyacharan is primarily an intruder. Coming from the more civilized locale of Calcutta, he is a misfit in the life of the forest. However, the transformation that Satyacharan's character undergoes deserves special mention and occupies a major part of the novel. This transformation is not a sudden miracle, and Bibhutibhusan's subtlety of description is perhaps one of the areas where the translation lacks. In the original, the only character (if I may so call it) that looms large is that of the Forest. The Forest is a presence, which cannot be denied. It is not one of the characters in the novel, rather it is 'the' character before whom all have to bow. This all-encompassing presence of the forest appears to be absent in Bhattacharya's translation. Satyacharan takes on the central stage, and all incidents appear to revolve around him. On the contrary, in the original, though apparently Satyacharan may be said to occupy central stage, he is nothing but a mere spectator. In fact, he plays no role in the progress of the plot, the Forest is at the helm of affairs.

Like Charles Dickens' novels where all the characters are portrayed in such vivid colours that the very utterance of a name brings along with it a portrait of the character in all its whimsicalities, Bibhutibhusan was a master of character sketches. All the characters in the novel have their individual traits and never is the reader allowed to mistake one character for the other – such is the power of depiction. Thus, we tend to remember Raju Parey, Dhaturia, Motuknath Pandit, Manchi, Nakchhedhi, Bhanmati and

others as individuals in their own rights. Rimli Bhattacharya's attempt in creating the same flavour as that of the original is commendable. However, for one who has read Bibhutibhusan, there is something missing in Bhattacharya's character sketches. 'In fact, no reader of a translation who can read the original work should expect to be wholly satisfied with the translation. But in examining the relationship between the translation and the original, he may not only be able to test how 'true' the translation is but also explore areas of literary understanding which the process of translation often enters, sometimes unwittingly.' (Mukherjee: 1981. p 86). The above comment may perhaps be taken as true for all translations and it is equally true in Rimli Bhattacharya's case. Nevertheless, Bhattacharya's translation provides the reader (particularly one who has not read the original), with all details necessary for understanding and appreciating Bibhutibhusan's work. Divided into seven distinct sections, the translation introduces the Bengali author to the readers, followed by an introduction that traces the genesis of the text, the note of the translation clarifies Bhattacharya's strategy in the work. This is followed by the actual translation, which is structured strictly on the original novel – there is no attempt at *transcreation*. The 'glossary of select terms' elaborates on words and concepts that only the reader of the original could probably know. This is followed by an appendix, which gives the chronological list of Bibhutibhusan's works.

Certain replications were perhaps not possible in the English translation. For example, the variation in the dialect spoken by the dwellers of the forest is markedly different from the way in which Satyacharan speaks. This is the primary difference marker between the intruder and the local people. However, Bhattacharya did not have the scope of replicating the same in English. Moreover, the way in which Satyacharan addresses the local people, is both an indication of the difference in status and also the gradual proximity that the outsider feels with the residents of the forest. However, in

English ‘you’ becomes the ‘great leveller’, and in a way mars the appeal of the original. Leaving aside such cultural constraints, Rimli Bhattacharya’s *Aranyak: of the forest* (the title itself is explicative) is a faithful rendering of the original. For those who cannot read the original, *Aranyak: of the forest*, is a novel in its own right. And also for those who have read Bibhutibhusan, there is not much cause for complaint as Rimli Bhattacharya carefully adheres to every minute detail of the original and arrests the true spirit of the forest. Those who complain of missing the style of Bibhutibhusan, let us be reminded, that was never the task of a translator.

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Englising the Vedic Age:  
*Awadheshwari*, by Shankar Mokashi  
Punekar,  
translated from Kannada by P.P. Giridhar  
New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2006

Nikhila H.  
Dept. of English  
Pondicherry University  
Pondicherry  
Email: nikhila05@gmail.com

*Awadheshwari* is a novel whose action is set in the Vedic period. The novel is divided into two parts: the first part is largely the story of Purukutsani, the queen of Awadh/Ayodhya; the second part mainly delineates the clash between Trasadasyu, Purukutsani's son and Vrisha Bhatta, a brahmin. The events are set in motion by the incestuous marriage between Purukutsa, the king of Ayodhya and his sister Purukutsani. The unfulfilled consummation of their marriage and Purukutsa's kidnap by a rival king has left Ayodhya heirless, though in the novel's present, Ayodhya is being ably administered by Purukutsani. On the advice of Sage Devadema, the spiritual advisor of the Queen, the *niyoga* ceremony is performed by Purukutsani with Simhabhatta, a prominent Rigvedin brahmin of her kingdom, and Trasadasyu, the heir to the throne of Ayodhya is born. Once Trasadasyu comes of age, his Hamlet-like dilemmas paralyze him as he wants his mother to unravel the secret surrounding his birth. As Vrisha and his father, covetous Rigvedin brahmins in his kingdom, prey upon his mind and belittle him, Trasadasyu is forced to redeem himself in the eyes of his subjects. How he does that and

how the demons of his mind are laid to rest form the rest of the novel's story.

