



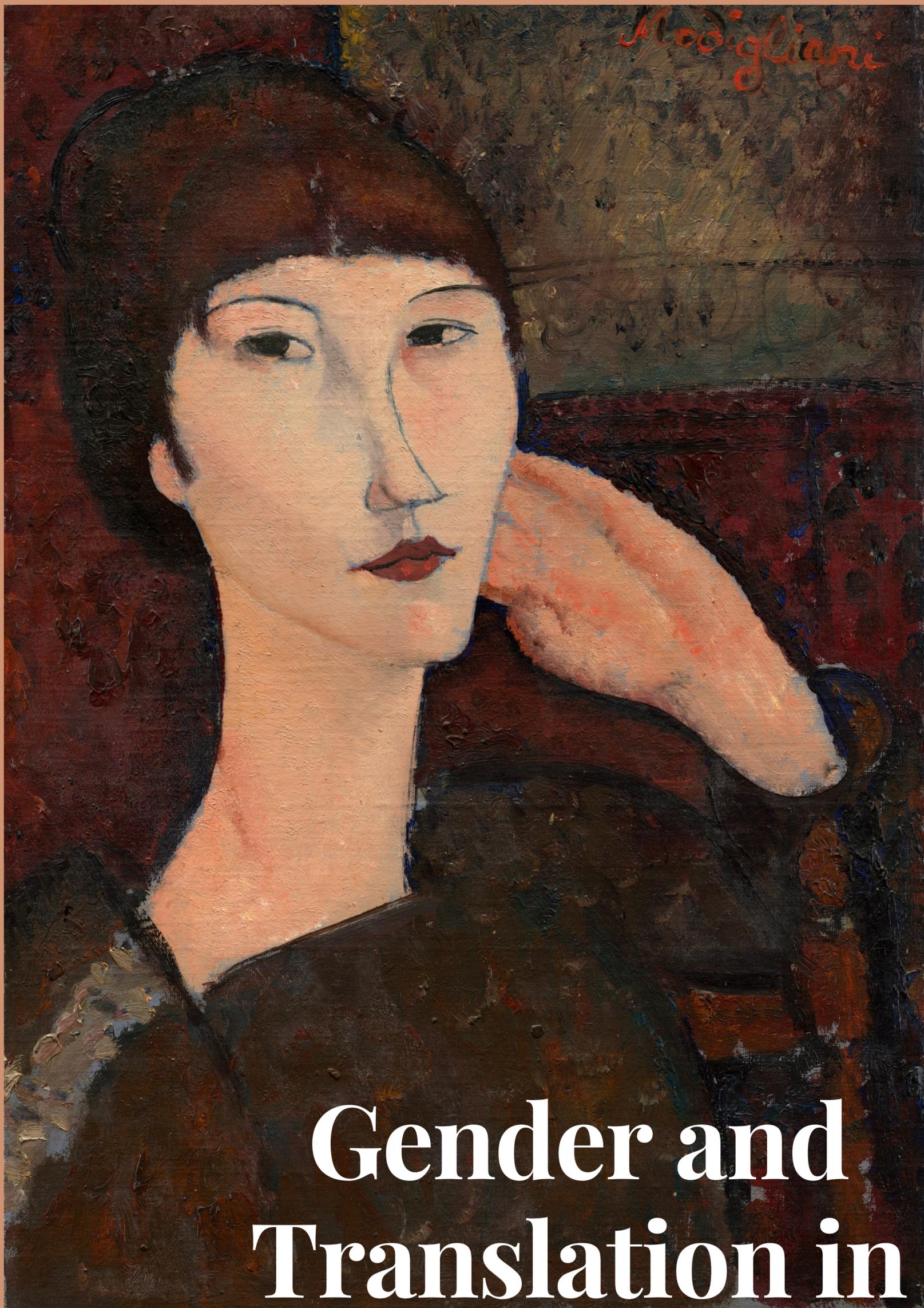
litinfinite

www.litinfinite.com

Litinfinite Journal

ISSN-2582-0400 [Online] CODEN-LITIBR

Vol-IV, Issue-II December 2022



**Gender and
Translation in
Multilingual India**

Litinfinitive Journal, Vol-4, Issue-2, (2nd December, 2022)

Content

Article Title	Authors	Pagination
Editorial	Dr. Nabanita Sengupta	i-iv
Why Always Translate a Sufferer? : The Consequences of Mimetic Translations of Mahasweta Devi's Works	Manodip Chakraborty	1-9
Engaging with the Partition Canon: Gastro-political narratives in Anchita Ghatak's translation of Sunanda Sikdar's <i>Dayamoyeer Katha</i> into <i>A Life Long Ago</i>	Namrata Chowdhury	10-19
The Voice of Silence: A Study of the Act of Transportation of the Muted Voices	Dr Purabi Goswami	20-28
Dropping <i>Draupadi</i> : The Crisis of A Woman Translating A Womanes	Ankita Bose	29-37
Fascinating Facets of Translation	Lucky Issar	38-42

Translation and Gender

Dr. Nabanita Sengupta

Assistant Professor of English, Sarsuna College (affiliated to University of Calcutta), Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Mail Id: nabanita.sengupta@gmail.com | ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2024-7652

From the Guest Editor:

A search for works by Bengali women authors in English translation, as a part of a project, brought the realisation home that even in a heavily translated language like Bengali, representation of women authors in other languages, including English, was way less than that of the male authors. That further brought an understanding of how gender affected translation – not just the craft of it, but also what to translate. One of the reasons can be visibility and availability of the texts. There are some deep-set and complex sociocultural issues that create this gap in representation. And this is not just true for the Bengali women authors, rather, a worldwide phenomenon which has led organisations and movements like PEN/ Heim Translation Fund or #womenintranslation project to promote more women authors in translation. Women’s writings, particularly from the past, are yet to receive a proper circulation among readers. Feminist studies, postcolonial studies and globalisation have helped in the increasing the possibilities of translation of texts by women authors though that is yet not enough.

In an article in *The Conversation*, Olga Castro mentions, “The future of feminism is in the transnational, and transnational links can only be made through translation”. Postcolonial studies too prioritise plurality of voices and representation of the marginal, and therefore gives space to the women’s writings from various cultures. In the post globalisation world, translation emerges as an important tool of communication that can initiate conversation between various linguistic communities. This intercultural communication lays the basis of inclusive and intersectional feminisms. With the third wave of feminism which directs its focus on feminisms and intersectionality, the transnational experiences become crucial. Since identity politics has become one of the pivots of exploitation and suppression, borders have gained greater significance. Transnationality is a movement beyond the borders, highlighting the necessity of porosity and transcendence of boundaries. Among the key factors that played a determining role in identity politics, gender is an important one. Also, gender experiences differ with nationalities. This realization is at the basis of the third wave of feminism that has identified the need for inclusivity of experiences as one of the basic criteria for a less stratified world. The significance of translation in this context has been highlighted by Michael Cronin:

“Translation also functions as a way of establishing transnational networks which are expansive in their ambition and reach. That is to say, it is translation which prevents national literatures from

cultivating a myth of pure autonomy or essentialist autogenesis. Translation can contribute to movements of linguistic or cultural independence but only on condition that the state of independence is one of interdependence” (35)

This resistance to ‘pure autonomy’ or ‘essentialist autogenesis’ is also the key to resist authoritarianism. This makes translation an important tool for feminist movements too as it resists the authoritarianism of patriarchy and other exploitative agencies.

Each age has its own dominant literary genre. It can be said that translation is fast emerging as one such in the contemporary age. With an increasing level of cultural intermingling, the need for translation has only been felt greater. Globalisation has impacted the language map of the world in multiple ways. While, in the erstwhile colonies it has led to the proliferation of English as a major language, it has also created a desire to understand the other languages. Though it has began as an economic activity, as a product of the market forces, there has been a growing trend towards cultural exchanges. This fall out of globalisation has been responsible for an increased translation activity too. In a multilingual country like India, translation has an even more important presence. In a land where the ruling dictum is: *Kos kos pe badle pani/ Chaar kos pe vani* (at ever kos, there’s a change of water and at every four kos, the language), interlingual exchanges are very important. For communities to understand and interact with each other, translation becomes the primary tool. In a country where language politics has often played a divisive role, importance of translation can hardly be stressed more. Linguistically divided boundaries of India are not just political demarcations, but they are also locations of multiple cultures, rituals and traditions. The reason that they are here also implies the inherent polyphonic structure of the Indian society which further emphasise on the need for translation.

Gender and language have always had troubled relationship. Language, along with translation, has been referred to as “tools for gender oppression and liberation” (Castro 2013: 7). Being a vehicle for communication of culture, language also becomes the medium of communicating prejudices. Therefore, feminist writings have felt the need to re-invent language, to find out means and ways to subvert the patriarchal bent of the language and re-engage it to topple the existing hierarchies. The radical feminists of 1970s looked at language, “as an instrument of women's oppression and subjugation which needed to be reformed, if not replaced by a new women's language” (Flowtow 14). Discussing the role of translator in translating radical feminist texts, Flowtow mentions the translator as “working for the cause of the woman in this work, she regularly oversteps the bounds of invisibility that traditionally define her role” (20-21), bringing in the role of translator as an activist.

Gender and translation bring together multiple epistemological concerns. On the one hand it looks at the nature of language and its relationship vis-s-vis not just women but all the marginalised communities, on the other, it also looks at the possibilities of empowerment inherent in the act of translation. Multilingual communities like India adds to this complexity because the notion of language and gender gets interspaced with linguistic hegemonies and politics of linguistic

hierarchies. The language of woman is cut across by other parameters of identity politics such as caste, class, and location, each of which in turn, have an impact upon the language.

The papers included in this volume deals with the multiple aspects of gender and translation. There are two dealing with English translation of Mahasweta Devi's short stories which approach the act of translating a subversive text like these stories from two different perspectives. Manodip Chakraborty addresses the issue of translating the 'sufferings' in a text by woman author where the protagonist is female. He argues that these translations, instead of bringing in the complex and multiple identities, vis-s-vis the character's social, cultural and political positioning, only universalises the idea of suffering in a woman, giving central importance to the 'secondary' position of women protagonists and stripping her of other possibilities. In this case, translation propagates the stereotypical and also legitimises the figure of the oppressed woman in literary consciousness across languages.

In the second paper on the *Breast Stories* by Mahasweta Devi, Ankita Bose looks into the act of translation of a woman by another woman and the politics of translation involved. Drawing from Cixous' idea of a woman writing with her body, Bose points at the discomfort that such texts evoke among the authorities and the mechanism of 'silencing' them. Removal of 'Draupadi' by Mahasweta Devi from the curriculum of Delhi University then becomes one such attempt. In this case both the translator and the author engage in a pact of de-stabilising the normative representation of woman by deliberately presenting a visceral representation of the female body and its experience of exploitation.

Namrata Chowdhury's paper deals with the problematics of translating gastro-political narratives of translation. Food is a site of cultural production and its deep-rooted association with a particular culture makes its translation a difficult task. She looks at the anxieties and trauma of partition through food. A translation of Sunanda Sikdar's *Dayamayi's kotha* by Anchita Ghatak becomes an exploration of the gastro-political anxieties and how they become a part of the greater narrative of partition across states and linguistic communities.

Purabi Goswami's paper looks at the translation of Assamese short stories by women and how they challenge the established notions of patriarchal system. A translation of these short stories by women is significant because they bring different and nuanced experiences of women's life into focus, making the readers aware of the differences yet, the similarity of their underlying exploitation. After looking at a host of translations in the Western tradition, the author focusses on the Assamese short stories and how their translation leads to a broadening of horizon for the readers.

The book review of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Translating myself and others* also explores the idea of translation as seen by a woman. The review focuses on the craft of translation as Lahiri mediates through various strands of Western epistemologies to finally engage with the idea of *dhwani* and its centrality in the act of translation.

The five different papers approach translation and gender from five different perspectives, highlighting the rich avenues of scholarly debates and possibilities still left to be explored. The limited number of papers also highlight the lack of serious engagement with the theoretical perspectives of gender and translation and the need for a deeper exploration of the same. This issue is an attempt to engage with the multiple possibilities of gender and translation by looking at the way language becomes a tool of gender experiences and to open up fresh dialogic spaces to engage with the idea of gender from the perspective of translation.

References

- Castro, Olga <https://theconversation.com/women-writers-work-is-getting-lost-in-translation-79526>
- Castro, O. "Introduction: Gender, Language and Translation at the Crossroads of Disciplines". *Gender and Language*, vol. 7, no. 1, Feb. 2013, pp. 5-12, doi:10.1558/genl.v7i1.5.
- Cronin, Michael. *Translation and Identity*. Routledge, 2006.
- Flowtow, Louis- Von *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism*. University of Ottawa Press, 1997.

Guest Editor - Dr. Nabanita Sengupta

Bio - A translator and creative writer, Nabanita Sengupta is an Assistant Professor of English in Kolkata. She has translated *A Bengali Lady in England*, and *Chambal Revisited*. She has also authored an e-book of fiction *The Ghumi Days*. As a poet, her recent publication is a collaborative poetry anthology by three women poets, *Three Witches' Songs* and has also co-edited the first IPPL poetry anthology *Voices and Vision*. She has co-edited a volume of critical essays *Understanding Women's Experiences of Displacement*. She is one of the Executive Committee members of the Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library

Why Always Translate a Sufferer? : The Consequences of Mimetic Translations of Mahasweta Devi's Works

Manodip Chakraborty

Assistant Professor, TKR College of Engineering, Secunderabad, India.

Mail Id: manodipchakrabortys@gmail.com | ORCID ID: [0000-0001-9366-679X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9366-679X)

Abstract

The enormous literary output of Indian female writers serves to emphasize the free flow of cognition - with which they are approaching the epistemology of past and present, and is categorizing the 'possible' future. The enigma of the whole corpus of female writing, it seems is predominated by the suffering portrayal of an 'often' female protagonist. Either suppressed under the domestic audacity, or binarized in the social plane, or is being fragmented in the cultural sphere. Translations of indigenous female writers (into English) in this respect not only open up a horizon of readership, but can also provide a pluralistic approach towards successful portrayal of femininity (along with the suffering one). However, the empirical observation suggests that the cultural consumption of a 'female protagonist' is signified with the 'suffering', 'subjugated', 'oppressed', 'categorized', 'binarized', 'mutilated' (among others) signifiers. Thereby, the number of translations carried out either by the popular female writers, or by the popular translating 'persona' - always presents the 'picture' of a secondary woman in a primary male society. Does this entail that females cannot be successful otherwise, without being exploited at the hands of male superiority? By applying the mimetic theories of Girard in the translated works of Mahasweta Devi's, this paper proposes to analyse the ideology of translating an inferior protagonist. The resultant work does not only invoke a sense of 'pity' or 'awareness' in the reader, but also categorizes him/her into accepting the plights of women as just, and female success can always be achieved by being 'secondary' in importance.

