

Tasting Tandoori Chicken in English: From ‘Translation Impossible’ to ‘Translation Is-possible’

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Introduction: To Begin with...

Translation is one of the most challenging tasks as one renders a text, located amidst a dense cultural milieu into another language, and transports the delicate nuances of the original into a foreign avatar and makes it appear as the most natural (even native) thing ever! The success of a translation lies in the felicity of expression even as it conceals the passionate struggle to find *le mot juste*. No self-respecting translator would like to publicly acknowledge the despair she often feels when confronted with a particularly obtuse passage in the source language. However, to surrender and cede victory is not in the nature of the translator (who is, by nature, an ambitious being). For translators, nothing is ‘translation impossible.’ They claw and grasp at any straw they can find to reach the elusive core of the quintessentially personal experience penned by the original author. The rare sense of complete gratification in hitting the nail right on the head and the exhilaration at pinning down the exact nuance of the word is what makes the entire effort worthwhile.

With all that has been said and done, written and read about translation strategies, it should really be a cakewalk to translate. Armed with a basic understanding of diverse and evolved translation theories available, one may tend to feel a bit complacent about the process. And with the easy accessibility of several machine translation softwares, one is justified in expecting pat answers. Yet that does not happen. One gets horrible gaffes like *cheda chāda kī pūrva samdhyā* (“the evening before teasing”) for ‘eve-teasing’ (which is by itself a particularly insidious Indian euphemism for sexual harassment). This is because translation is a potential minefield in which an unsuspecting translator is liable to get trapped during the transference of word and meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Even simple communication of information from one language to another can be subverted due to inadequate understanding of the cultures of both the source and target language group.¹ And when it comes to literary translation, the challenges are compounded as not only the denotative, but the connotative nuances are to be transferred. The process of translation is all about translating both the language and the culture of the source text (ST) into the language and the culture of the target language (TL).

This article tries to unravel the conundrum of translation by exploring some of the ways in which Indian literature may be translated into English successfully. Through writings by Indians in English depicting an Indian sensibility or translations from Hindi and Punjabi into English, the article attempts to pin some of the strategies one may employ to breathe in the aroma of *sarasom dā sāga* and *makī dī roṭī* (staple diet of Punjabis in the winter), beyond the literalness of ‘mustard greens’ and ‘corn bread’ (translations that turn their taste to ashes in the mouth!) or the typically Punjabi dish, *tandoori chicken* (a hybrid in itself) as ‘grilled’ or ‘baked’ chicken that fails to conjure the spicy aroma and smoky flavour of the former.

Challenges of Translation: As We Translate...

Questions of how to translate are always contentious. One grasps that translation is a three-stage communication – from the author in the source language to the reader in the target language through the medium of the translator who is expected to be proficient in both the SL and the TL. One quickly realizes that common sense ought to inform the translation effort as the source text, i.e. the ST, is transferred into the TL; that simple word-for-word translation is not recommended – if it is used, it stifles the text – and that sense-for-sense translation is more satisfying and represents the ST better. When we simply substitute words from one language with words from the other language, the connotations that the words carry in the SL may not be translated merely by substituting denotative terms. For example, the expression “*teja dhūpa*” may be translated as ‘bright sunshine’ but the connotation of it being uncomfortably hot which it is likely to carry to a Hindi speaker, would not be communicated; ‘harsh sunlight’ may be a better option. Similarly, in English, simply calling a summer

day 'hot' may not be able to carry the intensity of the pitiless heat of the tropics.

As noted earlier, the translator is seen as a bridge between not just two languages, but two cultures. While transferring meaning from the source text to the target text, there are always a host of cultural factors that appear untranslatable as a similar experience is not part of the target culture. In his essay, "Literature and Society," Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o talks about the psychological dissonance that is caused when the language of the intellect and the language of the emotions get disconnected due to the imposition of the colonial language on the African child. He cites the example of his young son for whom daffodils in Wordsworth's famous poem, "Daffodils" are "just little fishes in a lake" as he glanced at the illustration in the book (Thiong'o 4). He cannot imagine the flowers as they have never entered his realm of experience.²

