Preserving Tone and Voice: A Critical Evaluation of Khushwant Singh's Translations of Amrita Pritam's Poetry

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Abstract

Translating poetry demands more than linguistic accuracy; it requires a sensitive engagement with the poem's tone and voice, which are central to its layered meanings and emotional impact. This paper explores the significance of preserving these elements in poetry translation, focusing on the English translations of Amrita Pritam's work. It argues that tone, understood as the emotional colouring of words, and voice, defined as the distinctive presence and perspective in the poem, are crucial for conveying the poet's intent and maintaining the integrity of the preceding text. Through an examination of Pritam's diverse poetic voices, shaped by themes ranging from personal longing to social critique, the study investigates how translators interpret and reproduce these features. The paper further considers how the translator's choices affect the reader's experience and understanding of the source material. Ultimately, it highlights the importance of tone and voice in ensuring that translated poetry resonates with the same depth and complexity as the original.

Keywords: Poetry Translation, Tone, Voice, Punjabi Poetry, Literary Style.

Introduction

Amrita Pritam occupies a pivotal place in modern South Punjabi literature as a trailblazing poet and writer who profoundly shaped Punjabi literary traditions. Emerging during a period marked by seismic political and social upheavals, including the Partition of India in 1947, Pritam's work reflects the complex intersections of personal experience and collective trauma. Over a prolific career that

spanned six decades, Pritam produced a substantial and diverse corpus of work, encompassing poetry, fiction, essays and autobiographical writings. Among her numerous contributions, the poem *Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu* and novel *Pinjar* (1950), composed in the immediate aftermath of the Partition of India, remain a landmark in Indian literary history, powerfully capturing the trauma and anguish of a fractured nation with unflinching clarity and lyrical force.

Her literary achievements brought her wide national and international recognition. She was the first woman to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956 and later became a recipient of the Jnanpith Award and the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, India's highest literary honour. The Government of India acknowledged her contributions with the Padma Shri in 1969 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2004. She was also honoured abroad, receiving the Vaptsarov Award from Bulgaria and the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from France. She also founded the literary magazine *Nagmani*, which served as a significant platform for emerging writers. Publication in *Nagmani* was widely regarded as a hallmark of literary recognition and an important step toward establishing oneself as a writer. Amrita Pritam's legacy endures not only in her vast and varied oeuvre but in the moral courage and artistic integrity with which she gave voice to her time.

This paper closely studies the English translations of selected poems of Amrita Pritam,[1] written between 1950 and 1984, and later translated into English as *Punjabi Poems of Amrita Pritam* by Khushwant Singh (2009). The collection contains 35 selected poems, showcasing the breadth and depth of Pritam's poetic work. The introduction to the book emphasises the progression of Pritam's poetry from traditional forms to more liberated and rebellious expressions. The progression is not just a structural shift but a profound transformation in the tone and voice of her work. Singh does not specifically comment on the particular selection of 35 poems, yet the collection effectively reflects the thematic breadth

[1] These poems have been selected from Nagmani (1964), Kagaz te Canvas (1970), Chetarnama (1983) and Amrita Pritam: 141 Poems (1984).

and emotional depth of Amrita Pritam's poetry. The chosen poems offer a representative cross-section of her literary vision, marked by its intensity, diversity and social consciousness.

One of the dominant thematic currents in Pritam's poetry, vividly represented in this selection, is progressivism as manifested through her engagement with social and political issues. Poems such as "To Waris Shah", "A Letter", "Politics", "My City", "Conspiracy of Silence", and "An Aspect" articulate the anguish of those silenced by oppressive forces, weaving together personal suffering and broader political violence. Through this synthesis, Pritam critiques the lived realities of women, especially as they endure sacrifice and trauma under the weight of oppressive social and political systems. The historical cataclysms of the Partition of India in 1947 and the impact of World War II recur throughout her work, lending a backdrop of historical gravitas to her poetic discourse. Her poems skillfully juxtapose these external conflicts with the internal turmoil arising from fractured relationships and emotional devastation.

Alongside these political and social concerns, the theme of romance threads deeply through Pritam's poetry. She expresses a profound yearning for emotional and romantic freedom, articulating desires that transcend conventional social constraints. The presence of nature in her poetry, through imagery of the sun, moon, stars, earth, fire, water, clouds, flowers, and trees, serves as evocative symbols of desire, loss, and transformation. Her skillful use of metaphor and imagery, evident in poems such as "Memory", "Blasphemy", "My Friend", "My Stranger", "The Bridge", "New Year Greetings", and "Cold", enriches her meditations on time, memory, and identity, capturing the tension between past, present and future.

Contrasting with the lyricism of love and nature, Pritam's rebellious tone emerges distinctly in poems like "Virgin", "The Scar", "Love", and "Empty Space." Here, she confronts the suffering of women trapped in oppressive marital relations, where wives are often reduced to objects or mere bearers of children. These poems are a powerful appeal to men to listen, respect and honour the emotional lives and dignity of women. Pritam challenges entrenched patriarchal norms, contesting the idea of women as possessions and

insisting on their rightful claim to honesty, respect and equality. In her poetic vision, the ideal man provides emotional support and engages sincerely with the inner worlds of women, thus embodying a model of empathy and shared humanity.

Amrita Pritam's poetry is distinguished by its dynamic tonal range and the multiplicity of voices that inhabit her work. The shifting emotions of anger, anguish, tenderness and longing shape the tone of her poems and give texture to her voice. At times, her seemingly simple diction conveys profound sorrow that resonates deeply with readers; at other moments, her language becomes direct and confrontational, addressing social injustices that render life unbearable. These tonal variations form the core of her poetic identity, enabling her to navigate personal, social, and political realms with equal authority. This paper offers a comparative analysis of how the translator handled Pritam's diction to retain tone and voice in the poetry. The interplay between tone and voice not only intensifies the thematic richness of her poetry but also significantly influences how meaning is conveyed and received in translation.

Understanding Tone and Voice in Translation of Poetry

If one is to reflect on how poetry has been carried across borders through translation, then one finds that the act of translating poetry still resists simplification. It remains what it always was: a spiritual enterprise, an encounter not merely with language but with the breath and pulse of another mind. In a world increasingly crowded by speed, noise and simulation, tone and voice, the twin essences of poetic utterance, often vanish into paraphrase or are dissolved in the pursuit of clarity at the expense of depth. The translator's role begins to resemble that of a quiet custodian—not of information, but of presence.

Tone, that delicate interplay of mood and music, and voice, the inimitable fingerprint of the poet's soul, are not easily dislodged from the specificities of language and culture. They are atmospheric, felt before they are understood, heard in the silences between the words. In the best translations, what carries across is not just the meaning but the recognition of the poem's original tone and voice, allowing the reader to sense the poet's presence and emotional

resonance even in another language. When the poem speaks to the reader in another tongue and yet retains its intimacy, its defiance, its sorrow or joy, as though whispered directly into the inner ear. The translator, then, listens as a poet listens, with attention not only to what is said, but to how it lives. This inquiry, into what tone and voice mean for the translation of poetry, does not propose a formula. Rather, it offers a way of listening and of reading. It asks whether what survives the crossing from one language to another can still be called a poem, not merely by the fidelity of its sense, but by the survival of its spirit. For in preserving tone and voice, one preserves the possibility of poetic recognition across time, across language and across the distances that separate author from reader. And perhaps, if such preservation is possible, then translation remains not only a necessary task, but a poetic act in its own right.

