Reclaiming Agency from the Colonial Writers: The Case of Maridas Pillai

UMA DAMODAR SRIDHAR

Abstract

The 18th century in Europe was characterised by the Enlightenment movement that opened up new spaces of interrogation with respect to geography, natural sciences and religion. It was marked by a profusion of writings enhancing knowledge production about the new countries, cultures, fauna and flora encountered by the European travellers, leading to the creation of new discursive formations about foreign cultures. Most books were encyclopaedic in nature, published under the name of a single European author, but later revealed to have been the result of the collaboration of native scholars. For example, the dubashes in India acted as translators and go-betweens mediating the foreign and local cultures. They played a major role in this knowledge dissemination and actively participated in the construction of colonial knowledge prior to the 19th century leading to the formation of India as a product of European imagination. In this paper, I will present the case of Maridas Poullé or Pillai, whose work as the first translator of the Bhagavata Purana into French was appropriated by several French travellers, but who subsequently reclaimed his own agency, subverting the narratives of colonial power, authorship and originality.

Keywords: Translator's Agency, 18th Century French Travel Writing, Dubash, Maridas Pillai, French Translation of the Bhagavata Purana.

Introduction

It is now accepted that in the 18th century, translation and travel writing both acted as instruments of European colonialism and imperialism (Cheyfitz, 1991, p. 104). From the 16th century, texts from India were being translated into dominant European languages for European consumption. They highlighted alterity and

emphasised the strangeness of the texts, juxtaposing the differences between a forward-thinking enlightened Europe and a backward-looking East trapped in an ancient past. Drawing on Foucault's (1979, p. 27) theory on the relation between power and knowledge and applying them to the construction of the colonial subject, Tejaswini Niranjana observed that translation as a practice, shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism, highlighting the links between translation and representation, power and historicity (1992, pp. 2-3). Further, Edward Said's *Orientalism* highlighted the construction of the Orient by colonial hegemonic powers as an exotic, romanticised space, exaggerating the differences between European and Eastern cultures, setting up the latter as an essentialist "other". These representations shaped not only the understanding by the West of all countries east of Europe but also influenced the very understanding of the colonised subjects themselves of their own culture (Said, 1978). These facts provide a background to the study at hand, i.e. the agency of the indigenous or native translator in 18th-century colonial India, based on the case of the Tamil dubash Maridas Pillai. I will examine the circumstances and the consequences of the publication of his French translation of the Bhagavata Purana in 1772 in France, and his own actions before and thereafter, involving questions of power, authorship and agency.

Agency leads one to take action or to choose what action to take. I draw upon Robert Inden's definition of the word "agency" as "the capacity of people to order their world" (2000, p. 1). Inden has critiqued the Indological branch of 'orientalist discourse' and the accounts of India that it has produced since the Enlightenment. He explains that the process of the production of knowledge of 'Others' that Europeans and Americans have created during the periods of their world ascendancy was essentialist, flowing from determinist scientific approaches. However, the "agents," far from embodying simple, unchanging essences, were "relatively complex and shifting, making and remaking one another through a dialectic process in changing situations" (p. 2). It is the capacity of people to "act purposefully and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world

they lived in, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view" (p. 23).

In the colonial context, agency takes on a new meaning. As Inden says, "colonialism consisted quite precisely of the attempt to make previously autonomous (or more autonomous) agents (…) into instruments through which the colonizers could fulfil their desires and into patients, those who had to be variously pacified or punished, saved, reformed, or developed" (p. 23). However, as we shall see, the agents themselves were not always amenable to being manipulated and resisted in ways beyond the control of the colonial masters in an attempt to reclaim their own agency.

18th-century Europe and the Discovery of New Worlds

The Age of Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe was an intellectual and philosophical movement marked by the opening up of Europe to the outside world, both physically and intellectually, resulting in an inward-lookingness, introspection and a re-examination of accepted knowledge and beliefs. Although it was later viewed under a critical lens as to its status towards creating a more rational and better world, it undoubtedly created new spaces of interrogation with respect to geography, natural sciences and religion. There was a push against the authoritarianism and orthodoxy of the Catholic church, led by thinkers such as Voltaire in France, strengthened by the 'discoveries' of new religions in Asia, namely Hinduism and Buddhism, indicating alternate philosophies and civilisations that were older than Christianity, challenging the existing paradigms on history, religion, and memory, and promoting anticlericalism, secularism, and individual liberty.