Translation from one language into another with which it shares some common cultural terrain, despite having distinctive features, is comparatively easy; such as translations from/to Bangla, Marathi, Rajasthani and Hindi. On the other hand, a language like English is culturally and linguistically alien from Indian languages; and the wider the gap between the ST and TL, the harder it is to translate. It is therefore much more problematic for a translator to find equivalence between words in English and the Indian languages. For example, if one takes the word 'jūṭhā' in Hindi (as in "khānā jūṭhā ho gayā"), one would find equivalent words in all Indian languages, for example, 'etho' in Bangla, 'aimḡilī' in Telugu, 'aimḡilū' in Kannada, 'aicchila' in Malayalam, 'uṣṭā' in Marathi, etc. The concept of 'jūṭhā' is probably rooted in the notion of caste, and the idea of who could cook for whom in traditional Indian society. It derives from the Sanskrit 'uccīṣṭha' meaning leftovers, or food that is not considered fit to be eaten as it has been partially eaten or tasted, i.e. has been touched by someone's saliva, directly or indirectly. In conservative Hinduism it carries a connotation of ritual impurity and is taboo. In non-Hindu cultures, the concept is alien, so to find an equivalent in English is challenging. Similarly, to translate the English word 'cousin' into any Indian language would invariably require an extension to explain it, because Indians have elaborate structures of kinship terms, concomitant to one's duties and obligations, for which the word 'cousin' is woefully inadequate. So, the intermingling of cultures has led to the peculiar coinage of 'cousin brother' and 'cousin sister' in colloquial usage in the Indian context to distinguish them from the siblings born of the same set of parents.

Translators may use different approaches to bridge these cultural differences. One may choose to foreignize the text and nudge the reader towards the author and the text or domesticate the text and move it closer to the reader by leaving the latter in peace.³ The former may compromise fluency and readability; and the latter may flatten the nuances that enrich the text. The dilemma for a translator from Indian languages into English is also whether one should retain culture-specific terms and footnote them diligently or if the Empire should write back by compelling the reader to wander about the maze of foreign sounding words and phrases and hunt them down in glossaries or dictionaries. After all, we wondered what daffodils were, and why bright, sunny days should be welcome in our part of the world! In the parched plains of the North Indian subcontinent, regional language literatures describe the smoky grey, moisture-laden monsoon clouds as the luxuriant, dark tresses of a beloved, and rain drops are like manna from the skies on the scorched, sizzling earth. Thus, it is difficult to view a cloudless sky as an unblemished one. The lyrics of a popular song in a Bollywood film called "1942: A Love Story," can compare a beloved with sunshine only by appending a qualifying adverb. "ika laḡakī ko dekhā to aisā laḡā jaise subaha kā rūpa, jaise sardī kī dhūpa," translated loosely as "As my gaze fell upon the girl, I felt her to be the glory of the morning; and the winter sunshine." The sun is decidedly unpleasant in the summer, and it is the agreeable warmth of the winter sun that evokes the emotion of coziness (and of love, as well). To translate proverbs can also be problematic as the connotations ascribed to objects may be different. For instance, an owl is considered to be a fool in Hindi-Punjabi language culture, but in English one is as "wise as an owl."

Again, the Punjabi word for 'guest' is *paraunā*. But in colloquial Punjabi, the use of the word '*paraunā*' is customarily reserved for the 'son-in-law.' The son-in-law in Punjabi (and most Indian) society enjoys an exalted status and he is someone who is regarded as a very special and honoured guest. A Punjabi story mentions a woman cooking special basmati rice as the family is expecting the *paraunā* to arrive; ordinarily a cheaper variety of rice would be used for normal guests, and it is only a son-in-law who merits such lavish hospitality.

The challenge of translating from Indian languages is greater also because in India, with its enormous diversity of cultures, the same object may mean different things in different Indian languages. Taking the word ‘turban’ to illustrate the point: in the larger Indian context, wearing a turban is a sign of status and of honour. An idiom, ‘*pagadāṭ uchālanā*’ (“to toss someone’s turban”) is to dishonour him. To place one’s turban at someone’s feet would mean either an abject apology or a petition for mercy. But to a Punjabi Sikh, to describe the turban simply as a symbol of honour is not sufficient; wearing a turban is additionally a religious duty, as long hair or *kesa* is enjoined by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh as one of the five ‘k’s that Sikhs are exhorted to keep. It is a crucial article of faith for the Sikhs; and the *dasatārabadī* or the wearing of a turban for the first time at adolescence is an essential rite of passage for a Sikh boy and a moment of pride for the entire family.⁴ Similarly, the activity of shaving one’s head (or even the face) has a different connotation in the context of Hindus and Sikhs – in the latter, this would amount to sacrilege, while for Hindus, the shaving of the head might be a religious obligation in a pilgrimage or upon the death of a parent (and this would also vary from region to region). Thus, a translator is required to be sensitive to the cultural nuances and the implications embedded in the text.

