Translation as Cultural Negotiation: A Study of *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree*

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Abstract

Translation is much more than a mere mechanical process of conversion of one language to another language. It is an activity fraught with cultural compromises wherein the conversion from one linguistic medium to a totally different verbal exchange of ideas is both subtle and sometimes quite elusive. The paper probes cultural mediation required through translation and the translator's acumen in maintaining a balance of fidelity to the original text while also preserving accessibility to the audience for whom the translation is intended. This challenging complexity is quite adequately adumbrated in the translations of the two Nepali texts: Mauli, by Badrinarayan Pradhan and Phoolange by Lekhnath Chhetri. The translators of these two texts, Anmole Prasad and Anurag Basnet, respectively, while negotiating the socio-political and linguistic nuances of the Nepali text, outline for us the necessary acts of subversion and creation that translation ultimately demands.

Keywords: Translation, Cultural Mediation, Fidelity, Nepali Literature, Socio-Political Nuance, Translator Agency.

Introduction

Translation is much more than a mere mechanical process of conversion of one language to another language (Bassnett, 2002). It is an activity fraught with cultural compromises wherein the conversion from one linguistic medium to a totally different verbal exchange of ideas is both subtle and sometimes quite elusive. This is perhaps because the act of translation often merges the boundaries of language, identity and even ideology, a somewhat challenging act of

bringing such diverse factors into a rendition that shares the perspective and meaning between two or more vastly different systems of semantics and language structure (Jakobson, 1959; Venuti, 1995). The cultural mediation required through translation demands that the translator is mindful of maintaining the delicate balance of fidelity to the original text while also preserving accessibility to the audience for whom the translation is intended (Venuti, 1995). This challenging complexity is quite adequately adumbrated in the translations of the two Nepali texts: *Mauli*, by Badrinarayan Pradhan and *Phoolange*, by Lekhnath Chhetri. The translators of these two texts, Anmole Prasad and Anurag Basnet, respectively, while negotiating the socio-political and linguistic nuances of the Nepali text, outline for us the necessary acts of subversion and creation that translation ultimately demands.

The paper examines the English translations of two novels originally written in Nepali, *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, to learn what transpires when a story initially told in a local language is retold in a globally read language. The translators of the two novels, Anmole Prasad for *Mauli* and Anurag Basnet for *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, straddle two very different worlds as they move between mediums which belong to the margins and the mainstream. The paper studies this connection between the marginalised Nepali language in comparison to the globally known English language to learn how the translators accommodate their innovativeness with the power dynamics of the two languages and interrogate the extent to which such dynamics of the exchange between the two languages influence the subtext and metaphorical connections that are usually deployed in fictional works. The paper further looks at translation as an act of cultural negotiation (Croitoru, 2008; Zeynalova, 2025) and how far the translator of each of the two books, respectively, preserved the linguistic as well as socio-political nuances of Nepali writing as found in *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. In this context, the paper also probes the nature of challenges that a translator is confronted with in the effort to balance cultural fidelity and gain accessibility at the same time. Another question that the paper seeks to explore is the extent of the appropriateness of certain theoretical frameworks such as domestication, foreignisation and

untranslatability to evaluate the effectiveness of these translations in maintaining the cultural essence of the source texts (Venuti, 1995; Apter, 2013). Idiomatic expressions, socio-political symbols and code-switching all play an important role in the act of interpretation as well as re-creation of any text that is being translated. It is this navigation of cultural shifts and linguistic hybridity that makes Prasad's and Basnet's translations an important study; shifts that are evident in *Mauli* whenever the bilingual expressions echo the inner turmoil of the protagonist and the manner in which political slogans and idiomatic phrases are retained by Basnet, in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, to keep the cultural specificity intact, which seemingly impinge upon or at least challenge accessibility.

Both novels tell the story of the region and the social and political tumult through the narratives of otherwise marginalised people – a woman in *Mauli* and a semi-literate village youth in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. The two works span a time period of almost three decades apart but together present a zeitgeist of the particular locality: the Darjeeling-Kalimpong hill region of West Bengal, the socio-cultural changes that are a part of Mauli's coming of age in Prasad's translation and the socio-political upheaval which embroils Jhuppay in Basnet's translation are indeed experiences that many others from the region will testify as accurate, and this perhaps adds to the translators' task of transcribing the emotional essence of certain cultural idiosyncrasies, preserving the aptness of certain mannerisms, the familiarity of certain tropes, sounds and smells that the local reader will uniquely identify with and the global reader might appreciate. Each of these works is rooted in the Nepali identity while they lend themselves to themes of hybridity, cultural displacement and socio-political struggles, thereby allowing one an illuminating study on the workings of translation.