If any translation gives rise to a general anxiety of how a text from a different linguistic-cultural background will be received by the target readers, and the translation into English from Indian languages gives rise to the specific anxiety of how the 'vernacularism' of the source-text will appear to the English reader, one can say that the translation under review will appeal to many contemporary readers of fiction in English for a number of different reasons. For one, *Awadheshwari* gives a new rationale to Vedic texts, approaching them through epigraphic and hermeneutic frames. The Vedic hymns are juxtaposed with the Harappa-Mohenjodaro seals and re-interpreted to tell the story of the bitter conflict between Trasadasyu and Vrishajana, the king and the brahmin. The hymns are taken out of their ritualistic contexts and are seen in the modern form of the personal lyric, as expressions of the anguish and anxieties of their composers – real historical men, rather than anonymous entities. The novel marshals modern literary, archeological and historical modes to take the contemporary reader 'back to the Vedas', as the mythical past gets re-constructed on a modern scientific scaffolding.

The novel also opens with the 'outrageous' event of the incestuous marriage between king Purukutsa and his sister Purukutsani. The two are said to have a part-Egyptian lineage and we are told that incestuous marriage was a common Egyptian practice to maintain purity of blood and patrimony. When we read Punekar's introduction to the novel where he discusses the Drift-of-continents' theory that different peoples and races came along with their land-masses and attached themselves to India, one wonders if geological and geographical-evolutionary theories are being invoked here to exteriorize the sexual practice of incest, as the plot-line develops the unfortunate fall-out for Ayodhya of this 'alien' kind of sexual union.

Secondly, *Awadheshwari* has a powerful female protagonist in Purukutsani, the queen of Awadh. For contemporary readers looking for indigenous female models in the Indian past, Purukutsani's able and efficient management of her kingdom's affairs, and that she is loved by her subjects and respected by her enemies, make her a worthy ancestor for the present-day 'Indian-woman-achiever'. As a wise and compassionate queen who sets aside her personal troubles and responds to the greater duty towards her subjects, she is quite like the representation of the modern successful woman whose public persona hides private scars. She is also strongly committed to perpetuating her natal family's name and line: refusing to marry the neighboring king, she instead prefers *niyoga* to keep Ayodhya a distinct political entity in the control of her natal family. From being tomboyish in childhood, then taking up the reins of the state, to taking upon herself the task of perpetuating the natal patriline, Purukutsani offers a model of femininity shaped not for 'gifting away' in marriage (given that her marriage is within the family), but is deployed by the natal family-kingdom to stabilize itself as an autonomous unit. Is this any less a patriarchally-shaped femininity? What would a system where the woman perpetuates the line of the natal family do to the institutions of family, private property and society itself? – these are provocative questions that arise in the context of the novel under review.

Thirdly, for English readers whose tastes are molded by political thrillers, *Awadheshwari* has the complexity and suspense to keep readers interested in the political intrigues of the Vedic period. The twists and turns in the plot of the novel and its panoramic scope should interest any television serial producer looking for alternatives to the family drama genre.

That *Awadheshwari* won for Prof. Punekar the Sahitya Akademi award in 1988 and that contemporary critics find in Punekar's writing a criticism of the European and Anglo-American modernity and appreciation of the "inner resilience and naiveté of

regional cultures”,<sup>1</sup> make *Awadheshwari* a prospective text in the English syllabi of universities in India that want to ‘decolonize’ themselves and those abroad that are looking for such instances of ‘Postcolonial Literature’.

While *Awadheshwari* in English will find an interested readership, it may not be a very well-informed readership in the sense that, at the end of reading the novel, they may know little about the Kannada context that gave rise to and received the novel. While the task of translating the novel is undoubtedly a challenging one, the English reader also has to be informed about the source-text’s place in its linguistic-cultural context. What is interesting about a translated text is its life in two cultural contexts and readers in one cultural context must be allowed glimpses of how it inhabits another context. An Introduction that contextualized the source-text and introduced the author’s oeuvre to the English readers would have made the translation more comprehensive.