Keywords: Mimetic Ideology, Semantic Memory, Receptor's Cognition, Consent Generation, Mentalese Communication.

Introduction: The Ideology of Plight Configuration

The promulgation of contemporary feminine discourses serves to emphasize the growing number of readerships with a stimulus of female 'cause'. The author/ authoress's creation of a female 'protagonist' (either real or fictionalised), therefore, is successfully invoking the sense of catharsis hitherto been desired by the reader. The penetrating nature of these 'popular' discourses is questioning the essence of what a 'human' is and what is 'humanity'? However, even though at the

surface level they are preaching a different form of alternative; at the 'base' they form a homogenous construct – the portraiture of a 'sufferer'. Uniquely enough this *suffering* protagonist is a *female* – oppressed, a victim at the hands of societal binarism(s), and is confronting the societal repressive mechanisms with an aura of revolt. Paradoxically enough all the surviving popular literature about a female sufferer follows this paradigm. They claim that, "oppressed groups enjoyed privileged 'epistemologies' or 'different ways of knowing' that better enable them to understand the world, not only socially but scientifically" (Sommers 74). Therefore, Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil* is a brimming discourse about a Muslim woman's plight against patriarchal norms. Or, the autobiographical mode of narration in *My Story* by Kamala Das successfully invokes the sense of pity in the reader. Perhaps due to their unique portraiture of narrative persona, these authors upon public exposure came to be signified with their 'genre of production'. For instance, as Ismat Chughtai's "stories, indeed, are a reflection of her society...and she has remarkably depicted the social and emotional explication and the consequent deprivation of women...to call her *asocial critic* will not be wrong. She holds a unique place because of her boldness and truthfulness" (Kiran 53). In the same vein, Kamala Das's writing had been branded as "*intimate, confessional and innovative*...It is the unfulfilled dreams of the poet, which in turn shape the erotic themes of her poems. Her poems show a strong sense of consciousness towards female psyche...which is viewed by her in two aspects: male body and female body" (Fatima 62). Arriving with this denotative aspect of Das's writing as *intimate, confessional and innovative*, the subsequent criticisms delineate into how she viewed the male part with contempt and, how about her female part she is not sure, but accepts it nonetheless. The question then poses itself, during the process of the *creation* (of a repressive expression) did the authors themselves decide their *denotative mode of narration*, or is it just for the sake of being 'accepted' into the societal format, that the works themselves have transformed? What then about the *reader*? Is it just an arbitrary fact that when one (female primarily) suffers from a *societal oppression* (within Muslim community) for her the works of Ismat Chughtai appear just; and for another *sufferer*, victim of bodily oppression (physical or sexual) for her the works of Kamala Das provide solace?

In addition, having identified the 'victim' and after the clear demarcation of what has contributed to the *victimization*, the narrative of these discourses propels to signify the *sufferer* as an iconic figure, a sort of representative for a whole supposedly *oppressed* race. For this, they identify the 'people' (progressively males, and seldom female), who have wronged 'her'; and justify how in doing so they have wronged the entire female race in general. Kamala Das in her work *Understanding Gender* (2003) has identified this fact. By re-illuminating a fresh approach towards sex and gender with traditional normativity – she has demarcated between men and women: "If a woman can cook, so can a man, because a woman doesn't cook with her womb! What follows from this is that the different status women and men enjoy in society is indeed socially and culturally determined. *Everywhere* women as a group are considered inferior to men" (5). Even though feminine discourses often employ the distributive adjectives like 'everywhere', 'everyone', to stress on their universalization of *suffering*; and though at the same time, they are being critically acclaimed for their conceptions by the readers; the notions expressed two centuries before are still the mode of expression in contemporary scenario. Even though a reader (upon exposure with these texts) becomes conscious

with the mechanism(s) of oppression: why then the traditional oppressions (through new approach) still prevalent? As Bhasin herself has observed:

Every society prescribes different norms for girls and boys, women and men, which determine almost every aspect of their lives and their futures...However, the degree of differentiation between male and female roles varies widely. Sometimes the rules are *merely preferential*, and very little anxiety is shown by either sex over temporary role reversals (pp 6-7).

If this paradigm is true, then the entire corpus of *popular feminine* authors, in their zeal of authoritative creation have surrendered to a fundamental prerogative – they are no longer opting for an ‘objective’ mode of expression, rather it is the enigma of being ‘popular’ that is clouding their portraiture.

From this conjecture, it can be augmented that the voices which once preached (in negative way) the binarisms of social and sexual, public and private, oppression(s) and instruments of oppressions – have now become a cultural mode of production. Most importantly, though, it is not the authors who are in control of *this* cultural mode of production. Nowhere is this more evident than within the corpus of female writing. Targeted primarily towards writers who seeks or is seeking a public exposure – the cultural mechanics destroys the *polysemic implications of their texts*, and disfigured it into a commercial one. This fact is not a contemporary one; during the course of *writing* (the process of creating an authentic, undiluted text) Simone de Beauvoir had observed the same anti-mechanics of a public exposure: “I have hesitated to write a book on women. The subject is irritating, especially to women. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism...however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem” (Beauvoir 53). Once her authentic French version has entered the critical academia, it gave away its complexities of narration – and when the translation of it is done into *English*, with the purpose of approaching a wide populace, it has become an ‘edible product’. Therefore any mode of critical production fades in its attempt to approach a wider spectrum of society. Perhaps “if women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own...but for that much longer time is necessary, than has yet elapsed, before it can emancipate itself from the *influence of accepted models*” (Mills 83).

As Mills alternative is not a feasible one, the single most option left for the writers – is to exist in a coherence. But, in order to be coherent, the authorial creation runs the risk of becoming a victim of ingenious cultural probation. It is not the authors alone, who suffer this paralogical distribution – the readers, the distinguished consumers of the *invented texts*, too become subjectified in the process. Astonishingly enough, the ‘cultural probation’ is not politicizing the *contents* of the texts. They have realised that the market policy of demand runs parallel with the assumption of ‘exposure’ – the higher the exposed fact, the greater the consumption. They only seek to morph the appeal of the authorial text, and in doing so access the unconscious *motifs* of the reader. Even though the reader explains oneself to be a *conscious acceptor* of exogamic stimulus, but when judged from this background of cultural probation – the entire process becomes rudimentary. Thus, no matter the structure of an authenticated suffering *text*, it fails to produce its intended effect; and even if it does, the generated reaction (from the self-proclaimed conscious readers) too parallels the intended effect of the cultural

mode. In this respect, if the reader's reaction is customized, then the mere pretension of whether or not the intended work will generate the conformity from the reader is an invalid assumption. The stomata of cultural appropriation would never filter a text without any discursive appeal, in the same way it would never expose a reader's observation which runs against the proposed course of action. In this spectrum, "something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape: differences are hammered home and propagated" (Horkheimer & Adorno 97).

The Cultural Appropriation of Mahasweta Devi's:

This is the fissure which lurks behind the translated works of Mahasweta Devi. In the field of literary acclamation, she has introduced a paradigmatic shift of subject matter. In her works "she has dealt with the plight of women and their subordination" (Sheeba 310). Coming away from sophisticated diction, her Bengali works feature common language of expressions. She is "probably the most widely translated Indian writer working in an indigenous language...She has taken up the case of tribal people in India through political activism and writing" (Salgado 131). However, "her material is not written with an international audience in mind" (Spivak 105). Thereby, while her Bengali works are the evidences of polysemy; upon translation they become homonymy - a fixed denotation.

G.C. What do you think about Spivak's translations [of your work]?

M.D. I think she is the best. As far as I am concerned, as far as my stories are concerned, she's the best. Then comes Samik Bandyopadhyay...

G.C. My feeling is that sometimes when she is translating one of your stories, for example "Draupadi", in *In Other Worlds*, she incorporates it in her book and she writes a very long...

M.D. Dissertation.

G.C. Yes, which is very long and unclear, and then comes your story, and my feeling when I see that is that she's appropriated it, she's taken your story, she's made it her own.

M.D. No, all her translations are extremely faithful. Absolutely. Gayatri does not distort, not even one word...

G.C. In North America, the book *Imaginary Maps* is marketed under Spivak's name.

M.D. Yes, she has translated it.

G.C. Yes, I know but these are your stories. (Speaking with Mahasweta Devi 143)

Whereas her Bengali works are limited within the periphery of a Bengali populace, her translated works (not translated by her own) have received a wider circulation of popularity. Even though her subject matter of tribal plight is not widely known, due to the filtration of the content

(from Bengali to English), her works have acquired an aroma of 'appeal'. This is what distinguishes her works, and at the same time diminishes their pluralism. Even though the narrative structure and the narrative itself run parallel in both the medium of expressions – her Bengali works (original authorial creation) are not primarily evocative. Though they preach the plights of a *sufferer*, this suffering denies any subjective association between the text (or the *persona*) and the reader. Due to this objective standpoint, the reader remains conscious about the discursive elements, and can enumerate the implied essence of the text. However, this standpoint becomes completely opposite, when dealing with the translated texts. Filtered through the cultural lenses, the primary target of these texts is to generate a symbiosis between the reader, and the text. For which the translated texts have been inscribed with a mediated *desire*.

The exercise of writing an 'introduction' (which serves the same functionalism as a preface) is an attempt at saturation of this *desire*. Translated by Spivak, the preface of *Of Grammatology* argues,

the preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide, for the book makes a claim of authority or origin which is both true and false...Humankind's common desire is for a stable centre, and for the assurance of mastery through knowing or possessing. And a book, with its ponderable shape and its beginning, middle, and, an end stands to satisfy that desire (xi).

A self-moving activity, the introduction of the *Breast Stories* surrenders to this cultural structure of argumentation: "the breast is not a symbol in these stories. In 'Draupadi', what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge. In 'Breast Giver', it is a survival object transformed into a commodity" (Spivak vii). Therefore, the main functionalism of an *introduction* (if it is not stemming from the authorial pen) is to obscure the semantic memory of the reader – to stop the free flow of textual elements and to narrow it down to a false knowing of the subject matter. This legibility become seven more complicated given the fact that Mahasweta Devi is not primarily a writer but an activist; and her writing serves as an extension to her *activism*. In this respect, her "prolific output in the form of novels and short stories are mostly historiographies, rehabilitated folklore, political allegories – stepped in local conditions, traditions, dialects and customs, which need to be understood keeping in view her social activism in its totality" (Dar 100).

Activists like herself, Mahasweta Devi's Bengali works are essentially a structure of multi-layered knowing. It's an activity, where the reader moves between consciousness and reality, and deciphers the gestures and abstractions. The translated texts, on the other hand borders on meaning-text momentum with no authorial plurality. In the opening of *Breast Giver*, Jashoda was thus introduced as the embodiment of Indian motherhood: "Jashoda doesn't remember if her aunt was kind or unkind. It is as if she were Kanganicharan's wife from birth, the mother of twenty children, living or dead, counted on her fingers" (Devi, "Breast Giver" 39); and in the opening of *Draupadi*, Dopdi was introduced as an anti-personality to be persecuted: "Name Dopdi Mehen, age twenty seven, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased) domicile Cherakhan, Bankraharj, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees...most notorious female. Long wanted in many" (Devi, "Draupadi" 19). The narratives progress from there, developing into a culmination of a price that 'motherhood' has to pay or 'body' has to suffer. Behind this view of a 'suffering'

portraiture the mechanism is to transfer the message adequately. "The system works 'well' if the message received by the addressee is wholly identical to the one dispatched by the addresser (translator), and it works 'badly' if there are differences between the texts" (Lotman 12). These differences can function as discursive 'errors' (as in Jashoda's sympathy for her family, or Dopdi's dedication to her cause) and can instigate a stimulus of inquiry into the cognition of the reader – thereby there are special mechanisms to prevent any polysemic model of association and to restrict the free flow of receptor's cognition.

It is obvious therefore that the translated texts exist only to moderate a 'desire' for cultural propagation. The reader then is not opting for his own desire (the derivative meaning of the text), rather it is the cultural mechanics, who are denoting it for him. The readers pursue the plight of the translated *texts* by being motivated through a mediator. The characteristic trait in all of these mediated texts is a desire exhibited by the characters themselves. Jashoda is a 'proud woman', she exclaims: "a woman breeds, so here medicine, there blood-peshur, here doctor's visits. Showoffs! Look at me! I've become a year-breeder! So is my body failing, or is my milk drying? Makes your skin crawl? I hear they are drying their milk with injushuns. Never heard of such things!" (Devi, "Breast Giver" 54). The mediator by remaining absently present allows for a free flow of association between the desires of the *character(s)* and the desires of the reader. Though, in a culturally text, the mediator functions from the textural illusion, yet the process of mediation always remain present. Behind the characters desperate course of *actions* (illusions of choices), a 'voice' always make its presence feel and functions as an innovator to create an immersive textual aura: "The footsteps turn left. Dopdi touches her waist. In her palm the comfort of a half-moon...the lights of the camp at a distance. Why is Dopdi going this way? Stop a bit, it turns again...Not a word must be said. Dopdi has seen the new camp, she has sat in the bus station...this information cannot now be passed on. They will understand Dopdi Mejhén has been countered" (Devi, "Draupadi" 32). In this symbiosis, the reader arbitrarily derives the consolation of a metaphoric association between his cognitive stimuli and the character's course of actions as parallel, even though the elements were pre-structured and is based into a false catharsis.

The impulsive catharsis at the end of these translated texts is an ulterior impulse, employed by the mediator to generate negative empathy. It is thereby fascinating that the cultural mechanics are not only filtering the content of the translated discourses, but is strategically allowing the generation of negative criticism at the end of these narratives. Gerard (in his *Deceit, Desire & the Novel*) by extensively analysing the connection between the mode of prohibition and anti-criticism has remarked:

Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire (the characters own plight of actions) which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration (identification with a character) concealed by his hatred. In an effort to hide this desperate admiration from others, and for himself he no longer wants to see in his mediator (the cultural filtration) anything but an obstacle (11).