It is also important to preserve the style of the writer. A considerable amount of Indian writing tends to have rambling sentences, often beginning with an ‘and’ or a ‘but’ which is not the norm in English. One will need to be judicious in breaking up the sentences into more than one in an English translation, taking care that the overall intention of the author is not belied. Similarly, if the author intentionally uses short sentences, the translator needs to ponder whether she should club them together to make readable prose. In an article on one of the most widely read English translations of Manto’s stories by Khalid Hasan, literary scholar, M. Asaduddin says that Khalid Hasan’s translation is popular as it fulfils the goal of readability in the target language. But there are distortions when compared to the original, as Hasan “... changes the title of stories without any valid reason, leaves out large portions of the original, summarizes descriptive paragraphs and dialogues, changes the order of sentences, eliminates ellipses, flattens out uneven contours and cultural angularities of the original, and sometimes, though not as frequently, adds some copy of his own for the benefit of readers not acquainted with Indo-Islamic culture and the history of the Subcontinent” (Asaduddin 132).

However, Asaduddin exonerates Khalid Hasan in the case of the vignettes of *siyāha hāsīye*, translated as *Black Margins*. “Khalid Hasan’s translations of the pieces in *siyāha hāsīye* are more accurate and closer to the original precisely because the original holds no scope for editing or additions, being themselves fragmentary and pared down to the bone” (Ibid. 139). *siyāha hāsīye*, a collection of thirty-two anecdotes, were written in 1948 in Urdu by Saadat Hasan Manto as his first, raw, traumatized utterances after witnessing the brutality of violence during the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. These stories have been presented in this fractured manner consciously to cauterise the reader’s sensibility. They depict all the horrors of partition – arson, looting, murder, rape, and partisan official machinery. They testify to the writer’s anger, and the agony of articulation of that anger. Manto’s staccato style with his use of short, clipped sentences was deliberate; intending to convey the complete breakdown of all conventions, not just of language but of life itself in the aftermath of the gruesome violence. “Many of the fragmentary pieces are deliberately constructed out of broken sentences or simple words so as to suggest that they have been carefully incised on the page – like epitaphs on tombstones” (Bhalla, Settari and Gupta 244). A translator who does not retain this deliberate abruptness would undermine its intended effect. Although Khalid Hasan retains the ordering of sentences as in the original, an example demonstrates how Hasan tends to change the texture of the text by domesticizing it. One short, razor-sharp vignette is given in transliteration below:

halāla aura jhaṭakā

“*mainne usake gale para churī rakhī, haule-haule pherī aura usako*

halāla kara diyā”

“*yaha tumane kyā kiyā?*”

“*kyom?*”

“*isako halāla kyom kiyā?*”

“*majā ātā hai isa taraha*”

“*majā ātā hai ke bacce...tujhe jhaṭakā karanā cāhie thā...isa taraha*”
aura halāla karanevāle kī gardana kā jhaṭakā ho gayā. (Manto 295)

Khalid Hasan’s translation is as follows:

Ritualistic Difference

“I placed my knife across his windpipe and, slowly, very slowly, I slaughtered him.”

‘And why did you do that?’

‘What do you mean why?’

‘Why did you kill him kosher?’

‘Because I love doing it that way.’

‘You idiot, you should have chopped his neck off with one single blow.

Like this.’

And the kosher killer was killed in accordance with the correct ritual (Manto, Hasan 197).

A literal translation could retain the original title and the words ‘*halāla*’ and ‘*jhaṭakā*’ could be explained in the endnotes as two different ways of killing meat for human consumption. The story would read:

“I placed the knife on his neck, moving it slowly over it and killed him.”

“What did you do that for?”

“Why?”

“Why did you kill him in the ritual manner?”

“It is more fun this way.”

“More fun, my foot! ... you should have killed him in one blow... like this!”

And the head of the ritual killer was chopped off at the nape.”