While overall the translation reads well, some wordiness could have been avoided such as “with an humble prostration of her body” (p.12) and “one should step out to strike out along the lines of possibilities or impossibilities that the future holds” (p.60). In some places, pronoun references are ambiguous, and going by the story-line, in one place ‘Vatsaraja’ has become ‘Kalia’ (p. 73) and ‘Tuesday’ has become ‘Thursday’ (p.62). A misplaced footnote on p. 399 instead of on p. 397 is among the errors that need to be taken care of in the forthcoming editions.

Overall *Awadheshwari* compels the attention of present-day scholars and readers of fiction in English.

**Note:**

This is what Rajendra Chenni wrote about S.M. Punekar in his article titled “Enfant terrible of Kannada Literature” that appeared in Deccan Herald when S.M. Punekar died.

Translating Models: A review of  
Awadheshwari by Shankar Mokashi  
Punekar. Trans. P P Giridhar. 2006.  
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408pages.

**Sushumna K**

Centre for the Study of Cultures and Societies,  
Bangalore.

In times when tradition and modernity persist as crucial issues in all of our scholarship in literature as well as the social sciences, the translation of Shankar Mokashi Punekar's *Awadheshwari*, by P P Giridhar is an apt venture. The novel is a creative take on the political life in Vedic times. Written in 1987, the novel won itself a Sahitya Akademi Award. For all of us now, such a novel and its translation into English rake up a series of questions. How can one reconstruct the Vedic times? What are resources available to do so to creative writers? How does a reconstruction of the Vedic times in the 1980s look like, would it look any different or similar now? How would a translation of Vedic times, so to say, into English look like?

Does the translation of Vedic times involve a translation of concepts of the life-world of a certain time-space or does it demand a reconfiguring of language or even meet with dead-ends and involves in struggles against prevalent idioms of the present? In what sense exactly were the Vedic times different from ours? Is it only the case that sometimes translations into English end up merely *sounding* anachronistic or western-Christian or do they even distort meanings. Is it possible that to a native audience even these anachronistic-sounding renderings make meaning only in a context-

specific sense? Further then, can practices/rituals be understood as concepts? Surely, these are interesting questions spanning various fields of inquiry; I will speculatively answer some of them summarily in this review article, by taking up the novel first and issues of translation next.

### **A novel?:**

*Awadheshwari* is a peculiar novel, (to retain the term), not just for its brave attempt to creatively reconstruct the vedic times, it is so for other reasons as well. For instance, in the foreword, the author goes into researches current in his time and into scriptures and seals and tells us about a unified theory of oriental paleography. Our current understanding however, (of seeking out scriptures or judging practices like incest, both inventions of 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropology), is that it is a result of British colonization and that prior to colonization we related differently to ‘scriptures’ and that our life-worlds were composed differently. Although Punekar in his other writings was sensitive to issues of colonization and writing, it is often less known as to what exactly we mean by colonization or even modernity, all we can say is that he felt the unease that many of us still struggle with. Then again the author also puts forward the thesis that “they are like us”. He also exemplifies literature over ritual, “...To give it a sacrificial-spiritual interpretative, because it is a Rigvedic hymn is to do disservice to his poetic prowess”. A sort of paradox emerges between the author’s claims and what the novel actually accomplishes. While for the author then, our pasts can be rewritten or opted out of and life can be led on ideological or belief-based stances, the novel presents us with more complex instances. This raises a set of unanswered questions about colonization, modernity, passage of time etc or even anachronisms and other debates in historiography. In the limited space of this article I will show that these anachronisms reveal more about our issues and terms of contention and that the issues may themselves demand different treatment.