This resulted in a large body of writing enhancing knowledge production about the new countries and cultures encountered by European travellers, leading to the creation of new discursive formations about foreign cultures. This knowledge was a powerful factor in shaping the new thoughts in Europe. However, as Inden argues, European travellers did not act in isolation, rather they interacted with the Indian agents who contributed towards their writings, both thereby entering into a dialectical relationship. "Once

one realises the truth of this, he or she will begin to see that India has played a part in the making of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe (and America) much greater than the 'we' of scholarship, journalism, and officialdom would normally wish to allow" (p. 3). This observation also reiterated Sanjay Subhrahmanyam's (1997) idea of "connected histories" revealing the larger picture behind individual endeavours. As Subrahmanyam states, "ideas and mental constructs, too, flowed across political boundaries in that world, and - even if they found specific local expression - enable us to see that what we are dealing with are not separate and comparable, but connected histories" (p. 748).

European/French Presence in India: The Role of the Jesuits

From the sixteenth century onwards, the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch and the French began arriving here, seeking trade opportunities. They had been preceded by Jesuit missionaries who had been coming to India well before them. They learnt Indian languages to communicate with the locals in their mission to understand Indigenous cultures and spread their religion. Translations of religious texts were also undertaken for this purpose. Scores of texts were translated and sent back to Europe, where they were read and analysed. Many dictionaries and books of French-Tamil vocabulary were published by the Jesuits in the 18th century. Lorenzen (2019, p. 177) notes that Sanskrit grammars were also produced by Jesuit missionaries Heinrich Roth (1620-1668), Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681-1732), and Jean-François Pons (ca. 1730), although none of them was published before the twentieth century. Several eighteenth-century Jesuit missionaries in India wrote letters about Indian culture to their clerical superiors that were published (first in French, then in other European languages) in thirty-odd volumes of the popular series *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. All these missionaries learnt local languages to be able to preach.

In this respect, the French, Portuguese, Germans and Danes had taken the lead in the study of local languages with respect to the British, who remained largely ignorant of Indian languages. Lorenzen (2019, p. 178) notes that the earliest Sanskrit grammars by

British Orientalists were all written in English, from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. The earliest was that of Charles Wilkins (1749-1836) who began work on it as early as 1783. It was not published until 1808.

The 18th century also brought a host of travellers who visited India in different capacities: administrators, scholars, naturalists, scientists, astronomers. They produced books that were published under their names, but some were later revealed to have been the result of collaboration of native scholars, who were unacknowledged. These early works by the French and the Portuguese, who undertook the first steps in 'translating' texts into their languages, were produced with the help of a large number of local translators. India was being produced discursively, the final seal placed in the 18th century by the British Indologists such as William Jones who, by adopting translations of what they considered as canonical texts like the Dharma sastra, were determined to give India a 'book of laws' in the likes of Europe.

The Dubash: Intermediaries Between Europe and India

Archival records of the British East India Company reveal several names for the Indian intermediaries who were employed by the Company or associated with it, and on whom the British depended for information and knowledge. The anglicised title of some of these functionaries included *akhund, banian, dalal, dubashi (tupasi in Tamil, Colonial records of the Raj), gomasthi, pandit, shroff* and *vakil* (Cohn, 1928, p. 16). The titles varied according to the location of the company factories, but all of these Indians had specialised forms of knowledge. The dubashi of Bengal and the Coromandel coast had his function embodied in his title, meaning "two languages."

These were often Indigenous intellectuals drawn into various colonial projects associated with the flow of knowledge and power between Europe and South Asia. Dubashi culture is associated, in particular, with the work of colonial commerce and the practices of European agency houses, (do-bhasa; Yule and Burnell 1886, p. 252). However, they also contributed to the translation of Indie textual traditions. (Hatcher, 2017, p. 109)

Most departments of the Company government and the courts had their own *dubashes*. This was the case also in Bengal, as well as in Madras, where they acted as “advisor, guide, broker and inevitably, money lender” (Neild-Basu, 1984, p. 4). The French East India Company, or the Compagnie des Indes, chartered by Louis XIV at the behest of his far-sighted minister Colbert, held and governed the town of Pondicherry from 1674. The traders of the Compagnie were also administrators of the colony, with a triple mission: to colonise, profit and extend the cause of Christianity. (Agmon, 2014, p. 140) To achieve this, they employed local dubashes who acted as translators, interpreters and commercial brokers in a fixed hierarchy. At the highest position was the chief commercial broker to the French Company in Pondicherry, known as *courtiers* et *chefs des malabars* (p. 142). In Pondichéry, the powerful position of *courtier et chef des malabars* moved between two families in almost a hereditary manner for more than a century, the Mudali and Pillai families, titles that were associated with Vellala caste groups, high-ranking agricultural landlords. Though these two families belonged to the same caste, Pillais were Hindu and Mudalis were Christian.