Tone may be described as the "second-order" speech. The term that suggests something more than what is said: it is how it is said and why it matters. It is the atmosphere into which the reader enters, the undercurrent of emotional pressure that runs beneath the lines. If voice is the poet's unique fingerprint, the textual residue of their lived experience and aesthetic intuition, tone is how that voice interacts with its subject, how it questions, mourns, or provokes. It is not simply decoration, nor a detachable layer of sentiment; it is the guiding force that shapes the reader's experience and mediates meaning through effect.

I.A. Richards in his *Practical Criticism* (1929) identified tone as one of four key components of meaning alongside sense, feeling and intention. Each of these, while distinct, operates in concert. Sense is the literal scaffolding—the denotative meaning of the poem's language. Feeling is its emotional charge, the affective register the poet generates and the reader receives. Intention is the purposive drive, the telos, whether it is to persuade, to unsettle, or simply to be. Yet, it is the tone that most vitally articulates the relationship between the poet and their audience. Tone is what makes a poem not merely an object but an encounter; it is the difference between a declaration and a whisper, a sermon and a confession. Whether sombre or playful, ironic or reverent, tone is the vehicle of intention as it moves toward reception. In translation, tone assumes even

greater importance, for it is often the most fragile and least portable element of the poem. It is the tonal register, more than any single word, that conjures the world of the poem, that calibrates its emotional and cultural resonance. As Richards notes, flaws in tone are not minor aesthetic missteps; they are structural failures that can fracture the communicative bond between poet and reader (p. 216). A poem rendered in a mismatched tone risks distortion, misdirection, even betrayal. In the delicate act of translation, to alter the tone is to alter the poem's soul.

Equally vital is the matter of voice. If tone is the instrument, voice is the musician. Voice is the idiosyncratic cadence of a poet's inner self—how they inhabit language, how they leave behind traces of their own consciousness in the rhythm and diction of their work. It is not merely a narrative device or a matter of style; it is the very condition of poetic presence. A poet's voice may be confessional or distant, lyric or satirical, but it remains the unifying thread through which the poem coheres. In contemporary discourse, the term "freestyle" is sometimes invoked to suggest a loosened poetic structure, yet even in such freedoms, voice persists as the principal force of coherence. The voice governs the unfolding of the poem's narrative, no matter how fragmentary or nonlinear its form may be.

T.S. Eliot's reflections in "The Three Voices of Poetry" (1961) remain instructive here. The first is the voice of the poet talking to herself or to nobody, an introspective and private form of expression where the poet explores personal thoughts and feelings without consideration for an audience. This voice is intimate and often meditative, delving into the poet's inner world (p. 104). The second voice is the poet addressing an audience, when the poetry is crafted with the intention of communication and connection. This voice is more public and rhetorical, aiming to convey a message or evoke a response from listeners or readers. It bridges the gap between the poet and the audience, engaging them directly and often inviting reflection or action. The third voice is the poet creating a dramatic character speaking in verse, a form that demands complete self-concealment and imaginative empathy. In this mode, the poet must inhabit another person entirely, crafting a voice that is distinct from their own. This voice is the most challenging to achieve because it

requires the poet to step outside of themselves and convincingly portray the thoughts, emotions and experiences of a fictional or historical character.

Tone and voice, then, are not merely aesthetic ornaments. They are structural principles that animate the poem from within. In poetry translation, preserving these elements is not a luxury; it is the ethical and artistic core of the enterprise. To translate a poem is not to copy its words but to transpose its consciousness. It is, as Eliot might suggest, an act of impersonality that paradoxically demands the most acute sensitivity: to hear, not just what the poem says, but what it dares to mean beneath its language. Thus, the task of translating poetry is not a question of transposition alone, but of reconstitution. The translator does not simply lift a poem from one language into another; rather, they step into the poem's architecture and attempt to rebuild it in a new linguistic and cultural frame without letting its foundation crumble. At the centre of this task lies a tension between fidelity and re-creation. This is not a new dilemma. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920), Eliot suggests that a poet is most original when in contact with what is past, when the personal voice is formed not in isolation, but in dialogue with inherited forms and voices (p. 44). The translator, too, performs within this dual inheritance: answering to the voice of the original poet while writing within the conventions, rhythms and possibilities of the target language.

This dynamic, between preservation and transformation, has been explored in later decades with increasing clarity. Susan Bassnett in *Translation Studies* (2002) insists that translation is not a secondary or mechanical act, but a creative one, a claim that echoes the spirit of what Eliot believed about poetry itself: that it emerges not from emotional spontaneity, but from disciplined engagement with language and form (p. 15). The translator's creativity is not measured by invention alone but by their ability to interpret, to inhabit another voice without erasing it. This ethical tightrope, remaining faithful to the tone and voice of the original while rendering them intelligible in a new context, demands a kind of imaginative impersonality. It is a craft that calls for sensitivity to rhythm, cadence and atmosphere, not merely to semantic meaning.

Willis Barnstone, in his *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory and Practice* (1995), adds another dimension to this conversation when he likens translation to a voyage across an ocean "where everything is possible—everything except a mistake" (p. 14). In this formulation, error is not simply lexical; it is tonal. A mistranslation of tone, whether by excess or by omission, can distort the emotional register of the poem, undermining its intended force. This idea returns us to the importance of voice, that elusive presence by which a poet leaves an imprint not only of their subject, but of their consciousness. To translate a voice in poetry is not to duplicate it, for such duplication is impossible. Rather, it is to reconstruct the conditions under which that voice might once again be heard. The translator becomes a kind of co-speaker, not of their own poem but of the poem that lives beneath the preceding text.

Ezra Pound, whose influence on modern poetics was in no small part indebted to his translations, recognised this complexity. In *How to Read* (1968), he writes that one must go to the original "for tone and quality, not for the literal meaning of the single words" (p. 27). For Pound, the true measure of translation lay not in accuracy but in resonance. A translation should not sound like a repetition; it should sound like a memory. In this, he shares with both Barnstone and Bassnett a belief that the translator is a reader first, a listener second and a poet always. What is preserved is not the shell of the poem but its movement—the cadence, the breath, the pulse. This position also complements that poetry requires a deep historical and emotional consciousness; the translator shall perceive what is not obvious and attend to what is easily lost: the tone that carries feeling and the voice that carries presence.

There is also the matter of cultural positioning. Many poets writing in languages other than English bring with them histories marked by marginality, trauma, or resistance. Their voices are not merely stylistic but political. To translate such poetry requires a degree of humility and attentiveness that resists easy assimilation. It is not simply a matter of carrying over meaning; it is a matter of carrying the burden of a voice that speaks from within a different history. The translator here becomes a listener to suffering, to memory, to modes of expression that do not readily conform to

English-language traditions. This listening requires more than skill; it demands ethical engagement. Within this framework, the translator's ethical role becomes more than a matter of accuracy. Antoine Berman, in his *Toward a Translation Critique: John Donne* (2009), argues that ethical translation involves a willingness to preserve the foreignness of the text rather than to domesticate it. This position aligns with literary convenience and simplification (p. 74). If a translation smooths over difficulty or neutralises cultural particularity, it may gain fluency but lose truth. The poet's voice—especially when shaped by marginalised histories, regional textures or linguistic strangeness—ought not to be sanded down for ease of transmission. The translator's ear may be attuned to discomfort, willing to carry forward not only the elegance of the poem, but its wounds and tensions as well. In this sense, the translator is not invisible. Nor are they dominant. They are, rather, an interpreter in the fullest sense, someone who listens across the silence between languages and makes a new utterance that continues the breath of the original (Venuti, 1995, p. 189). This is not a matter of servitude nor authorship but of attention: a sustained and disciplined listening to the tonal and vocal integrity of the poem. If translation is to be considered a poetic act, it is because it performs, in another key, the difficult art of hearing.