Literature Review

Within the field of translation studies, considerable attention has been given to the idea that translation is a culturally embedded activity. For instance, Lawrence Venuti (1995), among others, points out that a translated text essentially gets rewritten in the cultural terms of the target language community and that, therefore, it is

always a kind of interpretation and a politically involved act, rather than a simple and neutral transfer of meaning from one language to the other. In line with this, Reiß and Vermeer's Skopos Theory (2014) states that the purpose of the translated text in the target language will determine the choice of translation strategy, even at the expense of equivalence. Taken together, these theories present translation as a culture- and ideology-dependent activity.

Peter Newmark's (1988) distinction between semantic and communicative translation further illuminates the tension between preserving the cultural and linguistic features of the source text and ensuring readability for the target audience. While semantic translation seeks to remain as close as possible to the contextual meaning of the original, communicative translation prioritises the response and comprehension of the target reader.

Similarly, Gideon Toury's *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (2012) views translation as a norm-governed socio-cultural activity rather than a purely linguistic exercise. According to Toury, translators operate within the expectations and conventions of the target culture, and their decisions are shaped by translational norms that determine what is considered acceptable, appropriate or comprehensible for target readers.

Anthony Pym (2023) similarly emphasises the plurality of translation theories, arguing that no single framework can fully account for the complexities of translation and that translators often draw upon multiple theoretical perspectives when negotiating linguistic and cultural differences.

Likewise, Katan and Taibi (2021) foreground the translator as a cultural mediator who actively negotiates between different cultural frameworks and systems of meaning, highlighting the importance of intercultural competence in the translation process.

Building on this, recent research has more explicitly viewed translation as a process of negotiation. For example, Roya Zeynalova (2025) states that translation is a type of "culture-conditioned design" (p. 76) by which translators have a definitive impact on the reader's experience as they decide on a mixture of strategies such as domestication and foreignisation in accordance

with the expectations of the target audience. Likewise, Elena Croitoru (2008) sees negotiation as a fundamental element of translation. She uses Umberto Eco's idea of negotiation, drawing an analogy from it, and proving that total equivalence is often difficult to achieve as translation necessarily involves trade-offs. These methods highlight the translator as the mediator of not just the meaning but also the cultural values and the interpretive frameworks.

Elena V. Marquez (2024) goes a step further with this idea by placing translation within the context of world literature. She puts a strong emphasis on the translator as a cultural mediator, particularly when it comes to postcolonial and diasporic communities. Her work shows how translation significantly changes literary reception and that it also plays a very active role in the issues of identity, power and representation. Part of her focus is on texts that have linguistic hybridity.

Recent empirical research has also highlighted translation as a platform for the negotiation of cultural identity. Sajarwa et al. (2023), investigating the translation of *L'Etranger* into Javanese, disclose that strategies of borrowing and localisation lead to outcomes such as equivalence, narrowing and inequivalence, which depict the ongoing mediation between "self" and "other". Styles of translation such as contextual adaptation and annotation are given prominence in the study of Ali Hashemi (2025), who sees translation as a cultural mediation that is an ongoing activity, and the translators are the ones who negotiate between languages, ideologies and the expectations of the audience. While discussing ethical issues related to representation and cultural integrity, he not only highlights the strategies but also the concerns.

However, these immense theoretical and empirical contributions do not focus on the problem of translating Nepali literature into the English language, particularly with regard to linguistic hybridity and culturally embedded expressions. Existing scholarship still mainly gives priority to dominant literary traditions, leaving regional and multilingual texts very much unexplored. Moreover, the ways in which translation engages with code-switching, culturally specific idioms and the representation of multilingual identity within literary

narratives remain insufficiently examined. This paper addresses these gaps by analysing *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree* through the lens of cultural negotiation, focusing on how translation mediates meaning and identity in Nepali contexts.