The most famous person from this (the Pillai) family was his nephew who also held this post Ananda Ranga Pillai (1746-61), who was dubash to the French Governor-General Dupleix, and who left behind 6 (several) volumes of diaries recording extensive details of life and politics in Pondichéry.

Sometimes, they were regarded with suspicion by the Europeans due to the power they wielded and the knowledge they possessed of the personal and professional affairs of the company (Neild-Basu, 1984, p. 3). This eventually led to their disappearance. In fact, most accounts of dubashes mention them as active in politics, trade, property, commerce, influence and wealth. However, some of these men played crucial, unlauded, roles in transforming learning and literature in colonial South Asia (Dodson 2005; Hatcher 2005, 2017). One such person was Maridas Pillai.

Maridas Poullé and the Invisibility of the Dubash

We know of Maridas Pillai thanks to the research conducted by Rita Régnier (1975) and a slim volume dedicated to the first

translation of the Bagavadam by J.P.B.More (2004). However, the circumstances surrounding the appearance of the translation are noteworthy and point to the nature and directionality of the networks of information flow during the 18th century between India and France. Régnier recounts that a controversy erupted in the learned circles of 18th century France when the naturalist Foucher d'Obsonville, published a *Bāgavadam* (1788) anonymously (his name however was recorded correctly by the *Bibliothèque Nationale* which has a copy of the work). In the preface, "*Discours Preliminaire*", he accused the Indian who had supplied him with an abridged translation of the *Bagavada Purana (Pakavatam),* based on a Tamil manuscript, of having clandestinely sent a copy of the text to Jean-Baptiste Bertin, the minister and secretary of State in Paris in 1770. D'Obsonville states in his book:

> *After travelling for twenty years, I arrived in Europe at the end of 1771. I soon became aware of several literary losses. A handwritten and incorrect copy of the Bagavadam had been clandestinely sent to a Minister whose enlightened taste for science was not unknown beyond the seas. The author of the dispatch was an Indian interpreter whose services I had used. This man, who owed his career more or less to my solicitations, had received from me a salary of twenty-five rupees (two and a half Louis) a month. After my departure from India in 1769, this payment was continued by my attorney, currently residing in Lyon, and until the time when he could no longer conceal the fact that I had been deceived. I submitted in 1772, to the annoyance of the Minister to whom this work had been sent, the proofs of my rights, and of the infidelity. In response, he deigns to honour me with the most satisfactory letter.* (1788, pp. vii-viii, My translation)

Bertin ultimately donated it to the *Bibliothèque du Roi,* the Royal Library, rendering it accessible to other scholars. In addition, Foucher also blamed this Indian for having sold a copy of this same translation as well as a few other documents purchased at his own expense "a modern voyage in two volumes" (1788, viii), pointing to

the work of fellow French naturalist and traveller Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage to India and China (1782)* and who he had criticised in an earlier anonymous pamphlet written in 1785. (Régnier, 1975, p. 79).

This "Indian" was Maridas Poullé or Pillai (1721-1796), a Dubash employed as interpreter to the Conseil Supérieur de Pondichéry (More, 2004). Maridas Pillai's (Maritācu Pillai in Tamil or Maridas Poullé in French) father, Appavou Pillai of the Vellala caste, had been chief interpreter in the Conseil Superieur de Pondichery. Appavou Pillai had converted to Christianity and Maridas was tutored by the missionaries, learning French and Latin, as well as some English and Portuguese. His fluency in these languages, knowledge of Hinduism and closeness to the missionaries soon made him an invaluable intermediary for the academically inclined knowledge seekers who travelled from Europe to India looking for the Vedas, the most sought-after religious texts during the 18th century. Indeed, there is not much information about his administrative duties as a Dubash, even though he was also appointed interpreter at the Conseil de Pondicherry around 1767 (More, p. 4).