Thus, at the climactic end when “Dopdi’s black body comes even closer. Dopdi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand... (Dropdi) says in a voice that is terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, what’s the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?” (Devi, “Draupadi” 36) – the distinction between reader’s appreciation and cultural probation vanishes. The textual suffering functions synonymously for the reader and for the textual character; and ends in an *impasse*, from which it becomes never possible to illuminate the cultural mechanics which are shrouding the nature and cause of the authorial polysemy.

Almost every domain at the hands of the cultural mechanics has become an ‘obvious factorization’. The readers decode the text, thinking that his understanding is parallel with authorial intention – whereas in reality the author (Mahasweta Devi) is not the originator of the texts. It is not fictitious, however, to impeach on these translated texts – where the categorical forces are eluding the cognition of the readers and are generating consents. The readers upon an exposure, only receives the surface meaning of the texts without questioning the multiplicity of authorial intentions. To an extent, they even feel that the text have become a ‘sacred’ being, unfolding an unforeseen parameter exclusively to them; and hence derives superior gratification from his understanding. An immediate question then comes: are there no alterations to such facade translations? The answer lies in the contextualization: the readers are not interpreting the texts in vacuum; a continuous flow of a ‘suffering’ text keeps the imagination of the reader alive. The reader’s imaginative capability too in this respect is not superfluous – it is very specific for those readers who crave violence. The textual violence (physical violence against Dopdi, or the psychological violence against Jashoda) adequately incurs a similar emotion in the reader.

The mimetic ideology instilled in the readers by the textual violence (of the translated texts) categorizes them into a reading community – within a space and time creating a homogenous nostalgia from a textual deformity. This textual deformity need not to be a physical one, for example “there is such a thing as social abnormality; here the average defines the norm (in *Draupadi* it is the police personnel, and in *Breast Stories* it is the patriarchal structure). The further one is from social status (as tribal people are) of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution (Girard, *The Scapegoat* 35). This textual illusion configures the reader’s consciousness, and probes him/her into absorbing the proposed textual course of actions. In doing so, the objective of the translated text remains the same; its target is to showcase a possible number of ‘activities’ and encourage the reader into following one. No matter how objective the reader is he/she drinks these stereotypical formulations and juxtaposes them in his/her approach to reality.

Conclusion:

Existence in a materialistic society is essentially based on differentiation of one individual against another and the individual’s search for legitimacy is often justified against the courses of another. Whereas the Bengali works of Mahasweta Devi strives to propose an alternative to this; the culturally translated texts coming away from their authorial intentions are glorifying this *legitimacy*. This impact is so deep rooted that even the mere mention of a ‘suffering personality’ invariably invokes the

mentalese communication of a 'suffering woman' in the reader's mind; thereby he/she becomes readily absorbed into the text. In this respect, the reader is encouraged to feel one-self not only different, but also extremely differentiated from (real or imaginary) oppressive forces – and the text entertains this paradigm to its highest pivotal axis. Delaying the climactic *catharsis* to its optimum (by synthesizing the narrative unfolding with the progression of the reader's mental apparatus), it diverts the reader's conscious cognition from authorial plurality to cultural singularity. The signs which are indicative that the reader is now 'decoding' according to the *preference* of the said mechanics – are not embedded within the text, rather they are being enforced from the outside. Any form of revolt against (by preaching against cultural mode of translation) it will only lead to its strengthening of application. Therefore, even though negations and criticisms are in existence, they have been co-joined and are filtered in its propaganda for morality. This tendency is omni-pervasive. Irrespective of temporal and spatial categorizations the same mechanics are being employed to cater to the responses against a sufferer. Despite what is proposed against it, whenever a translated text about *suffering* makes its appearance, it will follow the same paved way – where the individual consciousness will become an object in construction.

References

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley, Jonathan Cape, 1956.
- Bhasin, Kamala. *Understanding Gender*. Women Unlimited, 2003.
- Dar, Mukhtar Ahmad. "Mahaweta Devi: An Embodiment of Social Activism". *Literary Endeavour*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2018, pp. 100-105.
- Devi, Mahasweta. "Draupadi". *Breast Stories*, Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull, 1977, pp. 19-38.
- . "Breast Giver". *Breast Stories*, Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull, 1977, pp. 39-75.
- Fatima, Nighat. "Feminism in the Treatment of Kamala Das's Poetic Imagery". *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2016, pp. 60-69.
- Girard, René. *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- . *Deceit, Desire & the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.
- Horkheimer, Max. & Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Kiran, Sobia. "An Analysis of Lifting the Veil (A Collection of Short Stories) by Ismat Chughtai". *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2016, pp. 51-60
- Lotman, Yuri. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Translated by Ann Shukman, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1990.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- Salgado, Minoli. "Tribal Stories, Scribal Worlds: Mahasweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2000, pp. 131- 145,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002198940003500110>.
- Sheeba, M.K.. "Exploring the Female Psyche in Mahsweta Devi's Stories". *Language in India*, Vol. 19, No. 7, 2019, pp. 309-316.
- Sommers, Christina Hoff. *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women*. Simon & Schuster, 1994.

- Speaking with Mahasweta Devi: Mahasweta Devi Interviewed by Gabrielle Collo: Gabrielle Collo
Interviewed Mahasweta Devi at her home in Calcutta on 11 February 1997. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 1998, pp. 143-153, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002198949803300210>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful'". *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 14, 1989, pp. 105-128, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354294>.
- . Preface. *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. ix-xc.
- . Introduction. *Breast Giver* by Mahasweta Devi, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull Publishers, 1997, pp. vii-xvi.

Author Bio: Manodip Chakraborty has completed his M.A. in English Literature from Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University. He is presently an assistant prof. of English (Department of Applied Science and Humanities) in Teegala Krishna Reddy Engineering (Autonomous) College

Engaging with the Partition Canon: Gastro-political narratives in Anchita Ghatak's translation of Sunanda Sikdar's *Dayamoyeer Katha* into *A Life Long Ago*

Namrata Chowdhury

Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Ph.D. Scholar, West Bengal State University

Mail Id: nc20391@gmail.com | ORCID ID: [0000-0002-9393-7681](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9393-7681)

Abstract

The gendered experience of the Partition of 1947 has been a focal point of revalidation in the discussion of the mutilated bodies, the voices and the traumatic deferral of identities as Urvashi Butalia would point out in her *The Other Side of Silence*. The canon of Partition studies however has subjugated the diversity of the cultural borders by making the traumatic perception a central argument for the gendered identity. In this light, the paper seeks to challenge the 'canon' in the Partition memory as cultural theorist Jan Assmann would say, and attempt to reorient the narrative of the gendered experience of the Partition to produce the gastro-political sites of intersection. The patterns established of food consumption practices, of the production of food induces a tension that exists primarily on the margins of the Partition narrative and can only be intercepted by the translation, but the essence of the vernacular remains with words, and emotions that remain beyond translation. The paper examines the gastro-political notion of belonging and exclusion as it conceives the culinary language employed by Ghatak to surpass the local of the vernacular and through translation cement its position vis-à-vis national identity politics.

Keywords: Partition, Gastro-Politics, Food, Nation, Identity, Gender, Translation.

"Would life feel richer if she could always speak her own language, eat the foods she had grown up with, hear the sounds, inhale the air and see the colours of her native land?" (Banerji 10)

In the above excerpt, Chitrita Banerji's protagonist Uma is torn between her desires to belong to the newly created nation of Bangladesh to which her husband belonged, and at the same time to Calcutta in India where her grandmother Sunayani lived and also in America where she spent her adolescent years studying. Uma, struggles to remember the homes she has lost through the taste of the food she ate as a child in Calcutta and wanted to recreate the same when inviting guests in her home in a different Bengal, separated now by an international border. What Banerji's narrative dexterously does is put Uma in a tangential relation with her culinary roots, as she barely has time to

cook and hires a help and at the same time takes an interest in duplicating the dishes that she had grown up eating by giving her cook directions.

Almost like a reversal of Uma's movement, Sunanda Sikdar's Dayamoyee or Daya as she is fondly called has had to leave her home in East Bengal and had married and settled in West Bengal. Daya too remembers her village Dighpait, as it was torn by the Partition, the political line that rent Bengal into two different territories, and it is her remembering that cooks up a language, a taste of the home lost, that is at once difficult to translate and at the same time potent enough to contest the centrality of the Partition canon. The translation of Sunanda Sikdar's *Dayamoyeer Katha* into Anchita Ghatak's *A Life Long Ago* that will be the mainstay of this study forges its way into the re-writing of the canon of Partition literature and Partition studies through its examination of the gendered sphere of gastro-political belonging, borrowing the term 'gastro-politics' from Arjun Appadurai's take on the culinary politics of South Asia. Appadurai's essay "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia" defines the term 'gastro-politics' as the "conflict or competition over specific cultural or economic resources" that seem to appear "in social transactions around food" (Appadurai 495) and it is this very transaction that Daya would remember and reproduce through her cultural memory of the land and the home that was her home, upended by the line of Partition.

Cultural Memory and the Canon:

The Partition and the events leading up to it and its aftermath have been seminal in the articulation, in the silences but overall the construction of the empire of cultural memory through literary and cultural texts and multifarious modes of performances and communication. The cultural memory as Jan Assmann is a filtered version of the past which "exists, if it can be said to exist at all, in a double form: as a sedimentation of relics, traces, and personal memories and as a social construction." (Assmann 15) Assmann also points out that memory is a "specifically human faculty" as it allows the individual "to construe an image or narrative of the past and, by the same process, to develop an image and narrative of ourselves." (Assmann 15)

With the historical event of the Partition, it is not only the physical repositories like the museums and archives that hold memory, but as Jan Assmann has indicated in his notion of the 'cultural memory' that cultural devices like the "[d]ishes, feasts, rites" (Assmann 17) too can be the containers. When speaking of 'cultural memory', Jan Assmann reminds us that it is an "institution" and that "[h]uman memory is embodied, and it requires a brain as the material carrier of its embodiment" just as "it requires social and cultural frames for its embedment." (Assmann 17) When the human mind exists only in a constant interaction and exchange with "outward symbols", Assmann coins the terms the "remembering mind" and the "reminding object" and the notion of cultural memory then should be inclusive of both. (Assmann 17-18)

Herbert Grabes in "Cultural Memory and the Literary Canon" points out that canons are "objectifications of values, either individual or shared" (Grabes 311) and in this light it is the shared historical, social and cultural experience of the Partition, its memory, the inter-generational transfer

of the Partition all of which have together sustained to make the Partition canon. Grabes further states that “canons are constructed in order to last, and the history of canon formation shows that, against all odds, they quite often possess an extraordinary degree of longevity” and attributes this sustenance to its role in the “shaping and sustenance of cultural memory.” (Grabes 311)

Acknowledging the gravity of Grabes’s words on the formation of the canon, that it defines how select memories are preserved and sustain the trysts of time, one can draw from Urvashi Butalia’s seminal work *The Other Side of Silence* as she proposes to reorder and revise the canon too, the canon of Partition literature and Partition studies. Butalia scripts the aftermath of the Partition and then proposes to question the role of history, memory and the canon formation as she writes in her book:

And a series of events accompanied and followed it [Partition]: violence, mass migration, refugeeism, rehabilitation. But the ‘history’ of Partition seemed to lie only in the political developments that had led up to it. These other aspects — what had happened to the millions of people who had to live through this time, what we might call the ‘human dimensions’ of this history — somehow seemed to have a ‘lesser’ status in it. Perhaps this was because they had to do with difficult things: loss and sharing, friendship and enmity, grief and joy, with a painful regret and nostalgia for loss of home, country and friends, and with an equally strong determination to create them afresh. These were difficult things to capture ‘factually’. Yet, could it really be that they had no place in the history of Partition? Why then did they live on so vividly in individual and collective memory? (Butalia 6-7)

Anchita Ghatak’s translation of Sunanda Sikdar’s work:

Sunanda Sikdar, the author was born in 1951 in East Pakistan, present day Bangladesh, and she came to stay in India aged ten. Her experiences of the first decade of her life in East Pakistan were then published in 2008 as *Dayamoyeer Katha*. This work of Sikdar’s was subsequently translated in English by Anchita Ghatak, published in 2012 as *A Life Long Ago*, a Zubaan and Penguin Book collaboration. Ghatak is in the professional sphere working from Kolkata, India on various issues of women’s rights. She acknowledges her connection and bond with “stories of India’s struggle for freedom and the Partition” (Ghatak x) among the others she has heard from her grandparents and dedicates the translation to her maternal grandparents for whom home had always meant Dhaka, in present day Bangladesh. Her connection with the rift in Bengal therefore has led her to discover “important questions about class, caste, community, religion and gender” (Ghatak ix) that she finds in Sikdar’s memoir and at the same time in the present day. Ghatak, in her “Translator’s Note”, preceding the translated work has acknowledged the polyvalent discourses that prevail in Sikdar’s book, which won both the Lila Puraskar awarded by the University of Calcutta in 2008 and the Ananda Puraskar in 2010 and was translated by Ghatak, with the permission of the author who she claims was “supportive, encouraging and enthusiastic” (Ghatak ix) about this project of translation.

Scholarship on the Sikdar’s work has seen the debates on national identity by Debjani Sengupta in her recent article “One Who Stayed Back: Sunanda Sikdar’s Partition Memoir *Dayamoyeer Katha*” (Sengupta) to that of pathological violence and the resultant trauma and displacement in Sayan Parial’s 2021 article “Remembering and Forgetting: Trauma in Sunanda Sikdar’s *Dayamoyeer*

Katha." (Parial) Curiously however, gender politics and gastronomy has not been part of any extensive study on Sikdar's memoir, and thus Anchita Ghatak's acknowledgement of Urvashi Butalia in her "Translator's Note" might mean greater things for the revision of the Partition canon.

Sikdar's writing and Ghatak's translation confirm what the authors of "Literary sentiments in the Vernacular: Gender and Genre in Modern South Asia" see in the "literary expressions", which they consider as multiple discourses connected along the lines of "gender, caste, class, religion, nation and ethnicity, which help in articulating, disciplining and locating identities." (Gupta, Brueck and Harder 804) Anchita Ghatak's translation of Sikdar's work into English therefore is seminal in the re-writing of the Partition canon as the vernacular to the English assists in its wider readership. This translation would then foreground what appeared to be primarily a local conflict into a dialogue of national rhetoric and national identities.