Linguistic Hybridity and Code-Switching

Einar Haugen states that code-switching can be "used to refer to the alternate use of two languages, including everything from the introduction of a single, unassimilated word up to a complete sentence or more into the context of another language" (1973, p. 21). The concept of code-switching has been further analysed through frameworks like Jan-Petter Blom and John J. Gumperz's distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching (Blom & Gumperz, 1972, pp. 113-115). Situational code-switching occurs when language use changes based on context or social situation, while metaphorical code-switching reflects deeper identity negotiations, emotional shifts, or social group alignment. In the context of translation, the representation of such code-switching becomes particularly significant, as the retention, modification or erasure of these linguistic shifts can reshape how characters' cultural identities are conveyed to the target reader.

Linguistic hybridity in *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree* manifests differently in each of their narratives, posing unique challenges for their translators. While in *Mauli*, code-switching between Nepali and English by the protagonist marks the hybrid identity of a convent-educated Nepali woman attempting to reconnect with her cultural roots, the original Nepali text frequently alternates between both languages to capture this interior negotiation of identity. For example, the dialogue, "आई ह्यभन्नोट सीन हिम! … अँ, मैले उसलाई देखेको छैन।", (Pradhan, 1993, p. 11) blends English and Nepali seamlessly, reflecting her struggle to reconcile two linguistic and cultural worlds. However, the translation renders this as "I have not seen him-!" Mauli said, flustered. "– Er… I have not seen him!" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 3). While the translation conveys the meaning, it omits the bilingual interplay, flattening the nuanced depiction of Mauli's cultural negotiation.

This pattern becomes more evident in moments of emotional strain. For instance, in the line, "No, Ba- oh how can I tell you – how do I explain – that boy tried to hold her hand" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 7), the corresponding Nepali text, 'होइन बा... हाउ क्यान आई टेल यू । म हजुरलाई कसरी बताऊँ! त्यो केटाले प्रेताको हात समायो...', reveals a layered alternation between English and Nepali. While the English translation presents hesitation primarily as an inability to explain the situation, the Nepali version suggests multiple overlapping reasons: the difficulty of narrating a sensitive incident, the cultural discomfort of speaking to one's father about such matters, and Mauli's greater ease with English in emotionally charged moments. The movement between English and Nepali thus reflects a more complex form of hesitation than what is visible in translation, where it is reduced to a more uniform expression of uncertainty. Such instances demonstrate that Mauli's shifts between languages are not random but closely tied to moments of emotional intensity and social constraint, where language becomes a means of managing hesitation and self-expression. In the source Nepali text, code-switching functions as a conscious narrative technique that depicts Mauli's inner conflict as she attempts to reconcile the Western values instilled within her with her cultural values.

The loss of linguistic hybridity in *Mauli* is not confined to code-switching alone but extends to subtler features such as onomatopoeic expressions and interjections, which contribute to the auditory and emotional texture of the original text. For instance, the Nepali line "यो पटटट अंग्रेजी बोल्ने भइछ।" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 10) uses the onomatopoeic expression "पटटट" (paṭṭaṭṭa) to evoke rapid, continuous speech. However, its English translation, "She is now able to chatter away in English" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 10), renders the meaning descriptively while omitting the auditory immediacy of the original. Similarly, the expression "कहिले धनकुमारी खितिति हाँस्ठी।" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 24), where "खितिति" (khititi) mimics the sound of light laughter, is translated as "Sometimes Dhankumari would burst into giggling fits" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 24), losing the rhythmic and auditory quality of the laughter. Interjections too undergo simplification: the culturally embedded exclamation "यी बरा!"

(Pradhan, 1993, p. 37) is translated as "My goodness" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 37), replacing a culturally specific vocal expression with a more standardised English equivalent. In each case, the translation privileges clarity and fluency over the preservation of sound, resulting in a flattening of the sensory experience.

The absence of code-switching in the translation has major implications for the way Mauli's identity is represented. For readers of English, the exclusion of her bilingualism reduces the depth of her character and the complexity of her inner turmoil. This is evident in the translated version of Mauli, where the original Nepali text provides a more complex and multi-dimensional portrayal of both Mauli's character and her environment.