Maridas Pillai was well known during that period as an esteemed and indispensable 'assistant' (Régnier, 1975, p. 83) who helped several European travellers in their quest to learn Indian languages and decipher ancient Indian texts. The French Indologist Anquetil du Perron met Maridas in 1755 in Pondicherry to learn Tamil from this polyglot. On his request, Maridas even embarked on a Tamil-Sanskrit-French dictionary, which he could not, however, complete.

In 1760, the French royal astronomer Guillaume Legentil de la Galaciere was in Pondicherry to study the transit of Venus. He was also assisted by Maridas who translated Sanskrit manuscripts to help calculate the time of the eclipses. In his turn, Maridas became the interpreter in the French Conseil Superieur de Pondicherry sometime before 1767. Legentil recorded his appreciation of Maridas in his book *Voyage en Inde* where he described his experiments to witness the transit of Venus, which however was a failure due to bad weather conditions on that day. He described Maridas as a 'man of intellect and a curious mind', "homme d'esprit et esprit curieux". (More, 2004, p. 3, my translation)

Maridas continued to refine his translation of the Bagavadam even after sending it to Foucher D'Obsonville. Father H. Hosten, who published the later, more complete translation in 1921 in the *Revue Historique de l'Inde Francaise* stated that he had continued his efforts between 1793-95, as he was dissatisfied with his previous translation, made for Foucher d'Obsonville, that had no glosses or explanatory notes (found today in the Paris National Library). Father Hosten credited Maridas as possessing a rare kind of knowledge for that period about religious and philosophical literature, combining the qualities of a philosopher, theologian, historian and geographer. (p. 6).

Maridas was therefore the author of two translations of the *Pakavatam,* one, edited by Fouchon d'Obsonville (1788) and the second one by P. Holsten (1921). He was also the author of the unpublished *Mémoires sur l'Astronomie indienne en vigueur sur la côte de Coromandel*, (Essay on Indian Astronomy as practiced on the Coromandel Coast, my translation), work undertaken for Charles-Auge Monneron, Intendant of the *Compagnie* and his "protector." French astronomers Jean-Sylvain Bailly and Le Gentil referred to his work in their own treatises on Indian astronomy and the passage of Venus before the sun, respectively (More, 2000, x). Maridas also had a series of other works that he wished to undertake in the future, but he died on 3 April 1796 in Pondicherry, at the age of 75, after completing his last translation of the Bagavadam, where he included his notes and his interpretations.

Maridas' Translation of the Bhagavata Purana

The Bhagavata Purana is considered the most important of the 18 puranas, next only to the Vedas. Hindu tradition ascribes the creation of the Bhagavata Purana to the sage Vyasa, purportedly the author of the Vedas. However, the exact date of the origin of the Bhagavata Purana is unclear. The Indologist Jean Filliozat dates it between the 9th to 11th centuries. (More, 2004, p. 4).

Maridas had probably based his French translation on a Tamil manuscript, the origins of which are unclear. According to More, (2004, p. 4) the French translation carries the word 'toulouker'

(166), which appeared in Tamil only around the 14th century, referring to the Turkish sultanate in Madurai. He therefore concludes that the Tamil manuscript used by Maridas was composed between the 14th century and perhaps the 18th century. This anonymous manuscript can be found today in the *Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris* (Oriental section) in two volumes on paper. Maridas does not mention the name of the author of the Tamil manuscript, although it is probable that the original manuscript underwent several modifications over time.

It is interesting to note why, at a time when all attention was devoted to finding the Vedas, considered the most sacred texts of the new religion the Europeans encountered in India (apart from Buddhism), it was a Purana that had been translated. More speculates that it was perhaps a question of accessibility. The reading and chanting of the Vedas were restricted to the priestly caste with no chance for the common man to access them. The Puranas, on the other hand, were accessible to women and the lower castes, and therefore were easy to obtain. This explains why, Maridas Pillai, a converted Tamil Christian, was able to translate a Purana (More, 2004, p. 4), rather than a Veda, which was the holy grail hunted by most European travellers, as they believed it crystallised the most important thoughts of Hinduism.

Maridas' work was of course not a complete translation. More's 2004 edition of the translation is a mere 170 pages in prose form, whereas the original Purana comprises 10 books in poetry, dealing with the creation of the world, cosmogony and the genealogy of gods and kings, mythology and legends, like all other Puranas. In addition, More observes that a comparison of Pillai's final version with that of D'Obsonville's reveals that the Frenchman had overwritten some of the sentences, domesticating and lending it a French flavour, whereas Pillai's Purana had a distinct Indianness (x).