The challenges of poetry translation, then, are not reducible to the limits of language. They reflect something older and more enduring, the difficulty of hearing one soul in the language of another. In such an endeavour, to translate with care for tone and voice becomes both a literary fidelity and a cultural patience. It affirms that poems are not merely messages but manifestations, not just texts but testaments. And in preserving them, the translator does not echo the poet's voice from a distance, but walks beside it, quietly and attentively, allowing it once more to be heard.

Analysis of Tone and Voice in Khushwant Singh's Translations of Amrita Pritam's Poetry

The translation of verse is no mere matter of linguistic equivalence; it is a quiet negotiation with tone and cadence, where voice and presence are carried across not by precision alone, but by

an ear attuned to the deeper murmurs of the original. In the case of Amrita Pritam's poetry, where deeply personal themes are interwoven with cultural memory and emotional intensity, tone and voice are not ancillary features; they are central to meaning.

The first poem in the collection is "Aj Akhan Waris Shah Nu" (p. 16). It is a key work by Amrita Pritam, presenting a voice addressing the legendary Punjabi poet Waris Shah, known for his masterpiece *Heer* (originally written in 1866). Pritam implores Waris Shah to rise from his grave and write about the suffering of countless daughters of Punjab who were disgraced during the partition. People were thirsty for the blood of their brothers, driven by the Hindu-Sikh-Muslim conflict. The centuries-old brotherhood of Punjab was torn apart as the region was divided into two parts. The poem begins with a direct invocation, "To Waris Shah, I turn today", signalling that the poet is reaching out to someone specific. This direct appeal continues throughout the poem, as Pritam calls upon Waris Shah to "speak up" and bear witness to the immense suffering caused by the partition. The poem is not merely introspective or self-reflective; it is a public outcry, a purposeful communication aimed at drawing attention to the collective pain of the people of Punjab. In this way, the poem embodies Eliot's second voice, where the poet's words are directed toward an audience, in this case, Waris Shah and by extension, all who witness and remember the tragedies of the partition.

Pritam recreates *Heer*'s world by telling Waris Shah that Ranjha's brothers have all forgotten him, who taught them to love and honour, not disgrace women. Everyone has become like Qaidon, Heer's uncle, who gave her poison. The references to Ludhan (the boatman in *Heer*), Ranjha, Qaidon, *Trinjan*,[2] the flute, the Chenab River and the snake charmer all give voice to the suffering of the people. These elements remind the poets of Punjab, through Waris Shah, of their responsibility to write and sing songs of mourning in these difficult times. Names like Waris, Ranjha and Ludhan are far more than just proper nouns. They are carriers of cultural identities, occupational

[2] Trinjan was a traditional communal practice in Punjabi rural life wherein women gathered to spin, weave and sing folk songs.

roles and symbolic meanings that resonate deeply with the reader. The poem itself becomes a literary testament to the trauma of Partition, giving voice to those who lived through its horrors. For an English-speaking audience, it's not enough to simply understand the historical impact of the Partition on Punjab; they must also feel the emotional toll it took on its people. At the same time, the poem speaks to the heart of Punjabi culture, where love plays a central role—love that was irrevocably torn apart and redefined by the politically driven division, leaving a permanent mark on the region's social fabric.

While the English translation effectively conveys the general tone and message of the poem, it falls short in capturing the full depth and cultural nuance of the original. The tone in the Punjabi poem resonates with profound sorrow, urgency and a deep sense of lament, reflecting the collective grief and existential anguish of a people fractured by the partition. Pritam's direct address to Waris Shah highlights a poignant plea for acknowledgement and remembrance. While the translation captures this mood through phrases like "Speak up from the graves" and "blood runs in Chenab", some emotions are lost. The metaphors, though accurate, lack the layered meaning found in the Punjabi text, potentially diminishing the emotional impact of the poem. In terms of voice, the translation maintains the direct address and urgency of Pritam's plea but does not entirely capture the unique depth of her voice. Pritam's voice is marked by a blend of personal empathy and authority, aimed at Waris Shah and, by extension, at the poets and people of Punjab. The cultural symbols and names, such as Ludhan (the boatman), Ranjha and the Chenab River, carry significant weight in the original context and represent more than their literal meanings. The translation may not fully reflect these deeper connotations, leading to a less nuanced portrayal of Pritam's voice. Consequently, while the general tone and message are preserved, the translation might not convey the same depth of cultural and emotional resonance.

To illustrate this, we can take an example: Ludhan was a boatman who used to reserve a special seat for Heer in his boat. Heer's father paid him in advance to serve Heer. In a striking episode, when Ranjha unknowingly sits in Heer's designated seat, Ludhan protests,

demanding that he leave the boat. Amrita Pritam poignantly draws on this moment to reflect that, during the Partition, it seemed as though Ludhan had cast the boats adrift, abandoning not only the seats but also the people, leaving them to face their fate alone. He made no effort to save or protect anyone. Similarly, the peepal tree, once a joyful symbol of community where girls played on swings, is now imagined as breaking its branches, destroying the swings in the process. This vivid imagery captures the collapse of social ties and the cold indifference that replaced the once-thriving relationships. However, in the English translation, the name "Ludhan" is omitted, losing the specific cultural weight and symbolism attached to it; erasing a culturally significant reference and weakening the emotional and symbolic impact of the scene. Amrita Pritam writes:

ਸਣੇ ਸੇਜ ਦੇ ਬੇੜੀਆਂ ਲੁੱਡਣ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ ਰੋੜ੍ਹ
ਸਣੇ ਡਾਲੀਆਂ ਪੀਂਘ ਅੱਜ ਪਿੱਪਲਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਤੋੜ (Pritam, 2009, p. 16)

All boats lost the moorings
And float rudderless on the stream
The swings on the peepals branches
Have crashed with the peepal tree. (Pritam, 2009, p. 18)

Moreover, Singh's translation appears to falter in establishing and preserving other metaphors that are rich with layered meanings. The omissions in this poem constitute a critical failure because the translation misses the implied agency that is central to the preceding text, making it seem as if the boats and swings act of their own accord, rather than symbolising human betrayal and abandonment. Rather than engaging with the layered metaphors and cultural depth, the translation leans toward a literal interpretation, stripping away much of the emotional and symbolic weight. This diminishes the impact of the poem, particularly in the omission of culturally significant references like Ludhan's name, which carries deep resonance in the Punjabi context.

Amrita Pritam invokes *Heer* and addresses Waris Shah not merely as a poetic gesture, but as a profound act of cultural remembrance. By drawing on Waris Shah's imagery and language, she situates the trauma of Partition in a deep-rooted Punjabi literary and emotional

tradition. These metaphors, such as the spinning wheel, which evokes the communal space of *Trinjan*, are not incidental; they are vital expressions of collective memory. For Punjabi readers, such imagery carries the weight of loss, resilience, and historical continuity. In translation, however, the omission of *trinjan,* which is a culturally charged metaphor, reduces the poem to a surface-level account of violence. Without the symbolic depth, the emotional landscape collapses. What was once a cry woven from memory and metaphor becomes a plain narrative of tragedy. Thus, such omission in translation is not a minor oversight; it is a critical failure that disrupts the transmission of pain, memory and cultural identity. Metaphors are central to the tone and voice of a poem. They shape not only what is said, but how it is felt. When metaphors are omitted in translation, the tone may shift from evocative to neutral, or from intimate to detached. To remove or dilute these metaphors is to risk erasing the very qualities that distinguish one poetic voice from another.