**In form:**

Surely then, if I were to read the novel and not the author's promises, then we are confronted with peculiar things. A series of unrelated plots, lengthy sub-plots: the sheer number of it almost blinding us to the need or aesthetics of it. On the whole, the large number of plots cannot be missed by any reader at all. This leads us to ask, if then *Awadheshwari* is a novel at all. The numerous unrelated plots should perhaps be understood in terms of the story-telling traditions in our contexts. Typically, *Awadheshwari* is like a *record* of a set of instances. It does not seek to provide experience; fewer stream of consciousness techniques, abrupt shifts from reflections of characters to the development of plot (which can participate in theoretical endeavours) and such like mark the novel from time to time. One can see *Awadheshwari* as working through models (of set of instances) that are set in the *form* that then relates to us a different life-world. One can read the content of *Awadheshwari* as a particular understanding of the Vedic time-space, that strangely or perhaps not so strangely after all, offers us story-structures or models that take off from the main plot, never to return or contribute otherwise. Stories than, one could say have more ambiguous roles to play than novels or other forms, particularly in our contexts. A story could aim to merely relate or keep alive curiosity or retain a world, unlike a novel. And throughout *Awadheshwari* the reader meets with such stories. One could see the effort of the author to capture difference, showing in the form of *Awadheshwari* more than in say, its content, although the content offers to us equally different stuff. This poses to us a unique task, that of translating models, which I will take up in a moment. To see *Awadheshwari* as a record is even interesting in times where the *dharmashastras* are understood less as laws or codes and more as records. The lack of the form of the novel in our contexts can be drawn upon here to form interesting hypotheses.

### **In Content:**

The content of this novel is fraught with characters, but these are no characters from a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century novel! They are characters because they are reflective actors and because action can be typified at least in some general ways. The characters' attitude to action on the whole, the attitude of engagement and negotiation with existing practices and the unabashed pragmatism that is placed within a discourse of right action, contemplative/reflective life cannot be missed at all. With content fashioned in such a way, it is noteworthy that one cannot be proposing that the Vedic times were a degenerate or barbaric time. Thus the novel provides by default and this perhaps has to do with the form, a glimpse into a way of life that we can perhaps with due respect understand as our traditions or inheritances. Read like this the novel does not make us see colonialism as just another cultural encounter that occurred naturally in course of time, but the novel stands for something that can record tradition and show to us the ruptures that colonization set forth.

### **Translating Models?:**

The issues regarding the translation of such a novel then involve awareness of the story form and the models presented therein. However, very interesting questions arise here. Is translation only a task of translating the concepts? Can practices be translated or recreated as concepts? Are there practices that do not lend themselves to conceptualization and translation? And do they remain as practices only because they manage to remain outside of conceptualization? The awareness of the translator in such a case I think is shifted from providing an experience that is nearer or faithful to the original but in preserving the model that the original presents. Thus one has to translate models more than attempting to provide experiences or specific meanings. Here then, with the novel *Awadheshwari*, we are confronted with a case where language cannot be seen as representing culture in any direct manner. So then, the translator must be cautious not to be ideologically inclined and



must translate the meaning of the path or model if at all (because specific meanings are only part of a given path or model). So that, a model preserved and passed on, and numerous experiences within it can become possible. In times when endless ideological translations prevail upon us, even heaped upon us constantly, Giridhar's translation is more relevant. For instance, his "asked himself wordlessly" and similar phrases point to a particular form of reflection, specific perhaps to our times and contexts alone, the composition of which we can reflect upon. That Giridhar believes that one can be indifferent to ideological positions in the act of translation perhaps best suits the translation of stories in the Indian tradition.

## **Book Beat**

# **TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATING**

**Theory and Practice-**

**Roger T. Bell**

**Applied Linguistics and Language Study**

**General Editor: Christopher N. Candlin**

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Being a professor of linguistics, Roger Bell in this book, deals with both translation and linguistics. Translation is a process which transforms “a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language retaining, as far as possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text” and from this definition we can see that translation involves language to a greater extent in its process. The book examines and explains the way translation is treated both by translation theorists and linguists.

The book aims at specifying and solving the dilemma between the translations theorists who have used little systemically the techniques and insights of linguistics and on the other we have contemporary linguists who at best are neutral to these positions. Bell also suggests two motivations in the process of translating, within a systemic model of language, one being the intrinsic and the other utilitarian.

The goal of this book is to outline the essentialities and necessary knowledge of a translator, who must have the ability to translate without hindering the originality of the original as well as the translated text. In this context the author marks his interest in

psychology and attempts to apply it to linguistics, so that it may help in understanding the meaning “beyond the sentence”.

The book is divided into three unequal parts: Model, Meaning and Memory.

Model is a general introduction to the nature of translation and also it presents an outline for translation. It highlights the fundamental aspects of translation; Model questions the fidelity of the translator: The skills and technique that the translator should follow while translating and the manner in which the translator can establish him in translation and lastly, the integration of the translator in finding the “Meaning” of the related text is emphasized in Model.