Significance of the Maridas Pillai's Translation

Maridas Pillai's translation is significant for several reasons. First, it was one of the earliest translations of a Purana to reach Europe. (The most well-known French translation of the Bhagavata Purana, by Eugene Bournouff, in three volumes (1840-1847), appeared much

later, in the 19th century). For a continent eagerly awaiting new ways of looking at the world, it announced the presence of other cultures and religions that were far more ancient than Europe's, contributing, along with other such works, towards the intellectual developments of the West. Despite his ill will towards the Indian Dubash, Foucher's edition exposed the text to the world and it was read by other Indologists like Anquetil du Perron and Joseph de Guignes, possibly even Voltaire, leading to other important consequences.

Secondly, it raises the nature of the relationship between the colonial masters who commissioned translations and the fate of the actual translator. Foucher d'Obsonville had complained about the lack of financial support to French scholars working in India, as opposed to the British, who were supported and encouraged by their motherland. In fact, Anquetil du Perron records that Foucher d'Obsonville paid Rs 25 every month to Maridas, and continued this arrangement for some years after his departure from India in 1721.

However, on October 5, 1772, the Jesuit priest Father Coeurdoux wrote to Anquetil du Perron from Pondicherry, "I have received reasonable complaints from this Indian (Maridas), more educated than the others. We engaged him previously for the long and arduous translation of the Bhagavatam, not to mention the considerable expenses incurred by him and for which he did not receive the smallest word of thanks. As an Indian family man, he is not in a position to bear them. As a result, he was forced to abandon the translation of a few more arduous manuscripts that deal with cosmography and discuss the mysteries of the 'Duitam' (Dvaita) and 'Aduitam' (Advaita)". (More, 2004, p. 5, my translation).

Evidently, pecuniary issues continued to plague Maridas, who had capitalised on his talent by producing multiple copies of his translation and selling them to other European customers. Foucher d'Obsonville's complaints and indignation at what he believed was Maridas' perfidy therefore must be viewed in the light of the asymmetric power relations that existed between the prosperous patrons of translations commissioned from Indian informants, who were expected to exhibit complete loyalty and subservience to the colonial patrons for monetary returns. The Europeans, on the other hand, did not always show any inclination to acknowledge or

promote their Indian informants. Maridas must have realised the significance of the text he was translating and wished it to reach a larger audience, sending therefore a copy to the minister. He was not mistaken, as Foucher d'Obsonville had published the translation anonymously.

There is a third reason why Pillai must be remembered. Foucher d'Obsonville's edition of his translation was read by the French Indologist Joseph Deguignes. Deguignes studied the dynastic list of Magadha kings in that translation and observed that the name of a king transcribed as *Sandragoutten* was in fact, probably the Indian king Chandragupta (Maurya, 321-297 BC) referred to as *Sandrocottos* by the Greeks, a contemporary of the king Alexander (356 BC – 323 BC). As the date of the latter's conquests was well established, it was possible to synchronise the dates of the Indian kings according to western history, establishing a universal historiography. As the Purana provided a list of a succession of kings, it was possible to date them and establish the dates for ancient India.

According to Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat (More, 2004, xii), also reported in Mohan (2018, p. 85) and Lorenzen (2019, p. 175), De Guignes mentioned this discovery in 1772 in his *Réflexions sur un livre intitulé Bagavadam, un des dix-huit Pouranam ou Livres sacrés des Indiens dont la traduction a été envoyée en 1769 à M Bertin, Ministre et Secrétaire d'Etat*, published in the *Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, vol 38, 312-336,*[1], thereby laying the international foundations of Indology. However, the credit for this discovery goes to the British Indologist and scholar William Jones, who reported the same synchrony twenty years after Deguignes. He referred to it in a speech he delivered in 1793 and published in 1799 in the Asiatic Research.

[1] *Reflexions on a book titled Bagavadam, one of the eighteen Puranas or Sacred Books of the Indians whose translation was sent in 1769 to Mr. Bertin, Minister and Secretary of State,* published in the *Dissertation on the literature in the Registers of the Royal Academy of Inscriptions and Classical Literature* (my translation).

As put succinctly by Trautmann, 1997, “The Asiatic Society gave institutional form and definition to a group of scholar-administrators who were fashioning a new claim for authority over the older Orientalism, a claim that largely succeeded. The vogue for the new Orientalism virtually eclipsed the earlier writings on India (Trautmann, 1997, as quoted in Lorenzen, 2019, p. 177).