The translation of "My City" successfully portrays the preceding text's tone of frustration and disillusionment with urban life. The depiction of the city as an endless, futile debate is well-preserved, capturing the sense of monotony and chaotic discourse. The translation retains phrases like "Its roads like pointless arguments" and "clanging wheels of cycle and scooters", which effectively evoke the original's chaotic and repetitive atmosphere. However, the translator's literal approach leads to a loss of the cultural and metaphorical depth. Take, for example, the powerful imagery in the original poem, such as "epileptic drains frothing at their mouths". This vivid image carries complex connotations, evoking both physical and psychological turmoil, but such nuances may be lost in a direct translation ("ਤੇ ਨਾਲੀਆਂ ਜਿਵੇਂ ਮੂੰਹਾਂ 'ਚੋਂ ਝੱਗ ਵਗਦੀ ਹੈ") and "conch shells & kettledrums lost their voices," ("ਸੰਖਾਂ ਘੜਿਆਲਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਾਹ ਸੁੱਕੇ") which reflect specific cultural and societal frustrations. These images are deeply rooted in the local context, providing a window into the city's social dynamics. While the translation succeeds in conveying the overall tone, it struggles to capture the full significance of such imagery, thus diminishing the poem's cultural resonance. The real challenge lies in balancing literal accuracy with the preservation of

cultural and metaphorical depth—an imbalance that compromises the translation's ability to faithfully convey Pritam's critical perspective.

Poetic elements such as tone, voice, imagery, metaphors and cultural context work together to create a poem's overall meaning. Accurate translation of the poem relies on careful analysis and interpretation of these aspects to capture its essence in the target language. Consider an example of the translation of "Imroz", which reveals distinct differences from the previous translations, particularly in its handling of tone, voice and cultural references. In "Imroz", the first-person voice remains central, reflecting the poet's introspective engagement with cultural identity and artistic expression. The poem says:

ਮੇਰੇ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ ਈਜ਼ਲ ਦੇ ਉੱਤੇ –
ਇਕ ਕੈਨਵਸ ਪਈ ਹੈ
ਕੁਝ ਇੰਜ ਜਾਪਦਾ –
ਕਿ ਕੈਨਵਸ ਤੇ ਲੱਗਾ ਰੰਗ ਦਾ ਟੋਟਾ
ਇਕ ਲਾਲ ਟਾਕੀ ਬਣ ਕੇ ਹਿਲਦਾ ਹੈ
ਤੇ ਹਰ ਇਨਸਾਨ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਦਾ ਪਸ਼ੂ
ਇਕ ਸਿੰਗ ਚੁੱਕਦਾ ਹੈ,
ਸਿੰਗ ਤਣਦਾ ਹੈ, ਤੇ ਹਰ ਕੂਚਾ ਗਲੀ ਬਾਜ਼ਾਰ
ਇਕ 'ਰਿੰਗ' ਬਣਦਾ ਹੈ,
ਤੇ ਮੇਰੀਆਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਰਗਾਂ ਵਿਚ
ਇਕ ਸਪੇਨੀ ਰਵਾਇਤ ਖ਼ੌਲਦੀ
ਗੋਯਾ ਦੀ ਮਿੱਥ –
ਬੁਲ ਫ਼ਾਈਟਿੰਗ
ਟਿਲ ਡੈੱਥ ... (Pritam, 2009, p. 32)

A canvas
is spread
on the easel before me.
It seems
as if the patch of colour,
stuck to the canvas

swings
like red cloth.
And the beast in the man
raises its horn.
aims it to strike.
And every street, alley and lane
forms the ring,
And Spanish passion
Rages
in my Panjabi veins.
The myth of Goya,
bull-fighting
till death. (Pritam, 2009, p. 33)

The translation effectively captures the essential imagery and tone of the preceding text, but it simplifies certain crucial cultural and metaphorical nuances. The original poem uses vivid metaphors such as the 'canvas' and the 'beast' raising its horn to illustrate the intersection of personal and cultural experiences, blending Spanish passion with Punjabi identity. The translated text retains these core images, depicting the 'canvas' and the 'beast' with their respective symbolic meanings.

However, the translator's approach introduces a general tone that, while maintaining the poem's reflective nature, does not fully engage with the original's cultural specifics. Phrases like "Spanish passion" and "the myth of Goya" evoke the intensity of the imagery but lack the detailed cultural context of the "red cloth" and the specific Spanish traditions referenced in the preceding text. This shift in focus from nuanced cultural references to a more generalised critique affects the depth of the cultural and metaphorical significance conveyed.

Overall, while the translation communicates the fundamental themes of the poem and retains its reflective tone, it simplifies some of the original's cultural and metaphorical richness. The translator's approach prioritises broad themes over detailed cultural nuances, which impacts the full depth of Pritam's exploration of cultural identity and artistic metaphor.

In Amrita Pritam's poetry, each word is thoughtfully chosen for its meaning. Her writing is characterised by its precision and the exclusion of superfluous words. Khushwant Singh, however, seems to have misunderstood this quality. In the poem titled "Amrita Pritam", she changes the sense of the poem by changing the tense. Specifically, the term "ਸੀ" (was) is replaced with "ਹਨ" (are) in the next stanza. For Singh, this shift seems to hold no significance, and he simply omits it. Below are the Punjabi text and the translation for comparison:

ਇੱਕ ਦਰਦ ਸੀ –

ਜੋ ਸਿਗਰਟ ਦੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਮੈਂ ਚੁੱਪ-ਚਾਪ ਪੀਤਾ ਹੈ
ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਕੁਝ ਨਜ਼ਮਾਂ ਹਨ –
ਜੋ ਸਿਗਰਟ ਦੇ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਰਾਖ ਵਾਂਗਣ ਝਾੜੀਆਂ ... (Pritam, 2009, p. 28)

Pain:

I inhaled it,
quietly like a cigarette.
Song:
I flicked off
like ash
from the cigarette. (Pritam, 2009, p. 29)

The original poem carries an introspective and deeply personal tone, evident in phrases like "ਇੱਕ ਦਰਦ ਸੀ" (a certain pain), which conveys a specific, individual experience of suffering. The use of the past tense "ਸੀ" is significant; it signals not just the presence of pain, but the temporal distance from it, suggesting that the speaker has lived through and beyond this emotional state. Translating this nuanced opening simply as "Pain" flattens both the tone and the emotional complexity of the original. It removes the reflective quality and instead generalises what was originally a specific, inward experience. Further, the shift in tense in the original, from "there was a pain" to "now there are a few poems," marks a clear temporal and emotional progression. The poems are framed as residue, as the ash of an internalised suffering, a metaphor sustained

by the imagery of smoking. This movement from inhaling pain to producing poetry as its byproduct is deeply introspective and layered. The English translation, however, fails to carry this transformation. By reducing "ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਕੁਝ ਨਜ਼ਮਾਂ ਹਨ" (now the left is some poems or songs) to "Song" and treating it as a static image, the translation severs the causal and temporal link between pain and poetic expression. Moreover, the metaphor of the cigarette in the original is not merely a visual device; it is tied to the act of endurance, of silently consuming one's suffering. The translation's rendering of "I inhaled it, quietly like a cigarette" partially retains this imagery but lacks the subtle rhythm and emotional pacing of the original. The omission of the reflective tone, the temporal layering, and the specificity of "ਇੱਕ ਦਰਦ ਸੀ" results in a loss of emotional depth, personal voice and the processual nature of how pain transforms into poetry.