Dayamoyee shortened to Daya, the narrator of Sikdar's text speaks about her childhood from memory. Daya navigates through her memory, the territory of the border that divides the two Bengals, one that belongs to India and the other to Pakistan. Daya's narrative however is different because it colours her retelling through the 'human dimension' that Urvashi Butalia spoke of. Daya's Dighpait, the village from East Pakistan, what later became Bangladesh, would be revealed in this paper to be the site of multitudes of gastro-political encounters that contest the strict territorial division of the Bengal region into West Bengal that remained with India, and East Pakistan that became a part of the newly formed nation of Pakistan. Dighpait then locates the framings of the Hindu household- Kayastha, Brahmin and the Shudra as well as Muslim households- both native and refugee. Through the notions of purity and pollution attached to food consumption practices and the exchange of land that was occasioned by the Partition as a means of food production, and the feast as a primary site of food distribution, this paper provides a commentary on how the culinary language and gastro-political encounters between the social actors of Dighpait writes back to the canon of Partition scholarship exploiting the silences of being given what Butalia calls the "lesser status" (Butalia 7) and still promises to communicate through the culinary language.

Daya's culinary language then designs not only the social composition of Dighpait, but it also obliquely comments on how the strict borders between communities existent within the village get interrupted by the Partition. The subsequent turmoil and the upsetting of the peaceful cohabitation of the Dighpait inhabitants then is subsumed within Daya's memory of what she ate, how she ate, where she ate, with whom she ate, and also an address of what others around her were eating or not eating. This translation from the vernacular to English would then endow the text with what Appadurai would call the "two diametrically opposite semiotic functions." (Appadurai 496) Appadurai's semiotic functions "can serve to indicate and construct social relations characterized by equality, intimacy, or solidarity; or, it can serve to sustain relations characterized by rank, distance, or segmentation." (Appadurai 496) Incidentally, Daya's remembering of her childhood home in Dighpait exposes the human relationships that work along both the axes that Appadurai has mentioned.

When Daya describes how her beloved Majam Dada, ate “panta” and she quickly proceeds to describe it as “boiled rice soaked overnight in water” and establishes the difference of their grains by naming them the one they consume as “fine-grained kalojeera rice” and what plump hanskhol rice. Dada would mix red chillies in the rice with great care and eat it with pleasure. Watching him eat, I felt that hanskhol rice must indeed be a delicacy. One day, my mother cooked some for me and I found it tasted awful!” (Sikdar 6) The socio-political distinction of identities that comes with the consumption of a particular variety of rice enables Daya’s narrative to engender the domestic space and its role in the problematizing of the borders and to reiterate the problem of the distance manufactured in the gastropolitical appropriation of space within Dighpait. The post-partition memory of Daya’s home then rests on the position of rice to “encode gastro-political messages” as Appadurai reads in the context where one ends up “manipulating the food itself (in terms of quantity or quality)” (Appadurai 501) and the difference in the two varieties of rice therefore holds significance beyond the local community.

Daya had noticed further that her Dada had stopped eating his meals at their house and would rather take his food home. This change in behaviour is visibly noticed by Daya as it becomes a manifestation of the Partition of the two Bengals, and how the eastern side of it went under the newly created state of Pakistan, whereas its western counterpart remained with India. He brought along an earthen dish in which to carry the food, that was known as “shanki” and the vessel itself was “apparently impure” for the Hindu who were “forbidden to eat off them.” (Sikdar 6) Daya’s mother would not “serve” him his meal but rather “pour” (Sikdar 6) it to him from a certain height, keeping the distance between her ladle and his earthen plate. Eating in a Hindu household then, becomes a site of anxiety for Majam Dada and vice-versa as accidentally touching his earthen plate would spell disastrous for Daya’s home. The hanskhol rice that Majam Dada eats and his earthen plate then become the tools of facilitating a comfortable distance in the gastro-political identity of the members of two different religious communities. When Appadurai speaks of the “specific semiotic outcome” born of a “matter of the particular food substance” (Appadurai 496), Daya’s dalliance with the memory of the variants of rice and rice consumption, draws the borders of her home, is found to seemingly flirt with the invisible communal lines that sunder the village. The exchange between Majam Dada and a Hindu household, or rather the lack of exchange because of the Partition establishes a striking resemblance to Appadurai’s examination of gastro-politics in a Tamil Brahmin household. Appadurai strictly states that gastro-political tension in the household could also be the resultant of an interaction with its “[r]ecipients, dependents, guests and subordinates” (Appadurai 501) and Majam Dada is not the “manager of the hearth” but his presence and actions can still facilitate that communal tension that was absent before the Partition. The particular method in which Daya’s foster mother is seen ‘serving’ food to Majam Dada, a Muslim man who regularly visits the household tells us about the way her actions differ from the usual, and Appadurai tells us that within the context of the household, the gastro-political anxiety can be manifest “[f]rom the point of view of those who control the cooking and the serving process.” (Appadurai 501)

Daya herself is forbidden to eat in a Muslim home and although she is friends with Achia, the daughter of Samsheer chacha, she never eats with her. Sometimes Daya would visit her friend Phalani,

and on these occasions she would eat with them. The lower caste Hindu family consisted of Phalani, her parents and her aunt and uncle. The family was poor and to Daya's amazement she finds the family not consuming rice all throughout the year like the usual practice at her home. This was because despite living within an agrarian community whose primary cultivation was of rice and then of other grains, these people could not afford to buy grains for themselves. They therefore resorted to eating supplements, like greens and onion and chillies, but also at times cooking "pigeon meat" and a "curry made of rat" (Sikdar 18) and tortoise as well. Daya too had eaten what she would not be conventionally served at home by her mother, and she feels guilty for betraying her mother, who had forbidden her to eat cooked food in any other home than the Hindu Kayastha. Her repentance of her act of eating with Phalani's family is manifest in her writing the name of the Hindu God "Lord Narayan a hundred and eight times." (Sikdar 19) There would be times in the year when Phalani's family would be eating rice, because the women in the family were employed in the threshing and pounding of the grain, and they were paid with a share of the rice. This "measure of rice as wages" (Sikdar 21) similarly speaks of how the community uses the grain as currency, and the gastro-political encoding noticeable in the residents of Dighpait ensures participation in the national economy through its production of rice.

Daya's memory of Dighpait of 1951 saw a metaphorical and invisible rent between the inhabitants extends even to the conversion of the ownership of agricultural lands, moving from the hands of Hindu owners to that of Muslim owners. And the immediate effect of this exchange is felt by the farm hands, people like Majam Dada and his brother Ajam, who lose out on opportunities to cultivate the land because the new landowners can do it themselves. When Daya witnesses the new entrants to the village, the "ripuchi" or the refugee, her mother has taught her a new register, one that requires her to address an older uncle as "chacha" instead of the traditional "kaka". (Sikdar 12) Daya's Majam Dada and his family, and many of the sharecroppers in Dighpait then begin to suffer, as they would have been otherwise paid for their services rendered by a portion of the grain cultivated. However, these sharecroppers are now denied their grain because the Muslim landowners can do what the "Hindus can't", cultivate their own lands, because the latter thinks of their "standing in society." (Sikdar 9) When Appadurai speaks of the "semiotic outcome" his focus extends beyond the choice of a particular food to include the presence of "the actors involved in the transaction, and the context and audience of their transaction." (Appadurai 496) The social context of the time and the presence of the Muslim landowners as 'audience' would then gastro-politicise the identities of the Hindu and the Muslim, establishing difference through the social actors connected to food production.

A separate occasion that Daya tells us about Dighpait was the going away of the eldest brother in the family of the "Ghoshes of Chhaitani" (Sikdar 126) who had arranged a feast to celebrate their last days in Dighpait, as they were heading for the Hindu majority nation, Hindustan. It was not uncommon for Hindu men to move to West Bengal, leaving behind their homes in the Muslim-majority nation East Pakistan, but few would throw a lavish party, a final get-together before departure. This man, the eldest of the Ghosh brothers, could afford to arrange for a feast for had made a lot of profit from his supply of milk and milk products. The reason as to why he was ready to move

to Hindustan was primarily because his daughter would settle with her in-laws there and he wanted to remain close to her, and the secondary reason being a disease that he had contracted, for which he wanted to spend the last days with her, offering prayers to the Goddess Kali in two famous temples of West Bengal.

The celebration and the feast went on for three days, as Daya gives us details of what happened on each specific day. The first day of the celebration saw the performers dramatizing portions of the life of the Hindu God Krishna, and the presence of the Hindu deity meant that people ate only what was offered in prayer to the Gods. This offering consisted of “fruit and milk products like chhana” (Sikdar 128), vegetarian fare. The second day was the main day of the feast where all the people invited were given what had previously been offered to the gods, “rice, pulao, luchi and khichuri” and followed it with vegetable preparations, “labra, chhanar torkari and ambol” ending the meal with serving the guests “yoghurt, chhana, sugar and batashas” brought specially for the guests. (Sikdar 128-29) The second day saw among the turnout the upper class Brahmins along with the lower caste Shudras, and the warrior caste Kayasthas amid the two ends of the spectrum. Each of these were seated separately and served food.

But it is the third and final day of the feast that seems interesting as it becomes a crucial site as Appadurai pointed out in terms of the social function of feasting, which revolves around “establishing roles, relationships, and statuses in traditional societies” (Appadurai 502) like the one in Dighpait and in Chhaitani. While Appadurai comments on the Tamil Brahmin marriage feast, this feast too shall find its space within the gastro-political discourses of local and national identities. Daya speaks of how the elder Ghosh never felt compelled to invite the Muslims in the village and around it, but he nevertheless asked them to be a part of the celebration. The Muslims he had invited had accepted his invitation, but they had settled on visiting the Ghosh household a day after the main celebration, and consenting to eat “various milk products.” (Sikdar 127) Not only is their absence on the day of the actual celebration and their presence in his home a day after significant, but also their desire to feed only on milk products, as it addresses the gastro-political tension in their participation and consumption of food with the Hindu families. While this tension is sustained and mitigated by the feast, what it does is confirm the role of this public gathering in the acknowledging of the role of food in drawing lines that can ensure division and segmentation of the population, and blurring lines where necessary to unite them. If the invitation of the Brahmin, Kayastha and Shudra on one particular day of the feast attempts to temporarily distinguish the Hindu identity from the non-Hindu category, it also divides this same Hindu unity by talking about the separate seating arrangements made for each group, thereby erasing any possibility of a unitary whole. Although Appadurai was writing about the marriage feast, this feast that is organized by the eldest Ghosh, is done also in an attempt that people remember it in times to come, and the very requirement for making it a memorable fare makes it similar to the marriage feast, in all its attributes- “public, formal, extended and extraordinary.” (Appadurai 502)

While the third and final day of the feast saw the invited Muslim families become a part of the final get-together, there was Ajar chacha, a refugee, who felt left out, not because he was a refugee,

but because he was not a wealthy one. He grumbles and expresses his discontent over not being invited even though another refugee, Anar Mian was. Anar Mian was educated and he also had money, which is why Ajgar chacha's complains seem fair. The respect that Anar Mian already drew was doubled by this invitation at the Ghosh household, whereas Ajgar chacha remains a mere "ripuchi" (Sikdar 129) and in his own words, perceived to be in a lowly position. Therefore, the feast, eating together or not together becomes a "quintessentially gastro-political arena" (Appadurai 502) where class, religion, citizenship, and social status all matter.

Anchita Ghatak's translation of Sunanda Sikdar's *Dayamoyeer Katha* into *A Life Long Ago* therefore makes accessible what is apparently local into the larger framework of national politics. The gastro-political encoding of the social actors in Dighpait witnesses the uninhibited performance and maintenance of social, caste-based and gendered identities in the aftermath of the Partition, and the refugee movement across borders and the problem of settlement and rehabilitation. The translation project undertaken by Ghatak then has promised to re-write the "meanings, experiences and practices surrounding literary expressions in local, regional and national contexts" from a "vernacular world of sentiments" into an arena where it can facilitate in "theorising the very nature of literary writings in South Asian contexts." (Gupta, Brueck and Harder 804) Ghatak's focus in the translation of Sikdar's text has remained on the experiences and even in the food preparations, dishes that have been perceived as emotions in the vernacular language, that immediately succeeded by a description of the dish.

Conclusion:

Jan Assmann writes: "What counts is not the past as it is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians but only the past as it is remembered" (Assmann 19) and the onus then is on the individual who remembers and therefore reproduces not 'the' past, but 'a' past through his or her memory. What brings together the problem of translation of the text and its original in this particular circumstance then comes from the specific position and disposition of the author of the vernacular Sunanda Sikdar, and how her text is a clear vision of what Assmann would call the "temporal horizon" of an articulated past and how Daya would then be "reclaiming" the past as 'hers'. The translation by Anchita Ghatak then problematizes the cultural memory of Dighpait as she ties the local gastro-political tensions within the text to the larger discourses of the nation and the national identity. It is also this privileging of the gastro-political in her translation that enables a revision of the canonicity of Partition scholarship.

In *A Companion to Translation Studies*, Theo Hermans in the chapter titled 'Literary Translation' would write about how scholars have analyzed "translation as an instrument of domination and of information control: the metaphors speak of complicity and resistance rather than enrichment, of appropriation rather than transmission or transfer." (Hermans 90) In theory there seems to be a parallel drawn between the way gender and postcolonial scholars renegade their similar designs on translation studies as a discipline. In conflating gender and translation studies therefore the translator is assumed to communicate "as part of a non-masculine community under constant pressure from a

predominantly masculine world.” (Hermans 90) Translation of Sikdar’s text by Anchita Ghatak into *A Life Long Ago*, draws no comparison with the original, no opportunity to check whether it is a ‘transfer’ or a ‘transmission’ but opens up the text to a larger readership and scholarship, that can potentially draw from beyond the vernacular bindings of the text. These grave charges against the translator are invoked by Hermans as he considers the “culturally-hybrid writing of postcolonial authors” in whose translations, “the memory of other tongues is always inscribed, whether as the multilingual legacy of colonialism or through the migrant’s lost speech.” (Hermans 90) But regardless of a translation into English by Ghatak, that is the language inherited by the subcontinent from their colonial encounter with the European master, this translation acknowledges in the work of the Ghatak “not single but complex, polymorphous, uprooted identities” (Hermans 91) that necessitates the revision of the Partition canon.