These texts sourced from the Indigenous informants (who may have shared their knowledge with other travellers) attest to the hybridity of texts produced by the European travellers. This opens a view of the sources of pre-colonial European literature on India, and the role played by Indian intermediaries in supplying the original materials, often without receiving due credit. Early European travellers relied heavily on the educated upper-caste Indian pundits to access Indian texts that they appropriated and published under their names with their comments. These dubash or the local interpreters were the intermediaries who mediated ordinary commercial or domestic exchanges between the Europeans and the local populace in 19th-century colonial India. They also participated in the translation of Indian textual traditions, contributing towards an understanding of Indian culture. So, the images of Indian society that were brought to the Western world in the 18th-century were initially mediated through translated Indian texts by Indian pundits or learned men. The dubash and their translations played a role in the construction of representations of the colonised subjects as Europe’s civilised ‘other’, transmitting in the process a particular vision of Indian culture.—Michael Cronin writes that “the use of local knowledge and a striking feature of British imperial policy was its ability to co-opt local, dominated knowledge(s) in a strategy for retaining power.” (2000, p. 34). The dubash had played a crucial, albeit silent, role from the beginning of relations between Europe and India and such was the case of Maridas Poullé, who sold or forwarded his copies to more than one person, thereby laying hollow each of their claims to ‘originality’, and exercising his right to claim authorship over his work.

By the end of the 18th century, the dubash was being marginalised, mainly “occasioned by the weightage awarded to Western scholarship by the political power”. (Cronin, 2000, p. 34).

Further impetus to their decline was provided by the new scholar-bearers of Indian literature and culture to the West, such as William Jones and Charles Wilkins, who saw themselves as independent of them. They learnt classical languages and undertook their own translations. With this development, the pandits "ceased to be considered the living guardians and interpreters of the indigenous tradition and were downgraded to the role of assistants and employees of the British (…), admired and overlooked, credited and ignored at the same time". (Hatcher, 2005, p. 693).

Conclusion

As we can see, several European travellers who journeyed across India up to this period to take back home the mysteries they claimed to find were, in fact, mainly presenting reworked translations made by largely unknown Indians who acted as their collaborators, mediating between the European–traveller and Indian religion and mythology. Jyoti Mohan states, "even if Indians were in an inferior position, they were the primary informants who contributed to the discourse of Indology" (2018: xxx). In this way, says Mohan, the natives had the opportunity to exercise their agency in the relaying of information about their cultures and pasts to their colonial masters. A reading of this story through the lens of translation and history reveals that it was the Indian *dubash* Maridas Pillai who had the last word in the confrontation between him, d'Obsonville, and Sonnerat, reclaiming his agency as translator and mediator of two cultures. D'Obsonville's indignation stemmed from the fact that Maridas had proven to be 'disloyal,' whereas the latter had simply exercised his own agency by selling several copies of his translation to d'Obsonville, and then to Sonnerat. He had also gifted a copy to the minister Bertin, thereby robbing d'Obsonville of the claim to the 'originality' of his own work and the stamp of his authorship. These mediations of the indigenous translators therefore resulted in a subversion of the narratives of colonial power and the purported creativity of the European writers.

The anonymity of the Dubash/translators also resulted in their invisibility in colonial archives in 18th-century India, except in some rare and well-known cases. This effacing of their identity raises

interrogations about the oral and textual transmission of data across cultures and narrative systems (Harrigan, 2014, p. 4). Further research is required to unearth more such stories, giving back voice and agency to Dubash/translator, and to explore the larger networks of knowledge transmission in 18th-century India.

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About the Author

Uma Damodar Sridhar

Uma Damodar Sridhar is an Associate Professor at the Department of French and Francophone Studies at the English and Foreign Languages University. She has over 30 years' experience as a teacher of French and translator, having worked at the Alliance Française of Hyderabad prior to joining the ELF University in 2009. Her areas of interest are French language and linguistics, translation, teaching methodology and 18th-century French historiography. She is currently working on an ICHR project on translation of 18th-century French travel writing to India.

Email ID: umadsridhar[AT]efluniversity[DOT]ac[DOT]in

Cite this Work:

Sridhar Damodar Uma, (2024). Reclaiming Agency from the Colonial Writers: The Case of Maridas Pillai. *Translation Today*, *18*(2). 46-61.
DOI: 10.46623/tt/2024.18.2.ar3