In the translation of the poem "ਓ ਮੇਰੇ ਦੋਸਤ! ਮੇਰੇ ਅਜਨਬੀ!" ("My Friend! My Stranger!"), the translator's choice of words significantly alters the mood of the poem. The poet addresses a fictional character or her lover. She describes how, when he suddenly came to meet her one day, time seemed to stop, only to then jump out through the window. She still remembers this moment vividly. After that encounter, time never stopped for her again. The sun sets at its usual time, and darkness stabs at her heart. The lines are:

ਹੁਣ ਸੂਰਜ ਰੋਜ਼ ਵੇਲੇ ਸਿਰ ਡੁੱਬ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ।
ਤੇ ਹਨੇਰਾ ਰੋਜ਼ ਮੇਰੀ ਛਾਤੀ ਵਿਚ ਖੁੱਭ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ। (Pritam, 2009, p. 24)

Now the sun sets each day on time
and darkness enters my heart (Pritam, 2009, p. 25)

The word 'enters' carries a soft, almost gentle tone, suggesting that darkness quietly and unobtrusively comes into her heart. However, Pritam's original use of 'ਖੁੱਭ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ' conveys a much harsher reality, implying a sudden and piercing of the heart by the darkness. This single word in the entire poem intensifies the emotion of pain, highlighting the profound disturbance it causes her. The translation's choice of 'enters' diminishes this crucial emotional

impact, altering the reader's understanding of the depth of her suffering. To truly capture Pritam's emotional landscape, it is essential to preserve the intensity and rawness of her original language, ensuring the reader fully experiences the poet's intended expression of anguish and turmoil.

The major problem with the translation of Amrita Pritam's poetry arises when the translator decides unilaterally what her poetry should convey. At certain points, this leads to significant divergence from the original, completely altering the sense and tone of the work. These changes disrupt the continuity of the poem, creating breaks due to missing expressions. For instance, in the poem "Empty Space", she writes:

ਨੰਗੇ ਅਸਮਾਨ ਦੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ –
ਮੈਂ ਕਿੰਨਾ ਹੀ ਚਿਰ ਪਿੰਡੇ ਦੇ ਮੀਂਹ ਵਿਚ ਭਿਜਦੀ ਰਹੀ
ਉਹ ਕਿੰਨਾ ਹੀ ਚਿਰ ਪਿੰਡੇ ਦੇ ਮੀਂਹ ਵਿਚ ਗਲਦਾ ਰਿਹਾ (Pritam, 2009, p. 112)

Under the naked sky –
I was drenched by my body's shower
which continued a long age
rotted in the continuing downpour. (Pritam, 2009, p. 113)

Pritam clearly describes an experience beneath an open sky, involving both herself and her lover. She portrays herself as being drenched by a shower from her own body, symbolising an emotional and physical saturation. Meanwhile, her lover is described as rotting in the same rain, indicating a stark contrast in their experiences and perceptions of love. This juxtaposition highlights the differing impacts of their shared experience, emphasising that love holds different meanings for each of them.

The translation fails to capture the duality and the nuanced relationship between the two individuals. The phrase "I was drenched by my body's shower" attempts to convey the physical experience but does not clearly identify the presence of two people or the contrasting nature of their experiences. Additionally, "which continued a long age" is awkward and less evocative compared to the original's portrayal of time passing. Furthermore, "rotted in the continuing downpour" introduces a sense of decay that isn't as

nuanced as in Pritam's original lines. The word 'rotted' suggests decomposition but does not adequately convey the emotional depth of her lover's experience in contrast to her own. The translation loses the emotional intensity of Pritam's poem, resulting in a less impactful and somewhat disjointed rendition. It overlooks the critical aspect that while she is drenched and possibly nourished by the rain, her lover is deteriorating in it, highlighting the different meanings of love for each. To better capture Pritam's intent, a more nuanced translation might focus on the experiential and emotional contrasts between the two individuals, using terms that convey both the physical sensations and the emotional divergences under the open sky.

In the poem "Virgin" ("Kuwari"), Amrita Pritam explores the trauma of marital rape, capturing the protagonist's internal conflict between her past and present selves. Written in the first-person voice, the poem offers an intimate portrayal of a woman grappling with the forced suppression of her true self to meet societal expectations of marriage. The English translation retains this first-person narrative, which is crucial for preserving the poem's personal and confessional tone, allowing readers to connect with the protagonist's psychological turmoil. The protagonist's sense of a dual self is a central theme, depicted in both the preceding text and the translation. Upon entering the bridal chamber, she feels divided: "ਮੈਂ ਇਕ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਾਂ – ਦੋ ਸਾਂ" ("I was not one but two persons"). This duality is essential to understanding the internal struggle between her chaste, virgin self and the self that must fulfil her role as a wife. The translation effectively conveys this split, maintaining the poem's exploration of identity and self-sacrifice in marriage.

The act of killing her virgin self is portrayed with stark imagery in both versions. In the preceding text, she says, "ਸੋ ਤੇਰੇ ਭੋਗ ਦੀ ਖ਼ਾਤਿਰ / ਮੈਂ ਉਸ ਕੁਆਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਤਲ ਕਰਨਾ ਸੀ.../ ਮੈਂ ਕਤਲ ਕੀਤਾ ਸੀ" ("To fulfill our union / I had to kill the virgin. / And kill her, I did"). The Punjabi word "ਕਤਲ" (*katal*), meaning "murder," carries a deep emotional resonance, emphasising the violence and finality of the act. While the translation uses "kill," the intensity of "ਕਤਲ" as an irreversible violation is somewhat softened, though the essential meaning remains.

The imagery of blood and washing is another powerful metaphor. The protagonist recalls, “ਇਕ ਲਹੂ ਵਿਚ ਭਿੱਜੇ ਮੈਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਹੱਥ ਵੇਖੇ ਸਨ / ਹੱਥ ਧੋਤੇ ਸਨ” (“Came the dawn and I saw the blood on my hands. / I washed them”). This imagery, preserved in the translation, symbolises her attempt to cleanse herself of the night’s trauma, highlighting the physical and emotional aftermath of the experience. The translation captures this moment, but the visceral impact of seeing “ਲਹੂ” (blood) on her hands in the preceding text carries a heavier cultural and emotional weight.

The climactic moment of realisation occurs when the protagonist confronts herself in the mirror: “ਉਹ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ ਖਲੋਤੀ ਸੀ / ਉਹੀ, ਜੋ ਆਪਣੀ ਜਾਚੇ, ਮੈਂ ਰਾਤੀਂ ਕਤਲ ਕੀਤੀ ਸੀ...” (“There she was before me; / The same one I thought I had murdered during the night”). This moment, filled with horror and confusion, is well conveyed in the translation. The protagonist’s cry, “ਓ ਖ਼ੁਦਾਇਆ! / ਕੀ ਸੇਜ ਦਾ ਹਨੇਰਾ ਬਹੁਤ ਗਾੜ੍ਹਾ ਸੀ?” (“Oh, God! / Was the bridal chamber so dark?”), underscores her despair and the tragic irony that she could not distinguish between the two selves she tried to separate.