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, Basnet employs transliteration to retain cultural and political values embedded in slogans and popular references. Basnet's translation preserves the auditory rhythm of slogans by transliterating them, followed by footnotes explaining the meaning to the English-speaking reader. For instance, the slogan "Sindoor ko tika ke tika? Mato ko tika raja tika raja tika, mato ko tika rani tika" is transliterated in the text and translated in a footnote as, "The vermillion mark on your head, woman, that's no good. / What's good, then? / The mark of the land, that's king; / The call of the land, that's queen." (Chhetri, 2023, p. 72) The repetition of "tika" and the rhythmic structure of the slogan create a chant-like quality in the original, evoking a collective, performative context such as protest or public mobilisation. While the footnote conveys the meaning, the force of repetition and oral intensity are difficult to reproduce in translation, where the emphasis shifts to explanation.

Unlike *Mauli*, the translation of *Fruits of the Barren Tree* more consistently retains the acoustic dimension of language through transliteration. Expressions such as "Jhwaayin" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 59), "Thoo" (p. 53), and "Appui" (p. 79), presented in italics, maintain the original sound patterns and cultural resonance of Nepali speech. These interjections function as markers of emotion and reaction, immersing the reader in the linguistic environment of the source culture. This strategy preserves experiential immediacy, even if meaning is deferred to footnotes or context.

This strategy is also evident in other instances where multilingual elements are retained. For example, the Hindi line "Yeh dosti, hum nahi todenge." (Chhetri, 2023, p. 64) is preserved in its original form and translated in a footnote as "Never ever will we forsake our friendship." Here, the retention of the Hindi phrase carries popular cultural associations that are not fully captured in the translated version. Similarly, the political slogan "Kranti banduk ko naal bata suru huncha" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 85), translated parenthetically as "Revolution flows from the barrel of a gun", retains its ideological force in transliteration. However, within English prose, its impact shifts from a slogan to a more explanatory statement.

Taken together, these examples show that while the translation retains multilingual expressions in form, it often alters their effect by separating sound, context, and meaning. This approach of transliteration attempts to balance accessibility with fidelity, allowing cultural and political significance to be understood without entirely losing the auditory qualities of the original. Unlike *Mauli*, where code-switching is largely smoothed out in translation, *Fruits of the Barren Tree* retains multilingual expressions within the text, making hybridity visible to the reader even as it is mediated through footnotes and explanatory additions.

One of the more noteworthy strategies used by the translator is the use of footnotes to provide necessary political and cultural background. In several instances, the translator relies on footnotes to clarify culturally and politically embedded expressions. For instance, the colloquial expression छ इन्ची घटाउनु (*chha inchi ghatāunu*) (Chhetri, 2020, p. 10), which metaphorically means beheading, is explained by a footnote: "having six inches reduced" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 186). Similarly, the slang term "Syarpi", which means the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), is contextualised (Chhetri, 2023, p. 63). These footnotes preserve meaning but also highlight the difficulty of retaining local resonance in translation.

Foreignisation, as Venuti argues, "seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence" by deviating from cultural and linguistic norms in the target language (Venuti, 1995, p. 16). The translation of *Fruits of the Barren Tree* employs this strategy through

transliteration and footnotes to preserve cultural and political resonance. While *Mauli* tends to sacrifice some cultural flavour for fluency, *Fruits of the Barren Tree* retains multilingual elements more consistently, even if this sometimes comes at the cost of richness. Both approaches highlight the need to balance accessibility and authenticity in cross-cultural translation.

Sukanta Chaudhuri's *Translation and Understanding* (1999) provides a compelling argument about the subversive potential of translation as a cultural encounter. He argues, "Translation can release an alternative, subversive potential of the text, turn it inside-out to bring its deconstructive factor to the fore" (p. 2). Translation, in this sense, is not merely a linguistic transfer but an act of re-contextualisation that reshapes meaning within new cultural frameworks. He further states that translation "reminds us that language cannot enshrine any 'truth'… 'Truth' inheres in arbitrary combinations of signs and sounds" (p. 24). Thus, translation becomes a site where meanings are reinterpreted, which is central to the negotiation of cultural difference. Both the translations of *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree* exemplify Chaudhuri's perspective by presenting Nepali narratives within the English literary system. By foregrounding Nepali cultural contexts and language use, which is done through the reduction of code-switching in *Mauli* and the use of transliteration and footnotes in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, these translations resist linguistic uniformity. Rather than presenting a fully standardised English narrative, they retain elements of cultural difference, requiring the reader to engage with unfamiliar frameworks. However, the compromises inherent in translation also underline the tension between cultural fidelity and accessibility, revealing both the transformative potential and the limitations of translation as a medium for cross-cultural communication.