The title, “*halāla aura jhaṭakā*” refers to the two different, ritualistic ways of slaughtering animals – ‘*halāla*’ is the ‘permissible’ way in accordance with traditional Islamic law in which a well-honed knife makes a deep incision in the throat accompanied by the utterance of a prayer, and ‘*jhaṭakā*’ is killing with a single blow to sever the head, to cause the animal minimal suffering that Hindus, Sikhs and Christians favour. The title brings the violence immediately to the forefront which “Ritualistic Difference” does not. Although the difference of preferred religious practices is indicated, the target text de-contextualizes the story. The use of the word ‘kosher’ is in the context of Jewish practice, and it dulls the bitter divide between the Hindus and the Sikhs on the one hand and the Muslims on the other at the time of the partition. Nor does the irony of the last line where the neck of the ‘*halāla*’ practitioner is severed in one ‘*jhaṭakā*’ comes through as lucidly. Manto’s intent was to demonstrate that despite ingrained religious differences, the senseless violence of both the communities made them indistinguishable. Due to its domestication, it may appear to be a smoother and more fluent text in its target language; and depending upon the target audience, it might be regarded as a valid translation strategy. But even if the intent of the translator is to domesticate the text, “Ritualistic Slaughter” might have been more appropriate, to foreground the religious violence.

Translation theorists, too, are mindful that the objective in undertaking the translation project, or the profile of the target audience may impact the strategies used in translation. Translation from bhashas, the Indian regional languages, into English was much sought after to reach a wider audience at home and abroad.⁵ Moreover, the cultural, gender, political orientation of the translator is likely to, and perhaps, inevitably, does impinge upon the choice of words or the slant of the translation and the subtext of politics of translation is intangibly, or otherwise, woven into the text. The subjectivity of the translator and her ubiquitous presence in the translation is now generally accepted.⁶

Strategies for Translation: Howdunit...

Ordinarily, the breadth and openness of translation activity permits varying, and sometimes contrary, strategies to be employed to communicate a given text into the target language in an effective manner. A translation that makes imaginative use of language to create an autonomous text may not necessarily be a strictly faithful rendering, but the infused creativity offers glimpses into the greatness of the source text. One of the key strategies in translation to achieve this is to try and trigger an emotion in the target language text which is similar to the emotion intended in the source text. It has been said that the translator needs to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the TL wording will, “trigger the same impact on the original wording did upon the ST audience” (Nida in Hariyanto).⁷ This is the strategy followed by the translator, Harivansh Rai Bachchan, a noted Hindi poet in his own right, in the Hindi translation of William Shakespeare’s play, *Othello*. In Act 1, Scene i of the play, Iago says to Desdemona’s father, Brabantio:

“Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tugging your white ewe.” (Shakespeare 6)

Bachchan’s translation reads:

*tumase nātā toḍa, tumhārī dila se pyārī
putrī bhāgī; thūka isī samaya, isī ghaḍaī meṃ
kahīm tumhārī ujalī bachiyā-sī kanyā para
kālā moṭā sāmḍa caḍhaā hai.”* (Bachchan, *Othello* 132)

When translated back, it would read:

“Breaking off ties with you, your most beloved
Daughter has eloped; right now, right this moment
Somewhere on top of your fair, calf-like daughter
the black, fat bull has climbed.”

Bachchan translates “an old black ram” as “*kālā moṭā sāmḍa*,” but literally this is “black, fat bull.” Bull can also be translated as ‘*baila*’ but it would not carry the pejorative connotations of repulsiveness that ‘*sāmḍa*’ does in the target language. The daughter has also been referred to as a fair she-calf, carrying connotations of innocence and purity in the Indian context, much like the lamb in Christian iconography. Yet Bachchan retains the intended obscenity in the imagery of animal copulation of the original text.

Rupert Snell comments on another example of a deeply satisfying and creative translation by Harivansh Rai Bachchan of Robert Frost’s poem, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” which he refers to as ‘sublime’. The last stanza of the poem is:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep
(Frost 275)

Bachchan’s translation reads:

*gahana saghana manamohaka vana-taru
mujhako āja bulāte haiṃ,
kintu kiye jo vāyade maiṃne
yāda mujhe vo āte haiṃ,*

*abhī kahāṃ ārama badā yaha
mūka nimantraṇa chalanā haiṃ,
are, abhī to mīlom mujhako,
mīlom mujhako calanā haiṃ.
(Bachchan, “gahana saghana” 439)*

Translated back into English, the lines would read something like:

Deep, dense, alluring woods
Beckon me today,
But the promises that I made,
Come to my mind,
O, where is the time to rest,
This mute invitation is a lie
Hey, miles I have still,
miles I have still to walk!