Luise Von Flotow in the book chapter “Gender and Translation” highlights how the “[w]omen’s representation in language, through language, and across languages” (Flotow 92) has been a primary domain of investigation for the translation studies scholars, addressing issues of gender within. And in the same vein Ghatak’s appreciation of Sikdar’s text, has led to the re-writing of the Partition canon to include the gastro-political sites of turbulence, difference, belonging and identities in the aftermath of the division of Bengal into West Bengal and East Pakistan following the Partition of 1947.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun. "Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia." *American Ethnologist* 8.3, Symbolism and Cognition (1981): 494-511. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/644298>>.
- Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View (Knowledge and Space 4)*. Ed. Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan and Edgar Wunder. Springer Science, Business Media, 2011. 15-27.
- Banerji, Chitrita. *Mirror City*. Penguin Books, 2014.
- Butalia, Urvashi. "Beginnings." *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998. 1-26.
- Flotow, Luise von. "Gender and Translation." *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2007. 92-105.
- Ghatak, Anchita. "Translator's Note." Sikdar, Sunanda. *A Life Long Ago*. Zubaan & Penguin, 2012. vii-x.
- Grabes, Herbert. "Cultural Memory and the Literary Canon." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008. 311-320.

Gupta, Charu, et al. "Literary Sentiments in the Vernacular: Gender and Genre in Modern South Asia." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 43.5 (2020): 803-816.

Hermans, Theo. "Literary Translation." *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Ed. Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau. Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2007. 77-91.

Parial, Sayan. "Remembering and Forgetting: Trauma in Sunanda Sikdar's Dayamoyeer Katha." *postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies* VI.ii (2021): 216-226.
<<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5130231>>.

Sengupta, Debjani. "One Who Stayed Back: Sunanda Shikdar's Partition Memoir Dayamoyeer Katha." *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 44.4 (2021): 9-16. <http://jcla.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/JCLA-44.4_Debjani-Sengupta.pdf>.

Sikdar, Sunanda. *A Life Long Ago*. Trans. Anchita Ghatak. Zubaan, Penguin Books, 2012.

Author bio: She completed her Masters from the Department of English, Presidency University, Kolkata in 2013 and qualified the UGC-NET (National Eligibility Test) in the same year. She has held Guest Faculty positions with Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan, Seth Anandram Jaipuria College (Morning), and at Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya. She went on to join Pakuahat Degree College, Malda, West Bengal as an Assistant Professor of the Department of English in the year 2017 and shifted to St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata in 2019, where she holds the position of an Assistant Professor till date. She is also a Doctoral scholar at the Department of English, West Bengal State University under Dr. Chandrava Chakrabarty and her research interests include the city and the space, postcolonial literature, Indian English Literature, Gender and literature, popular culture, cultural studies. She has presented papers in national and international seminars and conferences and published in academic journals.

The Voice of Silence: A Study of the Act of Transportation of the Muted Voices

Dr Purabi Goswami

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Handique Girls' College, Guwahati, India

Mail Id: goswami.purabi@rediffmail.com | ORCID ID: [0000-0001-7147-6311](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7147-6311)

Abstract

Women and translation are connected by their empirical identity. Translation is something which comes after the original and holds a secondary position. Similarly, woman is second to man. The narrative from the Genesis too emphasizes the same notion. Creator endows breath of life to create the human species by transforming dust into man and then creates woman from the man's rib. From then on it is proclaimed she is called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Woman is named here in a derivative manner and this gives the assumptions to create all the clichés on the secondary nature of woman. Similarly, translation is something derived from the original text. The clichés never acknowledge the fact that translation is actually transformation where the 'original' goes through a change.

Notwithstanding these traditional assumptions many women translators are successful in including their own perspectives in the translated texts with subtle feminine interventions. Similarly many translated texts too have independent identities. For instance when we read a novel written by Orhan Pamuk we hardly think about the original. The 2022 International Booker prize winner *Tomb of Sand*, the English translation of *Ret Samadhi* written by Geetanjali Shree is acknowledged all over the world; but we do not weigh how far it is a derivative of the original.

Keeping these ideas in view the paper will look at different nuances of translation and women in the multilingual context of India taking into account two stories "Pas Chotalor Kathakata" and "Mariam Astin Athaba Heera Barua" written by Arupa Patangia Kalita, a Sahitya Akademi Award winning Assamese woman writer. The stories bear distinct feminist identity in terms of language and experiences. With innovative narrative techniques it tells us about women's silence and disappearance from the public domain. However, the paper will focus how English translations of the stories carry over these intricate experiences to a larger audience and endow a distinct identity to the Assamese writer.

Keywords: Translation, Woman, Gender, Silence, Voice

Women and translation are connected by their empirical identity. Translation is something which comes after the original and holds a secondary position. Similarly, woman is second to man. The narrative from the Genesis too emphasizes the same notion. Creator endows breath of life to create the human species by transforming dust into man and then creates woman from the man's rib. From then on it is proclaimed she is called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Woman is named here in a derivative manner and this gives the assumptions to create all the clichés on the secondary nature of woman.

The traditional interpretation of women as mysterious and indecipherable aided to maintain the secondary status of women in the public sphere. The image of women as 'deceitful' further accentuated the 'unknowability' of a woman. That was considered the feminine essence which made her more attractive to a man and to win over her was considered another victory for the man. Ilya Parkins in her essay "texturing visibility: opaque femininities and feminist modernist studies" observes: "...male authors glorying in the unknowability of women are comfortable in this position because it represents a means of denying engagement, disembodying femininity, distancing it only to hold on to the abstract erotic possibility that women represent" (58).

Similarly translation is something derived from the original text. The clichés never acknowledge the fact that translation is actually transformation where the 'original' goes through a change. Visibility of women in public life is a comparatively a new happening. In this context if we discuss the association of women with translation and dig into history we discover women in 18th century appeared in the world of publication through translation. Marie-Pascale Pieretti, in the essay "Women Writers and Translation in Eighteenth-Century France" writes: "It is clear that women used translation either to educate themselves and others, or to participate publicly in the literary and scientific debates of their time" (474). Discussing two French women writers Emilie du Châtelet and Anne Dacier of 18th century she shows how translation was the only forum to establish visibility in the world of publication. Châtelet is well known for the translation of Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and Dacier came up with a scholarly translation of Homer's *Iliad*. She further comments that translation was:

part of the rhetoric women writers of that period mastered in order to be heard. Consistently reiterating the perception du Châtelet and Dacier had of themselves as writers lacking the proper talents to create original works, a widespread opinion concerning the work of translators, these writers identified translation as the only appropriate form of writing they could publish(476).

Analysing Dacier's translation of Homer Pieretti finds that she makes a contribution to the realm of women by venturing into the male province. She argues:

Her most obvious achievement in this regard was to render the style and diction of the poem with her deep understanding of Homeric culture, found in numerous footnotes appended to her *Iliad*. In this way Dacier, a female author, achieved what none of her contemporaries or predecessors had managed: an accurate reading of Homer's work in modern French prose. Refusing the limiting concessions of the Moderns, Dacier used translation to assert herself on the terrain of the Ancients. She thereby made the

role of women more visible within the male-dominated discourse on knowledge rather than within the confines of novel writing, regarded as a more feminine literary endeavor at that time (477-78).

In British English literature the 'translatress' comes to the scene during the period of Renaissance. Women used the discourse of translation to enter into the public world of writing. The task of translation was given to woman for the sole reason that it was considered the only intellectual activity appropriate for women. Yet it rescued the women from their imposed silence. To appear in print was considered aggressive behavior for females during that period. Translation gave them the opportunity to be involved and get engaged in literary culture without challenging male control. Noted translatresses of this period were Margaret More Roger, daughter of Thomas More and Mary Sidney, sister of Philip Sidney. Another important woman translator of this period is Margaret Tyler. Unlike her contemporaries Tyler is not known for the translations of religious works but for a Spanish romance. Moreover, the powerful preface to this translation is strong enough to get compared to a feminist manifesto. Later on translation work was taken up by woman writers like Aphra Behn who was capable of translating from Latin and French.

When we talk about women's relation to translation two things get clubbed together: translation studies and gender studies. Samia Mehrez establishes affinities between the two fields in the following manner: "Both gender studies and translation studies are fairly new academic fields with international and interdisciplinary thrusts and implications. Both have oriented themselves toward travelling across traditional academic disciplines to create transnational communities and cross cultural communication" (107). Like translation studies gender studies too cross boundaries and make possible cross cultural communication. Hence translation of women's works broadens the scope of gender studies.

The traditional association of translation with women because of its secondary role further denies an independent status to both translation and women. This also results in turn what Helen Smith has identified as a "critical double bind, through which the devaluing of women's labour as mechanical and the devaluation of translation as derivative perpetuate each other." (31-32). Marie Alice Belle in the essay, "Locating Early Modern Women's Translations: Critical and Historiographical Issues" comments:

Micheline White notes for example that women's translations still represent a "neglected" genre in early modern literary studies. Her concern is echoed by Anne Lawrence Mathers, who further underlines the difficulty for female-authored translations to achieve canonical status. The status of translations within the corpus of early modern women's writings appears itself somewhat problematic. Long considered a secondary form of literary production, translation has sometimes been presented as a pis-aller, or default solution, which one should study to complement or compensate for the scarcity of female-authored texts belonging to more traditionally accepted, and therefore more easily recognized, modes of writing (7-8).

In spite of the secondary position of translation the women translators of that period successfully used it as medium to voice out their perspectives as female authors. Barbara Godard's asserts that female subjectivity should be foregrounded both in writing and translation. Godard says, "The feminist

translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Woman handling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest-self-effacing translator" (91). In the 19th century Madame de Staël, Margaret Fuller and Eleanor Marx used translation to voice for political causes. In the 20th century women translators like Constance Garnett, Lady Gregory, Willa Muir performed translation establishing a close relation to social, political or intellectual framework.

Looking at another dimension of translation and women Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood says, "I am a translation because I am a woman" (95) and "I am a translation because I am a bilingual" (89). Bilingual because women are obliged to use two different codes within the same language, the dominant male language and the often silent women's tradition¹. As women are silent and invisible in the literary tradition Hala Kamal contests Venuti's idea of invisibility and argues how it is unacceptable from a feminist perspective:

Looking at the translator's invisibility through a feminist lens, invisibility becomes unacceptable, since feminism, in theory and practice, is concerned with restoring women from a history of marginalization, silencing, and obscurity. It is therefore self-evident that in the translation of *EWIC*, and any translation carried out by a feminist, there would be a consciousness of the dynamics leading to the subordination of the translator; and to accommodate agency, there would even be a strategic acknowledgment of the role of the translator, as well as his or her being given space for overt self-expression. (258)

In this sense the act of translating creates a text that lives on its own terms with a distinct mark of the translator. C.M. Bowra commented on Edith Hamilton's ² translation of *Prometheus Bound* in a popular reprint of *The Greek Way*. Bowra discusses the positives of 'feminine intuition' and acknowledges her choice of 'the most significant'. He writes:

Miss Hamilton started from the best, the right, the only possible point – the actual texts of Greek literature. These she knew from the inside, not through translations and commentaries but through the original words, which are remarkable for their clarity and elegance and force. With this knowledge she was able to turn her feminine intuition in many directions, to adapt herself easily and almost unconsciously to the writers whom she studied, and to extract from their work what appealed most deeply to her and seemed to be the most significant. (xvii)

The woman translator cannot remain invisible behind the original author she does make her presence felt in the translated text. In this way translation becomes a medium for the women writers to make themselves visible in the public world. However, we can also look at the idea of women and translation from another perspective that is how the different narrative strategies and nuances of women writers can be transferred through translation. We should keep the idea in consideration that as a woman translator can make her presence felt in the translated text; in the same way a translated text written by a woman can also get a distinct identity. When we take up writers from regional languages the scope to get multiplicity of experiences and viewpoints becomes more. Recently in India some women writers have come up with anthologies containing translated works of Indian women writers. At many times translations into a language like English erase the regional specificities of these works giving them a pan- Indian identity. However, works like *Women Writing in India* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita are treasures in the sense that they had not only dug history to excavate

archival works but were careful to include texts which did not lose their individuality to fit into the idea of a nation. Hence they included translations: “that did not domesticate the work ... into (a) pan-Indian mode” (xx). For instance, Meena T. Pillai in the essay, “Gendering Translation, Translating Gender A Case Study of Kerala” questions:

A ‘woman’ thus constructed in language is an already subordinated entity, coerced into positions that ‘silence’ or ‘hide’ her. How does woman’s negative relationship to language inform an act of translation where there is qualitative and quantitative difference in the production and maintenance of gender hierarchies in the Source Language and Target Language? (1).

Describing Malayalam as a highly gender prejudiced language where the system of Patriarchy has silenced women she believed “ the degree of gendering is different in Malayalam and English” (2). Although these challenges cannot deny the need for regional literature to be translated; at the same time we can also not ignore the fact because the women in regional languages produce the most original works with high cultural innuendoes. The translations of them into English will not only provide a window to such literature it will also create a rich literature.

In recent times we find a host of contemporary women writers in Assamese literature who write about women’s lives and experiences in new ways. They have done the work of breaking the silence in the sense that they have a vocabulary which can be used to talk about women’s experience and by women only. They do not feel compelled to use the conventional narrative structures and at many times they talk quite openly about tabooed subjects like sexuality, love and women’s body.

In the translation of these stories the translator should be very cautious so that the nuances of the original can be carried across. As Lakshmi Holmström³ writes in the essay, “ Ambai The Language of Love, Desire and Sexuality”: “Translation is concerned, I believe, with paying very close attention to what the language is doing in the original text. Particularly in the language of sexuality and desire, the *tonal value* of words, and their *context* seems to be as important as their (more obvious) meanings. This is always a difficult and sensitive area for the translator” (58). The language and style of these stories are distinct in the sense that they are lyrical, spontaneous and unconventional.