Linguistic Negotiation and Cultural Re-Learning

While the previous section examined linguistic hybridity at the level of language use, this section shifts focus to processes of cultural re-learning and identity negotiation within the narrative. In both *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, these processes are

reflected in the protagonists' navigation of familial, cultural, and socio-political demands, highlighting the conflict between personal identity and the cultural structures within which they function.

In *Mauli*, the protagonist's linguistic and cultural negotiation becomes visible in her conversations, where she adjusts her speech to match the expectations of her Nepali family. This adjustment reflects her effort to align her language with the cultural norms of the setting. For example, the source text reads: "वाह, यू ह्याड बीन टू सिक्किम, पापा?" followed by a reformulation, "आई मीन, पापा,… बुआ, हजुर सिक्किम पनि जानु भएथ्यो?" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 12). In this moment, Mauli first asks the question in English and then repeats it in Nepali. This repetition shows her actively reshaping her speech to fit the cultural expectations of the situation. The shift is not limited to changing "Papa" to "Bua"; the Nepali utterance introduces an honorific structure ("हजुर… जानु भएथ्यो"), which signals the importance of politeness and family hierarchy in Nepali language use. The English translation, "Wow, have you been to Sikkim, Papa?… I mean Papa – Bua – you've been to Sikkim" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 5), retains the correction from "Papa" to "Bua", but it does not show that Mauli actually repeats the entire sentence in Nepali. As a result, what appears in the original as a layered adjustment of language and cultural tone becomes in translation a simple correction of address, reducing the complexity of Mauli's negotiation between languages and identities.

Mauli's return to Nepal also requires her to reconnect with Nepali language and cultural concepts, a process that appears in her attempts to recall basic vocabulary for terms such as "art" and "culture". This is illustrated in the line: "आर्टलाई के भन्छ नेपालीमा? …क, कला, कला, कल्चर चाहिं हो… संस्कृति!" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 64). In the original Nepali dialogue, hesitation is clearly visible through the use of ellipses and repetition. When Mauli says "क, कला, कला", she begins with the initial consonant before finally producing the complete term, suggesting that she is searching for the correct word and revealing uncertainty. The repetition reinforces this hesitation, showing that she arrives at the answer gradually rather than stating it

confidently. However, the English translation, "What is art in Nepali? – yes, Kala. And culture? Sanskriti" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 73), presents the exchange as smooth and immediate. The pauses, repetitions, and markers of hesitation are eliminated, making Mauli's speech appear more fluent and simplifying the struggle involved in recalling and reconnecting with cultural vocabulary.

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, the processes of re-contextualisation similarly highlight the difficulties associated with translating cultural and political symbols. A prominent example is the translation of the chapter title प्रेमको रंग हरियो हुन्छ (*Prem ko Rang Hariyo Hunchha*, "The Colour of Love is Green") (Chhetri, 2020, p. 50) into "The Colour of Love" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 40). The exclusion of the term "green" removes a significant political nuance connected to the socio-political context of the novel. In the context of the Gorkhaland movement, the colour green symbolised the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), in opposition to the red colour of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)). The original title reflects this symbolic tension, making the narrative more socio-politically grounded. Its omission reduces the contextual value of the title for readers unfamiliar with the political climate of the 1980s.

Both novels, in illustrating the complexity of negotiating language and culture in translation, exemplify Apter's concept of translation as an act that illuminates cultural incommensurability (2013). While *Mauli* focuses on personal and familial identity, *Fruits of the Barren Tree* engages with collective political identity. In both cases, translation enables cross-cultural access but also risks simplifying the layered meanings through which identities and histories are expressed.

Cultural Specificity and Idiomatic Expressions

Having examined linguistic negotiation, it is important to consider how culturally specific meaning is embedded in idiomatic expressions and proverbs. The translation of such elements in *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree* poses the challenge of rendering culturally rich texts accessible without compromising their depth. These expressions are intricately woven into the cultural and

linguistic framework of Nepali society and require a balance between literal accuracy and cultural integrity.