The four lines have been broken into eight in the Hindi translation, yet the essence is retained. “Beckon me today” is an extension that seamlessly stitches the thought of the first line to the next. In an analysis of the translation, Rupert Snell says:

These four lines of verse constitute an entire course in the art and craft of translation. The Hindi poem is not a dead replica of its English model but a living expression of the feelings engendered by reading the original; it is respectful to the wording and structure of the English without being bound to it hand and foot. The Hindi refashions Frost by assimilating it to an Indian landscape; his American woods, ‘lovely, dark and deep,’ are represented in Hindi by the *ban-taru* (*vana-taru*), whose qualifications as *gahan*, *saghan*, *man-mohak* (*gahana saghana manamohaka*), suggest a grove on the Jumna bank, a secluded *Gītagovinda* arbour. No less characteristically Indian is the use of a rhetorical question in the third line: ‘*abhī kahāṃ ārama badā*’. But it is in the last line that Bachchan’s skill shows most clearly: rather than dutifully reproducing the whole-line repeat of Frost’s original ‘and miles to go before I sleep’, he picks out just a few syllables – the alliterative collocation *mīlom mujhko* – and achieves the climax of the poem in the repeat of these alone. (Snell 443)

Even the manner in which the style of an author is to be retained can call for diverse strategies. Kabir, the fifteenth century Bhakti saint and poet, is widely revered as a fount of wisdom and pithy *dohās*.⁸ Considering the iconic status that Kabir enjoys in the annals of Indian literature, the expectation from him is of dignity and sobriety. Several translators have produced a sepia-tinted Kabir to convey the hoariness of tradition, and rendered him in archaic English, interspersed with ‘thees’ and ‘thys’. A recent translation of Kabir by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra ‘speaks’ to a twentieth-century audience by using an idiom familiar to contemporary times, while preserving the radical tone of Kabir as it appeared in his own time. The original lines of one of Kabir’s *dohas* are:

*paṇḍita bāda bada e so jhūthā
rāma kahem duniyām gati pāvai khāṇḍa kahem mukha mīthā
(Kabir 30)*

Literally, it would be:

Whatever Pandits say is falsehood

If one could attain salvation only by taking the name of God,
then one's mouth would become sweet merely with sugar.

In an English translation, the translator, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra offers:

“O pundit, your hair-splitting's
so much bullshit. I'm surprised
You still get away with it.”
(Ibid. 31)

In the Preface to the book, Wendy Doniger says, “Slang, neologisms, and anachronisms in Mehrotra's translations are a brilliant means of conveying much of the shock effect that upside-down language would have had upon Kabir's fifteenth-century audiences” (Ibid. xix). The words initially jolt the reader as one certainly does not expect this iconoclastic sacrilege from the lips of a venerable old seer. Here, on the contrary, we see an angry young man cursing and abusing the theologians. It is important to remember that Bhakti poetry in the fifteenth century rebelled against ossified and stultifying religious practices and employed the language of the common people to exhort them to break loose of the shackles of superstition and seek direct communication with God. The language of this translation effectively preserves the subversive strain of much of his poetry. The translation attempts to obliterate the centuries to jolt the twentieth century reader out of her complacency as much as the original would have shocked and thrilled Kabir's contemporaries.

In the introduction to the book, the translator, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra traces two different translation practices in the case of Kabir – one that closely follows the printed text and the other, older practice that “responds to and illuminates the performative improvisatory tradition out of which the songs arose and by which they have been transmitted” (Ibid. xxvii). He goes on to say, “for the singer, the *pada* was not something whose words had unalterably been fixed, to be slavishly followed while singing, but something that was provisional and fluid, a working draft, whose lines and images could be shifted around, or substituted by others, or deleted entirely” (Ibid. xxviii). He cites the example of a Kabir song singer in the mid-1990s who uses words like engine, ticket, line, etc. to draw an analogy with a railway train, and when quizzed on how Kabir could be expected to be aware of such things, “the singer, Bhikaramji Sharma, looked ‘most hurt’ and replied that Kabir, being a seer, knew everything” (Ibid. xxviii-xxiv). The contemporizing of Kabir to the extent of using anachronisms is a strategy to keep the relevance of the words to communicate with a generation in a language familiar to it. This is much like the transcreation of the Indian epic, *Ramayana*, in virtually all the Indian languages; and these *Ramayanas* are completely dyed in local colour and context. The intent is not so much to treat the presumed original text lightly as to sacralize the text by owning it completely.

IWE and IWET: To Take a Cue...

Writers writing in English, but deeply rooted in their own cultural environment, may act as translators of their culture through literature in English. Confident about their choice of language, several such writers have felt no hesitation in using English with the intimacy of a native speaker. Charting untraversed terrain, non-native writers in English set a trail-blazing path for later writers by using diverse strategies to adapt the English language to suit their indigenous expression. Even as one reads the works of Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, for instance, it is not the breeze of the English countryside, but the tempo and the cadence of the African continent that wafts from the pages. Similarly, Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan are able to communicate the earthy tones and tenors of their native languages.