For the study in this paper two stories “Pach Chotalar Kathakata” (“The Narrative in the Backyard”) and “Mariyam Astin Athaba Heera Barua” (Mariyam Astin or Heera Barua”) written by Sahitya Akademi award winning Assamese woman writer Arupa Patangia Kalita are chosen. The main narrative in “Pach Chotalar Kathakata” is moulded by other narratives which the narrator happens to read. In fact those narratives determine the later actions in the narrator’s life. The story progresses with the stream of thought of the first person narrator, Junu Hazarika. The background information about the characters are revealed through the strategy of flashback when the first person narrator reminisces about her past. Junu Hazarika, a researcher who is working on the child widows of 19th century India, is determined to secure an emancipated life for her daughter – free from all constrictions which a woman usually had to undergo in the period she takes up for research. Thinking about her daughter she utters, “I will give you a sky to fly. You will fly. You will fly, Majani, flapping your wings” (3).⁴ The narrative develops through her dialogues with the dead characters coming

alive on the worn-out pages of the old books. The narrator confronts them through her reading of these books and journals, and observes their lives closely. A narrative chain can also be discovered if we visualise Junu Hazarika reading books about the 19th century women and we reading about her experiences. The first part of the story is about those unfortunate women who were deprived of a life of dignity because they had lost their husbands, some of them at a very tender age and some even did not know whom they were married to! In the second part of the story, Junu Hazarika gets the news that her daughter has attained puberty and she hurries back home to take care of her daughter whom she has left behind in the custody of her in-laws. Majani's mother, Junu Hazarika is totally taken aback by what she has got to see at her in-law's house. Her daughter is kept quarantined in one room. She is not allowed to eat and be touched. Suddenly she realizes that the lives of the 19th century women she was reading about sitting in the National Library in Kolkata is not a distant reality but a stark present which is too immediate and close at hand to be complacent about it. The wall between the past and present collapses as she discovers a semblance of the past in place of the progressive development she dreams of. The writer writes: "It was a world of enchantment where the differences between past and present merged into a synonymy" (5).

The dead mothers from the past have come alive as flesh and blood presences challenging her illusions about her daughter's liberated existence in the present. Junu Hazarika, in her imaginary conversation with them, wants to know about their inner state of mind as she asks: "Do you have any idea as to what your family members said at the time of your death?" (7) The researcher Junu Hazarika engages with a conversation with those characters from the past. As Junu Hazarika treats them as living characters, the narrative she is reading has such an engrossing impact on her consciousness that she feels as if she is conversing with them. 'Kathakata' or narrative is the focal point of this story. It is about women's need to search or re-search women's narratives. Initially, Junu Hazarika reads those stories as only research material and distances herself from those stories. Nonetheless in the later part of the story, she ironically finds herself in a circular situation because she perceives that she and her own time are also in the same regressive state and therefore need to be subjected to critical scrutiny as she has been doing to the 19th century women's lives. The need is to regain one's agency as woman, a shift from the object to the subject position.

Towards the later part of the story, the narrative develops a stream of consciousness mode. The stream of the central character's thought crosses the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious. Majani's mother is shocked to have seen her daughter performing all the ritualistic norms of puberty under the supervision of her grandmother. Suddenly, she realizes that her dream of raising Majani differently is getting shattered. In the confusing state of her mind, Gyanadasundari's mother (a nineteenth century woman) appears before her and confronts her with a reminder that Majani's state of life is not different from that of her daughter. Majani's mother replies her angrily: "How can my Majani and your daughter be the same? My Majani is not a widow." Gyanadasundari's mother replies: "She is not a widow but she is threatened with the fearful prospect of being a widow, which is the same. How could my daughter too be a widow when she was not even touched by a man? Yet she remained a widow throughout her life. How can you and I be different as we have the same body, the body of a woman?" (27).

The narrator expresses how her entry into the National Library of Kolkata gave a feeling of enchantment and carried her back to antiquity. She felt: "Dead time is enlivened with flesh and blood; from the ruins of the dead time emerge a train of diverse people. I have come here searching for the mothers of the past. Not the fortunate mothers who gave birth to sons; I have come in quest of the blind mothers who raised daughters" (4). The determination of the protagonist in the story shows a parallelism with the central idea of the paper. The story wants to install the forgotten and unknown figures of the past. Similarly translated texts need to get a self sufficient status and women's works too need to come to the forefront. Translations of women's texts add in the widening of the scope and status of women's works.

The story creates a narrative space where 'woman's burden' can be realized and shared. The gamut of women Swarna, Kamala, Basanti, Gyanadasundari, Indumati, exhibit how since the past, women have been suffering for being women. In the consciousness of Majani's mother, these characters speak out their heart:

" 'Indu's mother! What did you do when your daughter went to stay at Kashi?'

'I was in my funeral pyre after a few days.' The women started weeping loudly. Gyanada's mother, Kamala's mother and Swarna's mother – all of them assembled there. Each of them began to howl" (33).

It is through her imaginary conversation with the dead child widows and their mothers that Majani's mother Junumoni gets back her determination to bring up Majani in her own ways, defying all the prescribed conventions. She drives off the oppressed souls of the past and utters: "You go and take shelter in the cracks of the walls of fallen houses. You have died, but I have not. Touch me and feel my body temperature. You are as cold as snow; my body bears the smell of a living human" (35).

In the story of "Pach Chotalar Kathakata", there are few events which can be considered as given. The narrative retrieval of the stories of the 19th century widows influences the course of events in the later part of the narrative which tells the stories of Junu Hazarika's life in the present. The act of retrieval of the silent voices controls as the driving force for the later course of events in her life.

Similarly, in the story "Mariyam Astin Athaba Heera Barua" the present state of Heera Barua is shaped by the story she heard from her maternal uncle about Mariyam Astin. Heera Barua makes an attempt to accept the trials and tribulations of her present life in the light of a narrative about an unfamiliar woman Mariyam Asin which Heera Barua had found quite strange in her childhood. The lonely life of Heera Barua with her pet dog and her stream of consciousness remind the reader of Clarrissa Dalloway from *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. Like Clarrissa, Heera Barua too often goes back to her past life and lives in her memories. Through her memories comes alive another woman Mariyam Astin, the landlady of her maternal uncle in London who lived alone with her pet dog. The story progresses non-sequentially with memories of Heera Barua. Her lonely and secluded life is unfolded through her recollections. The story does not focus on any external occurrence. The emphasis is on the consciousness of Heera Barua. Two women, one from the East and the other from the West go through the same experiences in their lives. The narrative flows with the reminiscences

of Heera Barua: “The imaginary picture of Mariyam Astin got engraved in her mind in her childhood itself. She couldn’t sleep for the whole night. She is remembering Mariyam Astin again and again...” (208).

The solidarity which is formed between these two women of two different countries is possible because of a female bonding she establishes with the distant woman. Heera Barua now passes her time talking with her pet dog, Sonamoni; she remembers how in her childhood days she used to hear a similar story about Mariyam Astin from her maternal uncle and found it quite incredible. “How incredible it was! Do human beings talk with dogs?” (187). Now she finds herself appropriating the actions of Mariyam Astin in her own life. In that sense, they also form a female bonding across time and space. In spite of spatial and temporal differences between them, both the women embrace the same lonely life sans their children.

The stories resist the repressive traditions existing in the society. The contemporary short stories offer us nuanced narratives as they depict the conflicts both within the characters’ mind and in the world outside as they fight against the old to establish the new.

This kind of experimental women short story writers abounds in contemporary Assamese literature. They have not only voiced the ignored concerns of women in terms of language and style they also have given a new recognition to Assamese literature. Translation of them into a language like English will ensure a well-defined identify of these writers introducing them to a large readership. It will also create a visibility of a regional literature to a large audience. None the less translation to another regional language too will familiarize the literature of this region to an audience who will be exposed to nuanced realities of women from another corner within India.

End Notes:

1. Deborah Cameron provides interesting insights into the relation of language and gender. Cameron says it is believed male- associated forms are the norms from which female deviates. The idea is elaborated in the book *On Language and Sexual Politics*. A very influential book in this respect is Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Women’s Place*. She discovers a woman’s language which maintains women’s inferior position in society.
2. Hamilton was criticized by some for misrepresenting the classical text; but discovered the woman in her translations.
3. Holstrom’s book includes short fiction by women writing in India, British and America and also incorporates varieties of genres covering the diverse themes of sexuality, quest for identity, caste and hierarchy etc.
4. Translations of the two stories are mine which are done for the purpose of the paper.

References

- Belle, Marie Alice. "Locating Early Modern Women's Translations: Critical and Historiographical Issues." *Renaissance and Reformation* 35: 4 (2012): 5-23. JSTOR. Web. 29 October, 2021.
- Bowra, C. M. Introduction to Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way*. New York: Time Inc. Reprint, 1963.
- Brewer, Maria Minich. "A Loosening of Tongues: From Narrative Economy to Women's Writing." *MLN* 99:5(1984):1141-1161. JSTOR. Web. 26 September, 2017.
- De Lotbinière-Harwood, Susanne. *The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Rewriting in the Feminine*, Montréal & Toronto, Les Editions du remueménage and Women's Press, 1991.
- Godard, Barbara. "Theorizing Feminist Discourse/ Translation", *Tessera* 6 (1984): 42-53. Web. 22 February, 2013.
- Holmström, Lakshmi. "Ambai The Language of Love, Desire and Sexuality." *Translating Women Indian Interventions*. Ed. N. Kamala. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2009. 46-62.
- Kalita, Arupa Patangia. "Pach Chotalor Kathakata". *Pach Chotalor Kathakata*. Guwahati, Jyoti Prakashan: 2000: 1-40.
- Kalita, Arupa Patangia. "Mariyam Astin Athaba Heera Barua." *Mariyam Astin Athaba Heera Barua*. Guwahati: Chanrda Prakash: 2012:110-121, 183-216.
- Kamal, Hala. "Translating Women and Gender: The Experience of Translating The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures into Arabic." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36:3&4 (2008):254-268. JSTOR. Web 10 June, 2013.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.
- Mehrez, Samia. "Translating Gender." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3:1(2007): 106-127. JSTOR. Web. 10 June 2013.
- Parkins, Ilya. "texturing visibility: opaque femininities and feminist modernist studies". *Feminist Review* ,107 (2014): 57-74. JSTOR. Web. 18 October 2021.
- Pieretti, Marie-Pascale. "Women Writers and Translation in Eighteenth-Century France." *The French Review* . 75: 3 (2002): 474-488. JSTOR. Web. 18 October 2021.
- Pillai, Meena T. "Gendering Translation, Translating Gender A Case Study of Kerala." *Translating Women Indian Interventions*. Ed. N. Kamala. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2009:1-15.
- Smith, Helen. *Grossly Material Things Women and Book Production in Early Modern England*. Oxford University Press:2012
- Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita ed. *Women Writing in India* Vol. II. Delhi: OUP, 1995.

Author Bio: Dr Purabi Goswami works as an Assistant Professor in the department of English, Handique Girls' College. She did her Ph D on the translated works of Mamoni Raisom Goswami and has done a couple of translations of Assamese novels and stories into English. Besides that, she has an interest in women's writing and has published several research articles on that area.

Dropping *Draupadi*: The Crisis of A Woman Translating A Woman

Ankita Bose

Editorial team member of *The Antonym – A Global Literary Translation Magazine*, West Bengal, India.

Mail Id: ankita.bose1993@gmail.com

Abstract

This academic essay seeks to criticize Delhi University's exclusion of Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, from its 'women's writing' course in B.A. English (Honours) curriculum in August 2021. It attempts to establish the text as a crucial example of 'a woman translating a woman'. In doing so, it evokes poststructural feminism as the basis of the shared agenda between the writer and the translator, as the text is transmitted through the process of translation as "literary activism". It seeks to argue how such an act of translation can subvert the existing status quo of the phallogocentric and hypermasculine power relations of the nation-state through the site of a woman's raped body – both as a site of oppression and resistance. It raises crucial questions on the politics that lurk behind the censoring of the text, throwing light upon the growing crisis of feminist translations today. In conclusion, it puts forward an urgent appeal to multiply the translation of a woman, and by a woman, so that such a crisis could be circumvented, if not subverted.

Keywords: Women's Writing, Woman Translating Woman, Post-Structural Feminism, Politics of Translation, Gender in Translation.

"My relationship with [Mahasweta] Devi is easygoing. I am able to say to her: I surrender to you in your writing, not you as intending subject. There, in friendship, is another kind of surrender. Surrendering to the text in this way means, most of the time, being literal. When I have produced a version this way, I revise. I revise not in terms of a possible audience, but by the protocols of the thing in front of me, in a sort of English. And I keep hoping that the student in the classroom will not be able to think that the text is just a purveyor of social realism if it is translated with an eye toward the dynamic staging of language mimed in the revision by the rules of the in-between discourse produced by a literalist surrender."

–Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *The Politics of Translation* (2000)

The nefarious Covid 19 pandemic had just splashed its second wave, and the human population was merely grappling with the overarching trauma of the lockdown when it was reported that Delhi University had removed three texts from its 'women's writings' course in the syllabus of the fifth semester in B.A. English (Honours) program. These three texts – Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, Bama Faustina Soosairaj's *Sangati*, and Sukirtharani's *My Body* – were removed despite considerable dissent from some members of the Delhi University's Academic Council. The news arrived sometime at the end of August 2021. At the time, the media was flooded with statistics of death and life in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Amid the pool of burgeoning information, this move would have easily drowned itself in the media frenzy, but it did not go unnoticed as some media houses picked it up. There was a huge backlash from civil society, especially against the exclusion of Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It is the strategic exclusion of this text – representative of a woman feminist scholar translating another woman writer – that shall be negotiated within this essay.

In the *Preface* to Sherry Simon's book, *Gender In Translation: Cultural Identity And The Politics of Transmission*, she writes that "it is not the gendered identity of the translator as such which influences the politics of transmission as much as the *project* which the translator is promoting. Feminism, in its diverse forms, has become the powerful basis of many such projects." Spivak's translation of Devi's *Draupadi* becomes a befitting example of the aforementioned claim. Feminism, in its poststructuralist understanding, is the basis of the "project" entailing the translation of *Draupadi*. When I make such a claim, I must also conclude that the exclusion of such a text from the syllabus of an esteemed university is a direct blow against feminism – it is anti-feminist. Hence, such a move of censoring such a text is only impregnable of a crisis – one which I would like to call 'the crisis of a woman translating a woman'. And to understand this crisis, I shall expound on the above claims.

According to a report published in *The Print*, there were two major grounds on which the translation of Devi's *Draupadi* was found to be "objectionable": one, the "gruesome sexual content" of the text, and two, the aspect that it showed the Indian military in "poor light". Several news reports explicitly said that despite opposition from more than 13 members of the Academic Council, they excluded the text without any expert guidance on the matter. I would like to point out that there was a specific portion that was cited as explicitly sexual and triggering for students. It reads:

Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her?