Idioms and proverbs often lose their cultural intensity when translated literally. For instance, the proverb, "तातै खाऊँ, जल्दै मरौ!" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 86), is translated as "Eat too hot, Die too soon" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 101). While the literal translation communicates the basic idea of haste leading to negative consequences, it fails to capture the moral undertone and colloquial charm inherent in the original. The phrase, often used as vernacular wisdom, carries a cultural resonance that is watered down in translation.

Similarly, the expression "छोरीलाई मैतालु पठाएको जत्तिकै भयो" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 54) reflects the profound emotional sentiment tied to a daughter leaving her parental home, an event steeped in traditional values. The phrase is translated as "Like sending off a daughter as a bride" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 60). While the translation conveys the general meaning, it simplifies the deeper emotional and societal connotations associated with marriage in Nepali culture. This reflects Venuti's concept of domestication, a strategy that enhances readability by aligning the text with the norms of the target language but often erases the cultural specificity of the original. Venuti critiques this tendency, warning that domestication risks appropriating the foreign text to serve domestic agendas. He states:

> The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the recognizable, the familiar, even the same; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for agendas in the receiving situation, cultural, economic, political (Venuti, 1995, p. 14).

This is evident in the translator's prioritisation of fluency over cultural nuance, which, while ensuring comprehensibility, reduces the immersive quality of the narrative. A similar reduction of cultural specificity can be observed in the translation of the line, "मेरो जीउ छँदा नै तेरो टिका-टालो गरूँ भन्ने मलाई लग्यो है।" (Pradhan, 1993, p. 91), rendered as "I want to perform your nuptials while my health is still

good" (Pradhan, 2023, p. 107). The phrase "टिका-टालो" refers not merely to marriage but to the culturally significant act of applying *tika*, a ritual gesture of blessing and auspiciousness in Nepali tradition. In this context, the expression conveys a deeply emotional and culturally embedded desire to witness and ritually bless a child's transition into marriage. However, the translation replaces this culturally dense expression with the more general term "nuptials," thereby flattening its ritual, emotional and symbolic dimensions. What is lost here is an entire framework of cultural meaning associated with blessing, lineage and continuity, which remains implicit in the original but unarticulated in translation.

The translation of *Fruits of the Barren Tree* lowers the impact of some cultural expressions. For instance, when Old Basnet is interrupted in his tale by Cannon Kaila's irrelevant comment, he stares for a long time into Cannon's face before walking away. In Nepali, the phrase "जोखाना हेर्नु" (*jokhana hernu*) (Chhetri, 2020, p, 78), which literally translates to "to make a divination," is used to describe such prolonged, contemplative staring. Anurag Basnet translates the passage as: "Basnet took a deep drag on a beedi and scanned Cannon's face to make a divination" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 71). While literal, this translation fails to capture the metaphorical depth and cultural context embedded in the original expression.

These examples illustrate the challenges of translating culturally embedded expressions, where literal equivalence often results in the loss of nuance and cultural value. Such difficulties resonate with Apter's concept of the "untranslatable" (2013), which highlights how translation can simplify cultural distinctiveness in the process of making texts accessible.

Translating Cultural and Political Aspects

While the previous section examined culturally specific meaning at the level of idioms and expressions, this section turns to broader cultural and political structures embedded within the narrative. Cultural traditions, practices, and terminology in *Mauli* and *Fruits of the Barren Tree* play a vital role in shaping their connection to the socio-cultural context of the source texts. However, their translation

into English often involves compromises that risk diminishing this cultural specificity.

In *Mauli*, the description of the folk Maruni dance with its accompanying songs is a strong manifestation of Nepali culture, integral to the narrative's depiction of rural living. Descriptions of the dance and songs abound, with poetry and rhythm evoking the celebratory spirit and communal joy associated with the practice. However, the translation renders these elements literally and communicates well but fails to capture the aesthetic depth and emotional resonance of the original. The cultural richness achieved through sensory and rhythmic nuances in Nepali is reduced in English, resulting in a depiction that feels less evocative. This highlights the difficulty of translating performative traditions in a way that fully conveys their cultural significance.