And then in Meaning, as the title itself suggests, there is the quest for meaning—both of the traditional word and sentence meaning and the modern semantic sense of logic and grammar; the communicative value [rhetoric], sets all the three in a Functional [Systemic] model of language. The meaning of the “meaning” and the problem of the “meaning” takes a lion’s share in this section. Also the conceptual distinctions introduced in the various aspects of meaning like sense and reference, denotation and connotation and other aspects like the nature of semantic meanings i.e. the cognitive meaning through Transitivity and interactional meaning through Mood are discussed in this segment. The segment explains the importance in distinguishing a text from a non-text, it values sentences and also it points out the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. The segment at once looks like a miniature of the communication model.

The final segment is the Memory part of the above two. It takes care of the specific issue of the text-processing and the generally related issue of the storage & retrieval of information. It deals with the typology of texts, synthesizing and analyzing of texts

along with the psycholinguistic processes included in memory and in information. Finally the building of a model in the process of translation and integrating the information into long term memory is aimed at.

In fine, the book acknowledges the need for a scientific mode in developing translation process not discarding the importance of linguistics. The book emphasizes the fact that in translation both the technique and knowledge of the text is important. Translation is not only a process of recycling the original text but also it is a process wherein recreation takes place.

## **Lives in Translation**

**Bilingual Writers on Identity and Creativity**

**Edited by Isabella De Courtivron**

**Prof of French Studies at MIT**

**First Published 2003 by Palgrave Macmillan**

**No of Pages 171**

**ISBN 1-4039-6066-6 hardback**

The book explores the problem of “being bilingual”. The authors facing the dilemma of “in-between ness” ponder the strange itineraries that have led them from a childhood in one language to a writing life in another. Each author for one or the other reason has been rendered helpless by inevitable circumstances to enter a new world, which is quite different from their own in which they had inhabited, cohabited and lived their childhood. The new challenges, adjustments, reconciliations in the new world lead to another crisis, the problem of identity. This duality extends to writing. The writer who has placed language at the center of his or her creative life doubts whether bilingualism is a curse or a boon to creativity.

Anita Desai feels “floundering midway” between old and new territory, it is only then that she decides that her work should be

“...comprehensible to readers who did not share (her) precise inheritance.” Assia Djebar expresses her desire to bring into light the hidden of her Arobo-Berber past origin in the French language.

Dorfman suggests two remedies for this “doubleness” – Assimilation and Rejection. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim opines that living in two languages is not important but the experiences as bilingual humans should pave way for new aesthetics of modes of imagination encompassing two cultures and two languages. Eva Hoffman explains how he came out of his first self-polish language and learned to love English –“the forbidden external object.” According to Nancy Huston languages are not mere languages, they are worldviews and hence untranslatable. Sylvia Molloy opines that the writing of a bilingual writer always needs to be altered and never “dis-altered”, never satisfied. Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill claims that Irish is his language of emotions and English is a bridge to him to the outside world. Jose F.A.Oliver declares that both German and Spanish to him are the “I” and the “Other”, both searching for a tongue. Leila Sebbar, her mother being French and father Arab, is the accomplished daughter of her teacher-mother. She says that she reads French writers and also Arabic language in translation. She wants to write about her father’s land, colonized, mistreated in her mother’s language. She tries to trace her roots to gain access to her father’s culture. Anton Shammas discusses the problem of writers as cultural translators. He tries to translate himself into English but in the attempt he loses his Hebrew and Arabic, just as his Arabic books drowned. Ilan Stavans wants his work to be of some use to his own people. He soon realises that grammar is an investigation on the nature and conditions of a language. In the case of Yoko Tawada, the haphazard meeting of languages as radically different as German and Japanese has not been resisted; on the contrary, the odd juxtaposition has provided an unexpected aesthetic liberation, bringing with it discovery of a style filled with playfulness, humor, and surrealist encounters. Isabelle De Courtivron relates her situation with Helen Wolf’s saying: “I am someone with two exiles and no

country.” It is in English that she decides to write about her French mother’s story, ironically, English had poised her mother’s life; same had been the language that transformed the author’s life.

Edward Said admits: “I have never known which my first language was, and have felt fully at home in neither.” The authors in this volume seem to be comfortable and more “one’s self” in the second language or the acquired language. Each has developed a very personal style that owes its elegance and power, in part, to this initial struggle. These writers master the adopted language and they navigate between words and between worlds in search of “self”. As Isabelle De Courtivron observes the experience of being caught between the two cultures, two languages is like neither returning home nor leaving home, it is probably a bit of both.