Perhaps it is important to mention, for those who have not read the story, that Devi's *Draupadi* evokes the image of a tribal woman revolutionary who is brutally gang-raped by the Indian Army officials, in the backdrop of the Naxalite peasant's movement in rural Bengal (not the geographical territory, but the political category including East Pakistan [now Bangladesh] and West Bengal) during the 1970s. Devi's descriptions of the rape are visceral, as is apparent from the above excerpt, turning the readers' focus to the site of the woman's body. In the story, the woman protagonist's body itself is a symbol of resistance against the phallogocentric, oppressive, masculine state machinery.

This intense engagement with the woman's body – both as the site of oppression and resistance – is a key feature of poststructural feminism wherein the subjective experiences of every woman were brought to the fore, yet the universal category of a 'woman' existed. Hélène Cixous, one of the early thinkers of poststructural feminism, has written in her famous 1976 essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, "When I say 'woman,' I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history...But... there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes-any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible." Hence, when Spivak speaks about her shared agenda with Mahasweta Devi while she translates *Draupadi*, it is the shared identity of Cixous' definition of 'woman' that plays a pivotal role in understanding what that agenda entails. While Cixous urges, sometimes almost pleading, women to write, and to write with their bodies, Devi seems to answer her pleas with her narrative in *Draupadi*, in the Third World South Asian context. Devi's narrative in *Draupadi* finds a home in the "new insurgent writing" that Cixous seems to promote. Devi's protagonist, Draupadi (or Dopdi), seems to stand against all oppression solely and merely with her debilitated and ravaged raped body. Her 'woman' body, caged by constructs of shame and humiliation, then breaks apart the cage, one iron rod at a time, as she puts her raped body on display.

While Cixous only wrote about the act of woman's writing in her essay, there isn't any mention of a woman's act of translating another woman, although she has mentioned the idea of "woman for women" as a crucial aspect of poststructural feminist writing. But if we consider Sherry Simon's idea wherein she says, "The entry of gender into translation theory has a lot to do with the renewed prestige of translation as "re-writing..." we can look at Spivak's translation as an act of "re-writing". This re-writing by Spivak is rooted in understanding translation "as a mode of engagement with literature, as a kind of literary activism," as Simon proposes. So, what is the "literary activism" that has been achieved in the translation of this text, written by a woman, and translated by another woman, especially in the South Asian context?

The most notable aspect of Spivak's *Translator's Foreword* to Devi's *Draupadi* is the shared agenda between the two which situates the story in a specific literary as well as an extra-literary context. *Draupadi*, which was originally published in 1978, is situated within the socio-cultural milieu of twentieth-century Bengal and its plot and thematic fabric are hugely contingent upon the contemporaneous political situation – this context is what Spivak explicates in her *Translator's Foreword* to the English translation of *Draupadi* which appeared as part of an anthology *Breast Stories*, published in 1997.

According to Itamar Even-Zohar's *Polysystem Theory*, it is important to analyze an act of translation within the literary and extra-literary *polysystem* of both the source language as well as the receptor's culture, and the interrelationships between the two *polysystems* are always marked by existing power hierarchies within and outside both these cultural systems. Thus, it becomes important to understand: Why a certain text is selected by the translator? And who is the translation for?

The myriad answers to both these questions are explicit in Spivak's *Translator's Foreward* wherein she is upfront about her intentions behind choosing to translate the text. She begins by stating that the anti-protagonist, Senanayak, was as much enthusing to her as the protagonist, Draupadi Mejhén. She describes Senanayak as the representative of the "First-World scholar in search for the Third World." Thereafter, Spivak refers to her readers as the first-person plural – "we" – thereby placing the receptors of her translation within the *polysystem* of the modern-day academic scholars who are trying to theoretically understand the classified "subaltern" but are perpetually alienated from their reality in practice – which is analogous to the "doublethink" and "pragmatism" portrayed through Senanayak's character. In much simpler words, Spivak's translation seems to be targeted toward the emergent critical scholars within the milieu of the English graduates at Delhi University, and also all other universities and centers of learning in South Asia, and further in the Third World. She seems to raise such critical academic questions to any scholar who falls into the academic loophole that Senanayak's character represents. Moreover, what becomes extremely important is the translator's position in the act of translation wherein the translator admits to being a participant in such a cultural *polysystem*. Spivak's targeted readership of her English translation becomes starkly apparent when she declares, "Since the Bengali language script is illegible except to the approximately twenty-five percent literate of the about ninety million speakers of Bengali, a large number of whom live in Bangladesh rather than in West Bengal, her [Mahasweta Devi's] 'Indian' reception is also in translation, in various languages of the subcontinent and in English." Therefore, the reception of Devi's English translation is truly an 'Indian' one and it takes the particularities of a regional cultural *polysystem* and makes it available to the broader prospect of the nation-state *polysystem* in a post-colonial socio-cultural context wherein English emerged to be a dominating language within the academic scholars of India.

However, it must be mentioned that in making Devi's narrative available to such a readership, Spivak remains truthful to Devi's exquisite Bengali and translates all metaphors and imageries as is without altering the immensity and poignance of how Devi portrays violence. An example would be how the expression of "চাঁদ কিছু জ্যেৎস্না বমি করে ঘুমোতে যায়" becomes "The moon vomits a bit of light and goes to sleep" symbolizing an expression of how aesthetic beauty is ruptured through the act of Draupadi's (or Dopdi's) gang-rape. Such faithfulness to the allusions and metaphors of Devi's fiction keeps the spirit of the story intact and bound by a common feminist agenda between the writer and the translator.

Thus, the act of translation, which is also a "re-writing" rooted in "literary activism", reflects the feminist solidarity that Spivak offers to Devi's portrayal of state repression and brutality of the law through the symbol of the woman's raped body.

Further, Spivak writes that her approach to the story has been influenced by "deconstructive practice" but refuses to follow the reductionist path of such a practice which is in tandem with imperialism. Instead, she explains that within the deconstructive framework, she hinges her act of translation as emerging from "the recognition of... provisional and intractable starting points in any investigative effort" and she recognizes her starting point of the critical act of translation from an ideological point of view. Thus, we see that the act of the selection of Devi's *Draupadi* is an exercise

of projecting the deconstructive structural feminist approach to address the marginal communities in the intersectional points: the social context (the *Santal* identity of Dopdi or Draupadi), the political context (the Naxalite identity of Dopdi), and finally, the act of penetration which portrays the marginalized social position of a woman's body amid the lowest rung of the cultural milieu – all rooted in a particular historical context of post-1970's Bengal.

Thereby, Spivak's "complicity in the act of translation" is also laden with the intention of making a particular historical context of oppression available to a wider Indian audience. The extraliterary socio-cultural factors are primary for Spivak in her act of translation and the receptor's *polysystem* becomes crucial here as she wants to ideologically critique the transgression of law within the nation-state and how marginalized oppression is overlooked by the many educated liberals of 21st-century India.

Subsequently, Spivak also expounds upon the *polysystem* from which Devi's text is selected to be translated and highlights a narration of Bengal's political scenario which informs Devi's narrative. She emphasizes West Bengal's Left intellectualism which dominated the ethos of the region post-1960s, especially after the Naxalbari movement, which was the first peasants' uprising from within the community, as Dopdi or Draupadi strikes with impeccable accuracy with a scythe and a sickle – the symbol of the radical Left. But soon after, the Naxalbari peasant uprising became merged with intellectualism and after the 1971 War of Liberation in Bangladesh, East Pakistan and West Bengal shared a common alienation with mainstream politics and shared a common interest towards non-electoral guerrilla style politics which becomes the foreground of the short story. In giving such a perspective of the socio-political significance of the thematic framework, Spivak makes her translation accessible to her readers by informing them that the narrative would hold no meaning if one is unaware of the historical and ideological context of its source *polysystem*.

She writes, "The story is a moment caught between two deconstructive formulas: on the one hand, a law that is fabricated with a view of its own transgression, on the other, the undoing of the binary opposition between the intellectual and the rural struggles. In order to minutiae of their relationship and involvement, one must enter a historical micrology that no foreword can provide."

Another important context and relevance of translating Devi's *Draupadi*, as put forward by Spivak, is the name Draupadi which becomes Dopdi in tribal dialect. She draws the parallel with the mythological Draupadi of the epic *Mahabharata* who had multiple husbands and was given off to the enemy as a price of a game. The enemy wanted to strip her naked but Lord Krishna's magnanimity clothes her eternally, upholding a critique against patriarchy. Contrarily, Devi's Draupadi becomes Dopdi in her language because her dialect is not a Sanskritized one, yet she becomes a symbol of twentieth-century oppression against the most marginalized as Devi's Dopdi challenges the patriarchy with her nakedness. This is discussed in great nuance by Spivak who explains that she does not see the story as a refutation of the ancient myth but as a continuation where Dopdi is as heroic as Draupadi, sometimes Dopdi becomes a harbinger of what Draupadi couldn't achieve. Spivak writes that Dopdi Meihen becomes both a "palimpsest and a contradiction" to the Draupadi of Sanskritized India.

Regarding the language of translation, Spivak puts forward that the words in italics written in English are also English words that are used in the Bengali original version of the story. This is to highlight that nation-state politics is an international intervention and the language of war is an international colonial imposition of culture which makes English the language of law and war – a language that is unavailable and alienated from the tribal community to which Dopdi belongs. Dopdi Mejhén's usage of the word "*Kounter*" again presents a political repertoire of the specific tribal community of revolutionaries and it means encounter by the law officers. Dopdi, although unfamiliar with the English language of the nation-state is familiar with the particularities of the context of this word which holds relevance to her politico-ideological position in the narrative. According to Spivak, "In her [Dopdi's] use of it [*kounter*] at the end, it becomes mysteriously close to the 'proper' English usage. It is the menacing appeal of the objectified subject to its politico-sexual enemy – the provisionally silenced master of the subject-object dialectic – to encounter' – 'kounter' – her. What is it to 'use' a language 'correctly' without 'knowing' it?"

In the end, Spivak points out her own shortcomings in capturing the essence of Dopdi's dialect and the esoteric usage of multiple dialects and specific linguistic patterns of the *Santal* community, and the other mish-mash of Bengali dialects that Devi's narrative upholds. This is a crucial problem when the target language fails to encompass the micrological nuances of a specific *polysystem* of the Bengali language and Spivak has to make do with "straight English" – a language that she chooses to honestly depict Devi's narrative without compromising the ideological point of view which drives her act of translation.

In Spivak's detailed *Translator's Foreword*, it, therefore, becomes clear that she attempts to take the readers on a journey that entails an exercise of self-reflexivity and introspective critique within the frameworks of the literary and extraliterary *polysystems* from where the text originates, and then she makes it available to the receptor's *polysystem* – the bourgeois academic readers and scholars of literature of the Third World. Thereby, upholding Devi's narrative as the "new insurgent writing", inductively makes Spivak's translation an act of *new insurgent translating* – perhaps, Cixous would have called it that had she been made aware of the translation of this text.

So, what does the coinage of 'new insurgent translating' encapsulate, especially in the South Asian context? Spivak's essay *The Politics of Translation* in 2000 responds to this question as she calls herself a "feminist translator". In the essay, where she describes translation as the "most intimate act of reading", she goes beyond conventional definitions of translation as a mere transformation of language, just like Zohar and Simon. She writes, "Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language." And as Spivak calls herself a "feminist translator", she claims that "the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency." This gendered agency is what spills throughout the narrative of Devi's *Draupadi*. *Draupadi*, or Dopdi, breaks the notions of shame and submissiveness of the woman's body, both thematically and in the language that she chooses to speak in. Spivak now speaks of what remained as subtext in her *Translator's Foreword* to *Draupadi*. She makes

her agenda as a “feminist translator” loud and clear when she says that the texts she chooses to translate in English are texts which have to be accessed by the maximum possible number of feminists in the Third World, which includes South Asia. In a way, then the task of a “feminist translator” is to make certain texts accessible to the English-educated feminists of the Third World in order to generate feminist solidarity against the plethora of oppressive constructs that chain the woman’s body. She writes, “In my view, the [feminist] translator from a Third World language should be sufficiently in touch with what is going on in literary production in that language to be capable of distinguishing between good and bad writing by women, resistant and conformist writing by women.” She adds that a “literalist surrender” is a necessity for a translator if one might want to uphold the feminist ideology in the act of a woman translating a woman, however, such a surrender should also establish a critical relationship between a writer and a translator for the pivotal role in recognizing the texts that one needs to translate. Thus, such feminist translations like Spivak’s translation of Devi’s *Draupadi*, wherein women’s bodies are brought to the fore, with an intention to make it accessible to the other feminists of the Third World, serve as a subversive politics of translation that break apart all law (including its transgressions), thus emerging to be the ‘new insurgent translating’ that is much needed for the future of scholarly studies on the relationship between *gender* and *translation*.

Thus, when according to a news report, a member of the Delhi University’s Academic Council which took the decision to exclude this text comments, “We have no qualms with Dalit literature and wish to teach our student stories that are empowering and speak of how Dalit women broke the shackles to overcome caste discrimination. The scenes of rape have been described in gruesome detail which can make grown adults uncomfortable, I don’t know how professors are teaching the text,” one is left with a flurry of questions and comments:

First, the category of ‘Dalit’ is irrelevant in the context of Devi’s *Draupadi*, because Draupadi (or Droupdi) was an Adivasi, not a Dalit. What happens when one leaves the decision of inclusion or exclusion of texts in the syllabus of a university’s reputed course in the hands of a member who cannot differentiate between crucial identity markers of ‘Dalit’ and ‘Adivasi’? Then, are claims by some members that the exclusion, or censoring, of Devi’s *Draupadi*, was done without considerable expert opinion on the matter hold true?

Second, how does one “empower” any marginal community by censoring fictionalized experiences of their past oppression? What is the relationship between history and fiction? Does censoring fiction entail a censoring of history in itself?

Third, according to the 2021 annual report of the National Crime Records Bureau, there are 86 rapes, on average, happening daily in India. If, in our society, adults (sometimes, non-adults too) have been extensively reported (sometimes, unreported) to have been raped or being rapists, or both of these, then how is it that adults would be “uncomfortable” by reading descriptions of a symbolic resistance of rape in Devi’s *Draupadi*?