One could regard the progress of translation of Indian regional literature into English as being somewhat similar to the development of Indian Writing in English (IWE). In fact, one could view the development of IWE as a sort of companion to Indian Writing in English Translation (or IWET); and talk about these two categories as twins – distinct, yet with close affinity to each other. In its early years, IWE was the butt of virulent attack as being tantamount to treason for writing in a colonial language; or was not taken seriously for being both unnatural and impossible. However this could not

contain the creative surge of Indian writers. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand were among the pioneers in writing in English and used the language to describe a typically Indian reality with felicity. Raja Rao expresses the dilemma of an Indian writer in English in the 'Preface' to his English novel, *Kanthapura*; and it is difficult to find a more articulate justification of writing in English by Indians. "The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (Rao 5). He says that English "... is the language of our intellectual make up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English" (ibid.). However, he does not advocate that Indian writers should aspire to emulate English writers. He acknowledges blithely, "We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world only as Indians. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it" (ibid. 5-6). He thinks that the "tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs" (ibid. 6).

These words are prophetic for translators from Indian languages into English as well. As we look at the works of the pioneers of IWE, we are able to breathe in the heat and dust of India. Moreover, with IWE gaining ground, Indian English, too, has come into its own. What was once referred to disparagingly as ungrammatical usage has come to be accepted widely as 'English in India'. This is also in sync with Chinua Achebe's principle of owning the English language and twisting and bending it according to the rhythms of one's native tongue. In an essay, "The African Writer and the English Language," Achebe is confident that the English language would be able to carry the weight of his African experience. "But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe n.p.). Salman Rushdie's 'chutneyfication' in *Midnight's Children* (Rushdie 456) holds as many lessons for translation practices as for Indian writing in English. With Indian literature becoming a marketable commodity, the confidence of publishers has grown and the translation of bhasha literature into English, too, has come a long way. Initially the attempts at writing in, or translation into, English would entail numerous italicized words explained in an interminable glossary at the end of the book. All kinship terms, local rituals, festivals, food items, clothing would be assiduously documented and accompanied by painstaking explanations and extensions; but nowadays the italicization is much reduced, and the glossaries are much shorter.

One may take examples from the works of Indian English writer Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), notable for being among the first writers to inject Punjabi idiom into English.⁹ The challenge for Anand was to transfer his Punjabi sensibility into a language far removed from it – to convey the exuberance and larger-than-life Punjabi character in the self-deprecatory reticence of the English. In his first short story, "The Lost Child," Anand seems to use English self-consciously, trying to ensure that there is no awkwardness in expression for the native English ear; but the floweriness of the language reveals his native Punjabi effusiveness. The vigour of thought gets incorporated in the uncommonly large number of adjectives and phrases used in description; for example, "The joyous morning gave greetings and unashamed invitations to all to come away into the fields, full of flowers and songs" (Anand 3).¹⁰

In the Preface to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao says: "We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are interminable.... We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us – we tell the interminable tale" (Rao 6). An example from the same story, "The Lost Child" demonstrates the truth of this statement:

It was a flowering mustard field, pale like melting gold as it swept across miles and miles of even land – a river of yellow liquid light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying in places into broad rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver light. Where it ended, on one side stood a cluster of low mudwalled houses, thrown into relief by a dense crowd of yellow-robed men and women from which arose a

highpitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises, sweeping across the groves to the blue-throated sky like the weird strange sound of Siva's mad laughter (Anand 3).

The indigenous oral story telling tradition is infused into the text where the narrator maintains a fast tempo to keep the interest of the audience engaged. These long-winded sentences are reflective of the rhythm of Punjabi, where thought chases thought without a pause; and this is articulated in an equally animated manner. Phrases like 'mudwalled' and 'highpitched' have deliberately not been hyphenated as they would be in an English text. Again, the fact of Siva's mad laughter presumes the reader's knowledge of the Trinity of the Hindu Gods of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer (and the fearsome frenzied laughter of the Destroyer). In a translation it is probable that the translator would feel obliged to reference and explain the cultural fabric.