The translation of “Virgin” effectively preserves the core emotions and narrative of the original poem. The first-person voice and the sombre tone are well-maintained, allowing readers to feel the protagonist’s anguish and internal conflict. While some cultural nuances, like the emotional depth of “ਕਤਲ” or the significance of “ਲਹੂ”, may be slightly diminished in translation, the overall impact remains powerful, offering a poignant reflection on the emotional and psychological costs of forced conformity in marriage.

It has been observed that while certain cultural contexts may not be conveyed well, they do affect the quality of the translation. Nevertheless, the translation often manages to preserve the overall meaning, tone and voice, which is a positive outcome. But a poem is not meant to merely convey a message. This reflects the translator’s approach and their perspective on translation as an act. However, this is not always the case. Missing metaphors or words can also create significant problems, where many poems hinge on a single crucial word. If this word is omitted or mistranslated, the poem loses

its entire meaning and value in translation. For example, in the poem "Meeting the Self", she writes:

ਮੇਰੀ ਸੇਜ ਹਾਜ਼ਰ ਹੈ –
ਪਰ ਜੁੱਤੀ ਤੇ ਕਮੀਜ਼ ਵਾਂਗਣ
ਤੂੰ ਆਪਣਾ ਬਦਨ ਵੀ ਉਤਾਰ ਦੇ!
ਪਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਮੂੜ੍ਹੇ 'ਤੇ ਰੱਖ ਦੇ!
ਕੋਈ ਖ਼ਾਸ ਗੱਲ ਨਹੀਂ –
ਇਹ ਆਪਣੇ-ਆਪਣੇ ਦੇਸ ਦਾ ਰਵਾਜ ਹੈ। (Pritam, 2009, p. 128)

My bed is ready for you!
But first take off your shirt and shoes
And put it away on the stool.
It doesn't matter very much
Every country has its own customs. (Pritam, 2009, p. 129)

The poem embodies T.S. Eliot's first voice of poetry, where the poet is talking to herself or reflecting on her thoughts and feelings. The intimate and introspective tone suggests a deeply personal moment, reflecting on cultural customs and the vulnerability associated with love and intimacy. The use of 'ਬਦਨ' (body) highlights this introspection, as it delves into the deeper layers of personal exposure and the stripping away of defences. Pritam writes with a deep, evocative imagery that captures both physical and emotional vulnerability. The word 'ਬਦਨ' (*badan*), meaning 'body', is central to the poem's theme, symbolising an intimate and profound exposure beyond just removing clothes. By omitting the word '*badan*', the translation misses the poem's core message and emotional depth, resulting in a less impactful and less meaningful rendition. To accurately reflect Pritam's intent, it is crucial to retain the reference to 'body', highlighting the layers of meaning associated with vulnerability, intimacy and cultural norms.

Furthermore, the translation presents an example of awkward phrasing, with lines like "put it away on the stool" and "It doesn't matter very much" lacking the natural rhythm and fluidity of the Punjabi poem. The cultural significance of the act, mentioned in the preceding text as a custom of one's own country, is not effectively

conveyed, leaving readers without a complete understanding of its importance. Consequently, the emotional impact and personal intimacy of the original poem are diminished, resulting in a translation that fails to reflect the richness and subtlety of Pritam's work, thus misrepresenting the poem's true essence.

Amrita Pritam's language incorporates symbols from the daily life of rural Punjab households. These words, rich with contextual meaning based on their usage and characteristics, vividly reference real-life experiences. In the last stanza of her poem "Memory", she writes:

ਇਸ਼ਕ ਤੇਰੇ ਦੇ ਹੱਥੋਂ ਛੁੱਟੀ
ਜਿੰਦ ਕਾਹੜਨੀ ਟੁੱਟ ਗਈ ਹੈ
ਤਵਾਰੀਖ਼ ਅੱਜ ਚੌਂਕੇ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ
ਭੁੱਖੀ ਭਾਣੀ ਉੱਠ ਗਈ ਹੈ। (Pritam, 2009, p. 48)

The cooking pot slipped from fingers
and broke;
We had invited history to a feast
It had to go unfed and hungry. (Pritam, 2009, p. 49)

Here, the word "ਇਸ਼ਕ" is missing. Where it is not simply the pot that slips, but life (ਇਸ਼ਕ) that slips from the hands of the beloved. This framing attributes the breaking of the speaker's life to the loss or mishandling of love, not merely to an accident or vague emotional rupture. The omission of "love" in the translation removes the agent of loss, thereby reducing the emotional and relational dynamics of the original. The ਕਾਹੜਨੀ (a traditional earthen pot used for slow cooking) in this context symbolises the speaker's life, one nurtured through patience and emotional depth but shattered as a direct consequence of life slipping away. Without the explicit mention of ਇਸ਼ਕ, the translation loses the clarity of who or what caused the fall, thereby diminishing the relational specificity and emotional intensity embedded in the original. The absence of this single word leads to a substantial loss of meaning, blurring the poem's emotional accountability and diluting its metaphorical force.

In the line "ਜਿੰਦ ਕਾਹੜਨੀ ਟੁੱਟ ਗਈ ਹੈ", Pritam also compares her life to a *ਕਾਹੜਨੀ*, symbolising endurance, quiet transformation and emotional simmering over time. Translating this simply as "the cooking pot slipped from fingers and broke" reduces a deeply layered metaphor to a literal domestic image, stripping it of its symbolic weight. The original implies that life, like milk slowly simmered in the *ਕਾਹੜਨੀ*, has been carefully tended yet ultimately shattered, not merely a pot broken but an emotional and existential state ruptured by love's failure. Furthermore, the image of "history rising from the hearth, hungry and unfed" is rooted in the cultural significance of the *ਚੌਂਕਾ* (hearth), which represents feminine labour, intimacy, and interior life. In English, this becomes a vague abstraction, severed from its cultural grounding. The poetic gesture of inviting history into the domestic space, only for it to leave empty-handed, speaks to the unacknowledged emotional labour and suffering of women, themes that are central to Pritam's voice. By flattening these culturally rich metaphors into neutral or literal phrases, the translation loses both the emotional intensity and the political subtlety of the original, rendering the poem less effective and significantly less profound.

Moreover, the translation's mismanagement of temporal pacing, especially in the final stanza of the poem, indicates a breakdown in interpretive fidelity. Rather than extending the emotional and metaphorical rhythm established earlier, the ending feels syntactically abrupt and semantically shallow. This signals not a lack of linguistic competence, but a deeper failure to engage with the poem's metaphoric temporality, where time is not chronological but emotional, shaped by memory, repetition and deferred fulfilment. In essence, the translation does not merely fall short at the level of language; it fails to inhabit the poem's internal universe, where metaphor, voice and time converge to articulate the psychic texture of love and loss.

Amrita Pritam's poem "Scar" vividly portrays the pain and disgrace associated with societal judgment, using the metaphor of a scar on a fragile wall to express the woman's distress. The Punjabi text employs rich, evocative imagery that deeply immerses readers

in the woman's experience, but the English translation only partially captures this intensity. In the preceding text, the phrase "ਕੱਚੀ ਕੰਧ ਮੁਹੱਬਤ ਵਾਲੀ" translates to "mud wall of love", which sets a poignant scene of fragility and vulnerability. The English translation, "The house of love seemingly in good repair", shifts this metaphor to a more stable image which loses the original's sense of instability and impending shame. The "crack" described in the Punjabi text – "ਰਾਤੀਂ ਇੱਕ ਖਰੇਪੜ ਲੱਥਾ" – suggests an abrupt, intrusive disruption. The translation "a crack opened" does not convey the same level of suddenness and impact. Pritam's description of the scar as "ਰੂੰ-ਰੂੰ ਕਰਦਾ" in the preceding text implies an ongoing, painful reminder. The translation "This scar is whimpering now" captures some of the anguish but lacks the forcefulness of the preceding text. The metaphor of the scar "kicking with its hand and feet" in the Punjabi text adds a sense of aggressive persistence that the translation's "growing stubborn" fails to fully reflect.