Fourth, where does the “literary activism” in translation stand in the context of India and its multilingual, multicultural reality? What must be the politics of such activism?

Fifth, how will the practices of self-reflexivity, critical thinking, and negotiating with poststructural (and other forms of) feminism be achieved among the educated literary scholars of Delhi University?

Sixth, when an act of translation *of* a woman, *by* a woman, is censored on grounds that have already been refuted in this essay, will it gradually spread its poison to the other universities of the Indian subcontinent? If so, then what is the future of the literary scholars of the Indian subcontinent?

Lastly, what is most astonishing is that the text has been removed from the 'women's writing' course. So, how does the exclusion of such a text blur the readers' (in this case, the students') insights into the poststructuralist feminist writings of intersectional marginal identities within the South Asian context, which focus on the site of a woman's body as a symbol of both oppression and resistance?

The answers to these questions aren't deterministic. Each of them demands a separate essay, focusing just on them. But these are the crises that plague the arena of translation, especially feminist translation. However, one must subvert, circumvent, and build a literary dissent against the censoring of such texts *of* a woman, translated *by* a woman. Why? – Because such censoring is anti-feminist (as is explained in the essay), also anti-humanist, and poses serious harm to the future of academic and scholarly debates on the relationship between gender and translation.

But how must one subvert it? – In my opinion, the only way to resist such censoring is to vehemently translate more texts *of* a woman, *by* a woman, albeit with the ideas of 'shared agenda' and 'literary activism' along the lines of feminism (its myriad forms), bearing in mind the intersectionality of identities within such an act of feminist translation. It is in the multiplication of translated texts – *of* a woman and *by* a woman – that the crisis can hope to find a resolution.

Author bio: Dr. Kanak Kanti Bera, Associate Professor of English, Panskura Banamali College (autonomous), Purba Medinipur, WB. has been teaching for more than two decades. He got both M.Phil. (EFL-U, Hyderabad) and Ph.D. (IIT Guwahati) in Phonetics and Phonology. Literary areas of his interest include Indian Literature, Buddhist studies, eco-criticism and Post-colonialism.

References

Agrawal, Soniya. "'Gruesome sexual content, Army in poor light' – why DU removed 3 English texts from syllabus." *ThePrint*, 25 August 2021, <https://theprint.in/india/education/gruesome-sexual-content-army-in-poor-light-why-du-removed-3-english-texts-from-syllabus/722810/>. Accessed 27 November 2022.

Cixous, Hélène, et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *The University of Chicago Press Journals*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239>.

Devi, Mahasweta. "Draupadi." *Breast stories*, by Mahasweta Devi, edited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull Books, 1997, pp. 19-38.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. "Polysystem Thoery" *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 287-310. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1772051>.

"Introduction." *Breast stories*, by Mahasweta Devi, edited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull Books, 1997, pp. vii-xvi.

Mehra, Amit. "'Draupadi' dropped from Delhi University's BA (Hons) English course." *The Indian Express*, 25 August 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/draupadi-dropped-from-delhi-universitys-ba-hons-english-course-7469687/>. Accessed 27 November 2022.

Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation*. Taylor & Francis, 1996.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Politics Of Translation." *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, Routledge, 2000, pp. 997-416.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Translator's Foreword." *Breast stories*, by Mahasweta Devi, edited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Seagull Books, 1997, pp. 1-18.

Author Bio: Ankita Bose has completed her M.A. in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University (Kolkata, West Bengal) in 2021. She is currently working as one of the editors of The Antonym Magazine, a global literary translation magazine. She holds a B.A. in Sociology from Presidency University (Kolkata, West Bengal), and a Post-graduate Diploma in Print Journalism from the Asian College of Journalism (Chennai, Tamil Nadu). She has been a practicing journalist for about a year and a half, after which she quit to pursue academia.

Fascinating Facets of Translation

Lucky Issar

Independent Researcher and Literary scholar. PhD from Freie Universität Berlin.

Mail Id: Luckyissar@gmail.com

Bibliographic Information:

Name of the Book: **Translating Myself and Others**

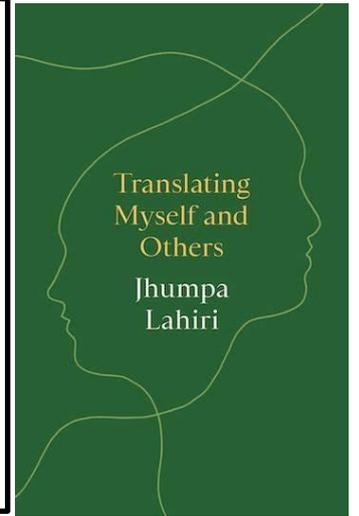
Author: **Jhumpa Lahiri**

Publisher: Princeton University Press

Language: English

ISBN: 9780691231167

Price: \$18.22



Abstract

This essay reviews Jhumpa Lahiri's book *Translating Myself and Others* (2022), published by Princeton University Press. Using a wide range of examples, both contemporary and classical, Lahiri offers a remarkable theory of translation. Whereas the book cites several western sources as the book engages with the Italian and the English language, its explicit focus on the theme of translation recalls the notion of dhvani that is central to Sanskrit literature.

Keywords: Translation, Language, Belonging, Identity, Migration, Dhvani

Translating Myself and Others is a deep meditation on the art of translation. In the opening chapter, Jhumpa Lahiri tells the reader about her early life, different locations and languages that shaped her, and about her obsession with the Italian language. Examining her personal struggles and citing examples from literature, Lahiri sets out to answer the question: "Why Italian?," a question that follows her everywhere. The "why" part of any question that concerns choice, desire, or love always lands the one being questioned in deep waters. 'Why-questions' at some level are also violent. Lahiri is often asked: "Why do you speak our language?" (9), or "Why Italian instead of an Indian language,

a closer language, more like you?" (10). Such questions surprise her because she herself has not considered them. Although Lahiri explicitly refers to the gender dimension of such probes, she merely implies their racial side. In deconstructing these questions, Lahiri plunges into illuminating thoughts and ideas and taking the reader along with her.

Lahiri positions herself as a writer who has been traversing between languages, cultures, and places, and thus always translating from an early age. Accordingly, a question like "Why Italian," although disrupting, is not entirely new for her, but rather, an extension of similar questions that are frequently posed to cultural, linguistic, and sexual minorities. While reading her defense, I wondered why Lahiri feels the need to respond to why-questions that are so casually put to her, often if not always based on ignorance or perhaps jealousy. However, Lahiri's engagement with "Why Italian" is not merely about linguistic transgression, but it is about choice, language, and ownership. And thus, her concern exceeds the merely personal. She admits that Italian is not her language and that she does not possess it. She also asks, "Who possesses a language, and why? Is it a question of lineage? Mastery? Use? Affect? Attachment? What does it mean, in the end, to belong to a language?" (22) Asking such questions, Lahiri emphasizes that questions about language are ultimately questions of selfhood, identity, and thus existence.

Moving further into the book, Lahiri writes about the Italian novelist Domenico Starnone, a writer whose work she admires and translates, highlighting what translation demands and what it can achieve. Reflecting on words such as *trezzare* (joking), *vuoto* (emptiness), and *buio* (darkness) in the context of translation, Lahiri offers a fruitful reading of Starnone's two novels *Ties* and *Tricks*. Lahiri reads the novel *Ties* through the figures of literary and symbolic "containers" that hold precious things, house secrets, and keep things from dispersing or disappearing. But containers, Lahiri points out, can also imprison, ensnare, and limit. And, that a translated text is also a kind of container that both holds and transforms the original text. Concerning her translation of Starnone's novel *Tricks*, Lahiri notes, "Starnone's text remains the parent that spawned this translation, but somewhere along the road to its English incarnation, it also became a ghost" (43). Lahiri shows the reader repeatedly that writing is tough, but translating is tougher. If Lahiri feels enamored by Starnone's ability to play with words, she herself is no stranger to the creative use of words. She knows how to tease out words and release their potential with finesse.

Throughout the book, Lahiri uses medical and material metaphors such as "graft" and "door" to describe her relationship with translation. If a successful graft can prolong life and create

something beautiful, an unsuccessful one can deform the body into which graft is inserted. As for doors, they function as a barrier but also as a point of entry. It is via talking about "doors" that Lahiri offers a definitive but also slightly defensive answer to the question "Why Italian." She states, "I don't wish to live, or write, in a world without doors. An unconditional opening, without complications or

obstacles, does not stimulate me. Such a landscape, without closed spaces, without secrets, without the presence of the unknown, would have no significance or enchantment for me" (16). Such personally experienced ruminations over the practice of translation reveal what translation involves. They also reveal, as in the last sentence of the quotation, how questions of "language" segue or translate from mundane to mystical realms.

Lahiri's partly theoretical and partly personal essay on Antonio Gramsci is impressive for its form, as it never loses its grip on the theme of translation. Those unfamiliar with Gramsci's work can start here. The chapter is divided into several subsections with headings like "Translation Journey," "Double Identity," "Echo," "Original," "Mutation," each offering some aspect of translation in Gramsci's work. The Italian word *traduzione*, or translation, is an example. Lahiri points out that, in Gramsci, the Italian word *traduzione* has a second meaning: it refers to the transportation of individuals who are detained. Making similar insights, she brings out the nuanced, relational, and inclusive aspects involved in the act of translation. As a writer-translator, Lahiri knows where to look in Gramsci's journals. In the section titled "Voice," Lahiri notes how, within the same day, Gramsci's writing changes from light to dark, from mundane concerns to haunting reflections, depending upon to whom he is writing. She describes Gramsci's ability to change gears and engage with multiple realities, and at the same time wonders what kinds of challenges such qualities may pose for his translators. She notes, "This would be the greatest challenge for the translator: to give voice, in another language, to each of Gramsci's individual voices" (121). Such reflections on the much-ignored art of translation that Lahiri identifies in Gramsci's work are strewn all over *Translating Myself and Others*.

The concept of "echo" that seems central to translation surfaces throughout the book. The chapter "In Praise of Echo" delves deeper into the meaning and centrality of echo to translation. Lahiri offers a fascinating study of Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses* through the mythical figures of Echo and Narcissus, drawing unexpected parallels between translator and Echo: like the translator who follows the original text, Echo chases Narcissus in the poem. Translation and love involve intense passion and complete devotion. In order to translate, one enters into a relationship with the original text and seeks to know it intimately. Lahiri writes, "One of the conditions of this relationship is the act of following, of being second and not first. Like Echo, who in Ovid, 'sees and burns for Narcissus, furtively following his tracks.'" (48). A translator as well follows the tracks of the original work with Echo-like zeal. Both the translator and Echo emerge as figurative "hunters" (49). Commenting further on Echo and translator's role, Lahiri writes "Though Echo's hunt ends in failure, she helps us to better appreciate the translator's contradictory role as someone who both comes second and exercises a certain degree of power in the course of wrestling a text into a new language" (49). Drawing such profound parallels between two very different entities, Lahiri foregrounds translation. Almost everything that Lahiri says about echo in the context of translation recalls the theory of *dhvani*, meaning echo in Sanskrit, espoused by Bharata Muni and later by the 9th-century Kashmiri poet

Abhinavgupta. Lahiri's observation that "far from a restrictive act of copying, a translator restores the meaning of a text by means of an elaborate, alchemical process that requires imagination, ingenuity, and freedom" (47). And, that the translated text must echo the original text, the first principle of the subject of translation is what the notion of dhvani means in Sanskrit literature. Apart from mentioning the Bengali language, her Bengali parents, and the problem of narrating her Bengali characters in English, Lahiri's book swims in a range of western concepts, myths, languages, and literary works; and, yet dhvani shapes her formulations on translation.

Lahiri's passionate account of translation becomes most endearing in the section called "Afterward." Throughout the book, Lahiri either defends her choice to write in Italian or talks about the works of other authors. However, *Afterward* shows Lahiri's writerly side most powerfully; it

dissolves boundaries between translation theory, personal narrative, and what constitutes fiction, thus cogently highlighting the finer aspects of translation with which the book engages in the previous chapters. Combining discursive eloquence with emotional power and erudition with stillness, Lahiri offers an insight into her relationship with her mother, some glimpses into her family life as well as her association with her colleagues at Princeton. Lahiri subtly weaves different aspects of her life from the pandemic to the studies of her son, her mother's death, and Ovid in ways that give extraordinarily nuanced meaning to translation that manifests in life as change, but also as various things that seem different but are underneath connected. Lahiri's poignant mediation on her mother's death evokes Walter Benjamin's ruminations on translation—on his idea of "the pure language that emphasizes the inherent oneness of all languages. She brings Ovid, her mother's slowly dissolving body, plants, and her own body on the same plane, each different but interacting with one another: one is comprehended in the light of the other. The personal references about her family and her own journey as a writer with which she begins the book become more elaborate in the *Afterward*: she talks about her son, parents, the birth of her sister, and the Hindu concept of incarnation. Although Lahiri does not explicitly address it, it is via dhvani, perhaps subconsciously, that she brings the disparate worlds of Bengali, English, and Italian and of Sanskrit and Latin literature via notions of echo or dhvani into harmony and communion.

The best parts of the book are those where Lahiri talks about her own struggles with language, demonstrating that questions of language are ultimately questions of life. The least attractive part of the book is where she brings in voices that question her choices. Without pushing the reader under cumbersome theories, Lahiri offers a straightforward but profound and lyrical theory of translation. She moves seamlessly between languages and the works of writers such as Ovid, Gramsci, and Calvino. Subtly, the book also comments on the present-day world, or perhaps all worlds in historical time, which is structured in ways that different people experience it differently. If for some the world is easy to navigate, for most there are doors, delays, waiting rooms, and bureaucratic impositions. One can stop and ask a working writer who holds multiple languages and identities why-questions,

but cannot predetermine their outcome. In Lahiri's case, 'questions' and 'doors' do the opposite: they open up spaces in which new ideas dwell and flourish.

Author Bio: Lucky Issar is an independent researcher and literary scholar. He holds a PhD from Freie Universität Berlin. His research interests include gender and queer studies and queer theory that focuses on India. He is working on a book titled *Narratives of Queer Desire in Modern Indian Fiction*. He has contributed scholarly articles, essays, and book reviews to various publications such as the journals *Literature and Theology*, *Victorian Review*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Studies in Popular Culture*.