## **Translation and Globalization**

**Michael Cronin**

**Joint faculty of humanities and**

**Director of the Centre for Translation and Textual studies at**

**Dublin City University, Ireland**

**First published 2003 by Routledge**

**197 Pages**

**ISBN 0-415-27065-0**

The new world is now the United States of the world and the ‘English race’ has conquered the globe. The effects of the dramatic changes in technology and in the organization of economics and societies at national and international level are wide-ranging and *Translation and Globalization* examines the specific consequences of these changes for translation and translators. It is truism in translation studies to point out that most of the work done in translation is in the area of scientific, technical, commercial, legal and administrative or institutional translation. Though both literary

and non-literary translation are examined in this work, the focus is largely on non-literary translation. This book takes a broad look at translation and new technology in a world transformed by the forces of globalization, with three aims in mind. Firstly, the study attempts to understand the specific role of translation in this particular moment of human history. Secondly it shows translation students and teachers that translation is not only useful but interesting. Thirdly, the work wants to demonstrate, who not translators are and why translation is interesting and important. **Chapter 1** examines the major changes in the economy and information technology over the last three decades which have impacted on translation. The chapter also considers the role of the social in conjunction with the technical as translation is not identified as a means of instant communication but as a channel of transmission over time. If all translation is a vivid demonstration of interdependency, then any real independence of spirit can come through a grateful acknowledgement of our many cultural and linguistic dependencies. **Chapter 2** deals with contemporary models of translation and asks what the role of translator might be in the twenty-first century. The concept investigated in the chapter is that of the network and how the properties of networks can be explored to describe features of translation activity worldwide. **Chapter 3** takes a close look at the changing geography of translation practice and how translation in one small country, Ireland, has been affected by contemporary globalization. As more people become inhabitants of global cities, the issue of translation and indeed indifference to translation is raised in the context of an argument for a new, polyglossic civility. **Chapter 4** examines key features of globalization which impact on any future politics of translation, namely time, the rise of supra-national institutions and organizations, automation and the economic might of specific languages. The chronostratification of languages, the invisibility of translators as mediators and the dangers of a new 'clonialism' are examined in the light of debates about the gradual impoverishment of the planet. It demand a more self-aware and activist dimension to

the role of the translator in the age of globalization. **Chapter 5** looks at the world in a minor key. The difficulty for communities in defending their languages against outside pressures is examined in the context of all resistance to translation being seen as uniquely regressive and essentialist. An argument is advanced in favour of a new translation ecology which attaches due importance to particularism and place without a reactionary retreat to ethnocentric smugness.

Translation is important not simply because it gets us talking to each other or allows each of us to read what the other has written but because it gives us insights into why we find it difficult sometimes to speak to each other and why we particularly like or understand what the other has written. If contemporary reality is inescapably multicultural and multinational, then it makes sense to look to a discipline which has mediation between cultures and languages as a central concern to assist us both in understanding globalization and in understanding what it might mean, and why it is difficult to be a citizen of the world.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**A.J.Thomas** works as Assistant Editor to the journal *Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

**Anamika** is Lecturer in English in Saraswati College, New Delhi.

**B. Hariharan** teaches in the Dept of English at the P.G. Centre, University of Mysore, Hemangothri, Hassan.

**Chandrani Chatterjee** is UGC Junior Research Fellow working for her doctorate at the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai

**Ian Fairly** works in the University of Leeds, U.K.

**Mandakranta Bose** is Professor Emeritus, Institute of Asian Research, British Columbia.

**Meena T. Pillai** is Senior Lecturer of English at Sri Shankaracharya Sanskrit University, Regional Campus, Thiruvananthapuram.

**Milind Malshe** is Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai.

**Nilanjan Chakrabarti** is Senior Lecturer in French, Dept of English and Other Modern European Languages, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan-731 235.

**Niranjan Mohanty** is the author of six volumes of poetry, the latest being *Krishna* (2003). Translates from Oriya and Bengali into English. His papers on translation have been published in *Perspectives* (Copenhagen) and *Language International* (U.K). He was a Visiting Writer from India to the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, U.S.A. in 1994. Recipient of Senior Fellowship, Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi,

1994-97. At present he is Professor of English at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India.

**Probal Das Gupta** is Professor at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad. He has written extensively on Linguistics, Translation Studies, and Literature.

**R. Radhakrishnan** is Professor of English & Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine.

**Suh Joseph Che** works in the University of Buea, Cameroon.

**Vijaya Guttal** works in the Postgraduate Department of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad, India



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