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, the translation of proper nouns exemplifies the challenges of preserving cultural authenticity. The character name "तोप काइँला" (*Top Kainla*) is translated as "Cannon Kainla" to avoid confusion with the English word "top". The Nepali original reads: "पेट्रोल बम, खँदुवा अनि बन्दुक बनाउने अध्भुद कौशलको सम्मान गर्न रातारात हुकुस अनि औकान्छाको नाम फेरेर तोप काइँला अनि बम कान्छा बनाइयो।" (Chhetri, 2020, p. 75). The English translation renders this as: "To honour their special talent at making petrol bombs and guns, the names of Hukus and Aukancha were changed overnight, and they came to be called Cannon Kainla and Bomb Kancha" (Chhetri, 2023, p. 68). The changing of the names of these characters in the source text serves as a recognition of their skills and reflects the community's humorous and creative engagement with their identities. This process of naming integrates their skills into the social fabric of the rural insurgent context, tying them closely to the collective sensibility of the Gorkhaland movement. The names तोप काइँला and बम कान्छा are significant, as they are indicative of their origins in traditional Nepali vernacular, which firmly situates the characters in the socio-political realities of the narrative. The translated names, although more intelligible, diminish these subtle connotations by favouring clarity over fidelity to the original. This

translation, which maintains the literal meaning of the term तोप ("cannon"), sacrifices the vernacular and rustic connotations embedded in the original.

The examples from both texts illustrate the challenges that are inherent when rendering aspects that are steeped in culture. Literal translations may prove useful for people who only understand English, but they generally fail to capture the sensory, emotional, and cultural depth of the indigenous customs and terms used. As Apter argues, translation must grapple with the limits of equivalence, recognising untranslatability not as an obstacle but as integral to the literary experience (2013).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the English translations of Mauli and Fruits of the Barren Tree as acts of cultural negotiation rather than straightforward linguistic transfer. What emerges from this study is a more layered understanding of translation, one that involves not only carrying meaning across languages, but also making choices about what to retain, what to adapt and what inevitably gets lost in the process.

While Translation Studies has long recognised the translator as a cultural mediator, this analysis shows that such mediation becomes far more complex when the source texts are themselves linguistically hybrid and politically nuanced. In *Mauli*, the smoothing out of code-switching and bilingual expression creates a more fluent English narrative, but at the cost of reducing the visibility of the protagonist's internal negotiation between languages and identities. In contrast, *Fruits of the Barren Tree* takes a different route. Through transliteration and footnotes, it retains traces of linguistic, cultural and political difference, yet these meanings are often shifted away from the main narrative into explanatory spaces. The result is not a loss of meaning so much as a redistribution of it.

These differences point to a larger issue. Existing frameworks such as domestication and foreignisation are helpful, but they do not fully capture what happens when a text already contains multilingual elements to begin with, as in *Mauli*, or when cultural and political

nuance is strategically mediated through translation, as in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. In such cases, translation is not simply about bringing one language into another; it is about managing layers of language, identity and cultural reference that do not always align neatly. This paper, therefore, suggests that linguistic hybridity, and more broadly, the mediation of layered cultural and political meanings, should be seen as central to translation, not peripheral to it.

At the same time, the study draws attention to a gap in the field. Nepali literature, particularly in its translated form, remains underrepresented in critical discussions, which tend to focus on more dominant literary traditions. Since both *Fruits of the Barren Tree* and *Mauli* are works that are essentially localised yet move towards a wider, more general readership, the argument here draws one's attention to the role of the translator as cultural negotiator presenting a text from a marginalised language to a wider mainstream audience, in this case from localised Nepali to English, which is a medium of global recognition and understanding. The unevenness apparent in this kind of linguistic and even cultural power dynamics reveals the travails of the act of translation itself.

Taken together, these observations suggest the need to think of translation less in terms of fixed strategies and more as an ongoing process of negotiation, where cultural and linguistic elements are selectively made visible, softened or recontextualised. Such an approach allows for a more flexible understanding of translation, one that better accounts for multilingual texts and the shifting nature of meaning across languages. It also opens up space for further work on underexplored literary traditions and the complex ways in which translation shapes cultural representation in a global context.

This is perhaps because the act of translation often merges the boundaries of language, identity and even ideology, a somewhat challenging act of bringing such diverse factors into a rendition that shares the perspective and meaning between two or more vastly different systems of semantics and language structure (Jakobson, 1959; Venuti, 1995).

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