The original lines "ਬਿਟ ਬਿਟ ਤਕਦਾ ਮੇਰੀ ਵੱਲੇ / ਆਪਣੀ ਮਾਂ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਸਿੰਵਾਣੇ" illustrate the child's gaze and the mother's sorrow with sharp precision. The English translation, "It stares at me knowing its mother's face", conveys a similar idea but does not quite capture the cultural and emotional weight of the interaction. Furthermore, the Punjabi poem's plea for understanding and comfort is expressed through "ਕੁਝ ਤੇ ਮੁੱਖੋਂ ਬੋਲ ਨੀ ਮਾਏ / ਏਸ ਦਾਗ਼ ਨੂੰ ਕੁੱਛੜ ਚੁੱਕਾਂ", which directly translates to "Mother, say something, / that I may take the scar in my lap." The translation maintains the request, but lacks the poignant immediacy of the preceding text. In the final stanza, the lines "ਦਿਲ ਦੇ ਵਿਹੜੇ ਰਾਤ ਪੈ ਗਈ / ਇਸ ਦਾਗ਼ ਨੂੰ ਕਿੰਝ ਸੁਆਵਾਂ" reflect a deep sense of introspection and helplessness. The translation, "Though I sit in darkness / how can I tell the scar to sleep?" captures the theme but does not fully replicate the lyrical quality and profound reflection found in the preceding text. Overall, while the English translation communicates the core themes of "Scar", it does not entirely convey the nuanced imagery and cultural significance embedded in the Punjabi text. The translation simplifies some of the preceding text's metaphors and emotional nuances, impacting the overall resonance of the poem.

In Amrita Pritam's poetry, natural elements such as the sun, moon, stars, clouds, trees and flowers play a crucial role in shaping the tone and voice, providing a rich tapestry of imagery and emotional depth. For a translator, it is essential to recognise and preserve these elements because they often carry significant symbolic weight and contribute to the poem's overall impact. A translator is expected to be attentive to the prerequisite conditions of the preceding text, ensuring that the cultural and emotional nuances tied to these natural elements are effectively conveyed. This involves not only translating words but also capturing the subtle interplay between imagery and meaning that defines the poem's tone and voice. By doing so, the translator helps maintain the integrity of the preceding text, allowing readers of the translated text to experience the same emotional resonance and thematic richness as the readers of the preceding text. In analysing the translation of Amrita Pritam's poem "Siaal" ("Cold"), we see how natural elements like the sun, sky and season are used to convey the tone and voice of the poem.

The translation of the title "Siaal" as "Cold" is a notable aspect in evaluating the translation. This translation is both accurate and effective in conveying the literal meaning of the original title. However, the choice of "Cold" in English slightly shifts the focus from the more nuanced and culturally specific connotations of the Punjabi term "ਸਿਆਲ." In Punjabi, "ਸਿਆਲ" denotes not just the physical sensation of cold but also connotes the emotional and existential chill that pervades the speaker's experience. Here, the word "winter" can be a better choice. It implies a deeper, more pervasive sense of discomfort and emotional desolation that the English "Cold" might not fully capture. In contrast, "Cold" in English, while accurate, can sometimes be perceived as a more neutral or less evocative term. It might not fully convey the depth of the speaker's suffering or the intensity of the experience described in the poem. Thus, while the translation of the title as "Cold" is correct and serves the poem well in a basic sense, it does not entirely capture the layered meanings embedded in the title of the preceding text. The English term lacks the specific cultural and emotional undertones that the word "Siaal" encompasses in Punjabi, which could result in a somewhat diminished understanding of the poem's full impact and context.

The opening line, “I am shivering in the cold. / My lips have turned blue,” captures the physical sensation of cold, but the translation could better reflect the emotional and existential chill described in the Punjabi text. The line in Punjabi is “ਜਿੰਦ ਮੇਰੀ ਠੁਰਕਦੀ / ਹੋਂਠ ਨੀਲੇ ਹੋ ਗਏ” evokes not only physical cold but a profound emotional and spiritual desolation. The translated line, while accurate, might not fully convey the depth of this feeling. The original lines in Punjabi “ਵਰ੍ਹਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਬੱਦਲ ਗਰਜਦੇ / ਇਸ ਉਮਰ ਦੇ ਅਸਮਾਨ ’ਤੇ” are translated as “Clouds of years are thundering over the sky of age.” This translation maintains the imagery of clouds and sky but slightly shifts the focus. In the preceding text, the clouds and sky symbolise the burdens of life and the weight of ageing. The translation effectively conveys the metaphor of time and age, although the phrase “clouds of years” could potentially dilute the immediacy and harshness implied by the preceding text “ਵਰ੍ਹਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਬੱਦਲ.” The description “The laws fall in my yard like hailstones” attempts to capture the harsh, oppressive forces described in “ਕਾਨੂੰਨ, ਗੋਹੜੇ ਬਰਫ਼ ਦੇ.” This translation portrays the cold and impersonal nature of these forces, but the metaphor of hailstones might not fully convey the sense of systemic, unyielding oppression that the preceding text suggests.

The lines “Should you come at this moment, through lanes full of mud, / I will wash your feet with my hands” translate the original imagery of cleaning the feet after traversing muddy streets. The English translation captures the physical action but may not fully convey the contrast between the harsh winter outside and the personal warmth of the speaker’s gesture. The Punjabi text, “ਗਲੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਚਿਕੜ ਲੰਘ ਕੇ / ਜੇ ਅੱਜ ਤੂੰ ਆਵੇਂ ਕਿਤੇ,” uses the image of muddy streets to emphasise the contrast between the external cold and the internal warmth offered by the speaker. The translation into “You are like the sun. / I will lift a corner of my rug and warm my hands and feet” attempts to reflect the original’s desire to bring warmth into the cold. The Punjabi text “ਇਕ ਕੌਲੀ ਧੁੱਪ ਦੀ / ਮੈਂ ਡੀਕ ਲਾ ਕੇ ਪੀ ਲਵਾਂ / ਤੇ ਇਕ ਟੋਟਾ ਧੁੱਪ ਦਾ / ਮੈਂ ਕੁੱਖ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਪਾ ਲਵਾਂ” highlights a longing for warmth and comfort amid the cold. The translation captures the basic idea but might miss

some of the nuanced desire and symbolic warmth that the preceding text conveys.

Finally, the concluding lines "And perhaps in this way the harsh winter of life would be easier to bear" reflect the hope for relief from suffering. The original Punjabi lines "ਤੇ ਫੇਰ ਖ਼ੌਰੇ ਜਨਮ ਦਾ / ਇਹ ਸਿਆਲ ਗੁਜ਼ਰ ਜਾਏਗਾ" imply that the harsh winter of past lives will eventually pass. The translation conveys the sense of enduring hardship but might not fully capture the cyclical and reflective nature of the preceding text. While the translation of "Siaal" effectively conveys the poem's imagery and ideas, it does not fully capture the emotional and symbolic depth of the preceding text. The natural elements in the poem play a crucial role in expressing the tone and voice, and the translation should strive to preserve these elements' metaphorical significance to maintain the poem's emotional impact.