Anand's impeccable command over the English language is textured with literal translation of Punjabi words and phrases to convey the cultural nuances of the Punjabi milieu, e.g. "Why do you eat my head?" (This is a literal translation of, "*merā sira kyom khāte ho?*" a very common colloquial expression which actually approximates to "Why do you nag me?") (Anand, *Untouchable* 109.) In a similar manner, certain proverbs are translated literally into English: "Meanwhile he began to feel hungry as if rats were running around in his belly, searching for food" (Ibid. 141). This is a literal translation of the proverb '*peṭa meṃ cūhe kūdanā,*' and it means 'to be very hungry'. Anand has appended "searching for food" to bring out the meaning more clearly. In the novel, *The Old Woman and the Cow*, a sentence reads: "Ohe what Jinn has mounted onto your head!" shouted Rafique Chacha" (Anand 419) which literally translates the expression "*sira para kyā bhūta savāra hai?*" This is to indicate that the person is doing something that is considered insane by others. The reader can find any number of examples like these in the course of his perusal of Indian English fiction.

Terms of abuse in any culture reveal the outlook of the people but are difficult to translate. In the novel, *Untouchable*, Anand writes: "Come, O bey brother-in-law,' greeted Ram Charan... 'I want to be your brother-in-law if you will let me,' said Bakha turning the washer boy's light abuse into a mild joke, based on the fact that he was known to everyone to be an admirer of Ram Charan's sister" (Anand 111). Patriarchy is reflected, for example, in using the address 'brother-in-law' which is a translation of "*sālā*" (not just any brother-in-law but specifically the wife's brother) as a term of abuse. This may not be conveyed to a native English reader though it would make sense to an Indian reader. In a conversation, a usual way to call out to someone is to append something like 'hey'. '*O bey*' or '*abe*' or simply '*be*' is a rude, dismissive way to address someone, usually a male. The name also may take on a different inflexion depending on the context. Thus, the name *bakkhā* (or *rakkhā*) may become *bakhyā* or *bakkhe*. "ve bakhyā, ve rakkhyā father is calling you!" (Anand 109). Secondly, 've' is a more long-drawn than 'hey' in articulation and sounds like a complaint or a wail. For a female, 'nī' is similarly indicative of a rude 'hey' – like a 'hey you'. "'nī, come back, nī come back!' wailed Hoor Banu" (Anand, *The Old Woman and the Cow* 421). Another abuse that indicates the patriarchal character of Punjabi society is to curse a girl or woman by calling her "*khasamām nū khāṇī*" or "eater of husbands" (someone who will bring bad luck and lead to the death of her husband).

Another invention that Anand employs is to transliterate typically Indian expressions in English. "Don't buk buk, O bey brother-in-law,' said Rakha good-humouredly" (Anand, *Untouchable* 113). This would mean, "Don't talk nonsense." In Punjabi, it would literally be "Don't do baka baka" or "*baka baka mata kara*". In other cases, he uses the English equivalent in an Indian way, e.g., "puff-puffing at the hubble bubble." The onomatopoeic sound of the hubble bubble, or hookah, is a kind of gurgling – 'gur gur,' but he uses 'puff-puffing'. He similarly nativizes the word 'policeman' into '*pulasā*' by referring to "Napoo Singh, the poolcia," (policeman) in *The Village* (Anand 244).

One may be somewhat aghast at his contortion and coinage of English words, but upon reflection one can appreciate the absolutely novel ways in which he was able to carve a distinct style of Indianness (and within that, Punjabi-ness). Such practices can offer pointers for translators translating into a language that is remote from the source language, although as a translator one may be chary of embracing all his strategies to bring in culture-specific nuances, specifically the Punjabi tenor as in his case.

My own practice would be to make a first draft of the translation by trying word-to-word substitution (not at the cost of logic, however). A second reading would then keep the overall purpose and style of the text in mind and see how to improve the draft accordingly. I would ask myself if I was using big words where I should not, or vice versa. Does the narrative style match the original? Does it create the same, or a similar, impact in the mind of the reader that was created in the mind of the reader of the source text? At the same time, would the translated text ‘speak’ to a non-native reader? Would it seem an authentic portrayal to a reader familiar with the source culture? What is the author’s intention? Is there an element of resistance that the author conveys, consciously or subconsciously? How much of myself ought I to put into the text? My own experience as a practising translator is that one has to constantly maintain a careful balance and instill Punjabi-ness without sacrificing the readability of the text in the target language – push the reader towards the author and nudge the author towards the reader by turns. Although the target audience is an important factor, personally for me the choice as a translator is to move the reader closer to the text, and thereby not permit the reader to be lazy.