The translation of Amrita Pritam's poem "Kufra" reveals both strengths and limitations in capturing the essence of the preceding text. The title "Blasphemy" for "kufra" aptly conveys the thematic core of the poem, aligning well with the concept of rebellion against religious norms. However, the translation's approach to natural imagery and cultural references presents a mixed outcome. The analysis of the poem highlights significant issues stemming from omissions that impact the integrity of the preceding text. The translation, while capturing the thematic essence of the poem, does so at the expense of crucial natural and cultural references that are integral to its full meaning. The Punjabi text employs vivid natural imagery, such as "ਅੰਬਰ ਦੇ ਘੜਿਓਂ" and "ਬੱਦਲ ਦੀ ਇਕ ਚੱਪਣੀ", which are not merely decorative but central to the poem's thematic exploration of existential and spiritual rebellion. These elements provide depth and a specific cultural context that enriches its meaning. The English translation, however, omits these elements to more abstract concepts, losing the specificity and resonance of the original imagery. For instance, translating "ਗਜ਼ ਕੁ ਕੱਪੜਾ ਪਾੜ ਲਿਆ" (a yard of cloth) and "ਉਮਰ ਦੀ ਚੋਲੀ ਸੀਤੀ" (stitched a sip of moonlight) into broader, less precise terms results in a significant loss of the poem's preceding texture and nuance.

The cultural references embedded in the poem, which reflect Pritam's unique symbolic language, are insufficiently conveyed in the translation. This omission weakens the poem's cultural specificity and diminishes its emotional and symbolic impact. While the translation strives to capture the essence of the poem through more generalised poetic expressions, it cannot fully compensate for the loss of intricate imagery and the rich contextual depth present in the original. As a result, the translated poem, though still evocative, falls short of capturing the full richness and complexity of the original Punjabi text. This example highlights one of the central challenges in translation studies—how to preserve the intricate cultural nuances and references that are crucial for a faithful and comprehensive representation of the source material. When considering how translators navigate the emotional and auditory qualities of poetry, it's essential to examine how these elements shape the poem's overall impact. A thoughtful translation of these components is critical for maintaining the original meaning and emotional depth, as poems often depend on specific emotional tones, rhythms, sound patterns, and imagery to evoke a response from the reader.

For instance, in Amrita Pritam's poem "Blasphemy", the Punjabi text includes imagery and strong cultural references that contribute significantly to the poem's emotional depth. The term "ਕੱਪੜਾ ਪਾੜ ਲਿਆ" ("tore off a yard of cloth") and "ਚਾਨਣੀ ਪੀਤੀ" ("drank a cup of sunlight") create a tactile and sensory experience that shapes the reader's perception. However, in the translation, these elements are condensed and lose some of their sensory impact, which can alter how the poem's mood is conveyed. The translation "Blasphemy" simplifies the imagery to "tore off a yard" and "a sip of moonlight," which, while accurate, do not fully capture the sensory texture of the Punjabi text. This omission affects the reader's ability to fully experience the poem's intended emotional effect.

In the poem "Virgin", the emotional and auditory qualities are central to conveying the poem's complex feelings about identity and self. The Punjabi lines "ਮੈਂ ਇੱਕ ਨਿਰਾਕਾਰ ਸਾਂ" ("I was formless") and "ਮੈਂ ਤੇਰੀ ਸੇਜ ਤੇ ਜਦ ਪੈਰ ਧਰਿਆ ਸੀ" (when I entered your bridal chamber) use

specific imagery and language to evoke a sense of transformation and conflict. While the translation captures the literal meaning, it may not fully convey the emotional intensity or the cultural context that contributes to the poem's mood. Addressing the mood of a poem in translation is crucial for an accurate representation of its intended meaning. Translators should carefully consider how emotional and auditory qualities can be conveyed in another language. They need to ensure that the translated text preserves the atmosphere and impact of the original, reflecting its emotional undertones and sensory experiences. This is not simply a matter of translating words; it's about capturing the essence and mood that shape the reader's experience. To successfully translate the emotional and auditory qualities of a poem, translators should engage deeply with both its literal and figurative aspects. They should preserve not only the meaning but also the mood and emotional weight the original language conveys. This approach is essential for ensuring that the translated poem resonates with the same emotional and sensory depth, allowing readers of the target language to fully appreciate the poem's significance.

Conclusion

A close critical reading of the English translations of Amrita Pritam's poetry reveals an urgent need for more attentive and nuanced translation practices. It is particularly striking that Khushwant Singh, himself a prominent Punjabi writer, a contemporary of Pritam and someone who shared her geographical and historical experiences, was unable to fully carry her voice into the target language. Both writers bore witness to the Partition, were displaced from their ancestral homes in what is now Pakistan, and expressed this trauma through iconic works: Pritam through her poem "Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu" and novel *Pinjar*, and Singh through his novel *Train to Pakistan*. One might assume such shared histories would deepen the translator's empathy and insight. Yet the gaps in Singh's translation demonstrate that contextual familiarity alone is insufficient.

A translator should, first and foremost, be a careful and perceptive reader, attuned to ambiguity, emotional resonance and tonal shifts.

Translation is not merely the transfer of words across languages; it is the re-creation of aesthetic and affective experience. The choices a translator makes—diction, structure, rhythm, and tone—are required to serve the spirit of the preceding text, not flatten or simplify it. While interpretive freedom is a necessary part of the translator's craft, that freedom should be exercised responsibly. It should enrich the target text without compromising the intensity, clarity or intent of the original. The translations examined here suffer from omissions and softening that blur the sharp edge of Pritam's poetic critique. The removal of key terms, the dilution of emotionally charged language, and the erasure of culturally embedded metaphors are not incidental; they significantly distort meaning and mute the poem's urgency. These are not just textual losses; they are ethical failures.

This paper thus contends that the preservation of tone and voice is not a stylistic preference but a fundamental requirement in poetry translation. When these elements are lost, the translated poem loses its stance, its force, and its emotional clarity. Pritam's poetry does not waver; it confronts, mourns and resists. Her voice, even in translation, must do the same. This paper thus contends that the preservation of tone and voice is not a stylistic preference but a fundamental requirement in poetry translation. When these elements are lost, the translated poem loses its stance, its force and its emotional clarity. This case study, while focused on Pritam, opens broader questions about how we engage with marginalised or historically burdened voices in translation. The translator is not a neutral conduit but an active participant in shaping literary memory and political discourse across languages. Particularly in contexts marked by trauma, displacement, and cultural fragmentation, as with Partition literature, the translator's choices carry ethical weight. A flattened translation is not simply a technical failure; it risks erasing the urgency of lived experience and silencing resistance encoded in poetic form.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights the need to rethink commonly held hierarchies in translation practice, where linguistic fluency is often privileged over literary sensitivity. In poetry, fidelity is not achieved through literalism but through a careful

reconstruction of mood, cadence, and affect. Training translators to read poetry deeply as literature, as a cultural artefact and as an emotional document is essential if translated texts are to resonate with new readers while honouring the original's integrity. In re-evaluating how we approach poetic translation, especially of women writers, regional voices, and politically situated texts, we have to ask: What is at stake when tone is lost? Who benefits from the domestication of discomfort? And what responsibilities do translators bear not just to the text but to the histories and communities that shaped it? These are not merely technical concerns, but they are interpretive, ethical and ultimately political.

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