Dealing with the rich exposition of the dialects that exist in most languages is a common challenge that translators face. These linguistic ‘callouses’ tend to get smoothed and marginalized in a translation. Transporting the entire milieu to an English background with variants of dialects being translated into different accents of English – Welsh, Scottish, Cockney, etc. is not acceptable as they change the DNA of the source text. This is not to assert that translation is impossible but to say that such knots and gnarls need to be dealt with by using English more innovatively; and this is specifically where IWE might offer some pointers. In an on-going translation of Balraj Sahni’s travelogue, *merā pākistānī sapharanāmā* translated as *My Pakistani Travelogue*, faced with a thick dialect, I have tried to mould (and maul) English sentences to distinguish it from standard spoken English. For example, “*oe sāhanī koī hika thām te tām nāe homde*” (Sahni 50) may be translated as “Oye, Sahni haare (are) settled not only in whone (one) place.” Or, “*maiṁ rāvalapiḍī jamiā āsa*” (Ibid.) as “I’s bornin Rawalpindi.”

In a Punjabi short story by Devendra Satyarthi, titled “*aṁgūra paka gae*,” the proverb “*ulaḥ bāṁsa barelī ko*” has an entirely adequate English equivalent “carry coals to Newcastle” to indicate doing something superfluous or unnecessary (Satyarthi, “*aṁgūra*” 45) However, I chose to translate it literally as “taking the bamboos back to Bareilly” to retain the Indian topography (Satyarthi, “The Grapes” 21). To use the English equivalent would have sounded absurd in a story with a Punjabi setting. However, it is not really imperative to force the exotic into the text. At times, one may opt for more familiar phrases if they are sufficiently equivalent. Punjabi short story writer, Sukhwant Kaur Mann’s writings that depict the oppressed plight of the marginalized, especially of the peasantry, may be used to illustrate the problems faced while translating richly idiomatic language, peppered with the choicest of abusive terms and inimitable expressions. In a short Punjabi story “*caṭṭū*” translated as “The Mortar” about refugees settling in East Punjab due to the partition of the Indian subcontinent, an aunt who had fallen upon hard times by being forced to abandon her prosperous home in Pakistan and flee to India, is described as one who had never “*kakha bhana ke dūharā nahīm sī kītā*,” or “never plucked a blade of grass to fold it” to indicate her earlier luxurious lifestyle. (Mann, “*caṭṭū*” 335). I have gone with the more familiar English equivalent, “had never lifted a finger in her life” (Mann, “The Mortar” 190). The family’s discontent with cheap options that they are forced to make do with, for instance refined oil instead of pure *ghī*, is conveyed through the expression “*naka maroḍā*” (Mann, “*caṭṭū*” 335) which literally means twisted their noses; but one would go with “turned up their noses” (Mann, “The Mortar” 191) to convey the same sense of disdain that is intended in the source text. One may try to seamlessly weave in the connotation or association by way of explanation, or extension, to communicate its significance. In a story that had a character biting into succulent chicken, the most favoured fowl for non-vegetarians in Punjab, it seemed a good strategy to implant the word ‘butter’ before chicken, as ‘butter chicken’ is a quintessentially Punjabi creation.

Conclusion: Loss and Hope...

There is no set path or paths that a translator may take; one may start with one strategy, and then change course midway in the interest of the aesthetics of the translated text. The ultimate aim is to

communicate the source text authentically in the target language. It is important to retain the voice of the source author and it must seem as if she were conversing with the target audience/ reader directly. The translation should evoke, invoke and provoke simultaneously. It should evoke the unusual quality of the text, invoke the reader's participation, and provoke the reader to explore and compare with the original text. The mandate should be to retain the ecosystem of the original so that the translated text speaks in a pleasing foreign accent, but is nonetheless, accessible and intelligible. The attempt is to localize yet universalize. The end product should be readable and fluent but with a hint of mystique; and rather like a tourist who visits a foreign locale and is able to experience local culture, a reader should be able to visualize the texture and shape of local things. If this equipoise is achieved, one can be justly proud of the translation. In his essay, "English and the African Writer," Achebe says, "The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe n.p.). Translators may safely follow this advice. What is also important for a translator is to set out her objective and discuss the strategies involved in the process of translation of a particular text. And though over-use of footnotes can be avoided to explain culture-specific terms, a translator's note may contain examples of how such terms were negotiated and why the translator chose the word that was finally elected.

Using Vermeer's painting, *The Lacemaker*, art historian Gregory Minissale likens a translation to a patterned lacework – the overlying pattern can determine what and how the underlying layer – the original text – shall appear to the viewer. The translator is the one creating the overlying pattern.

A translation may be seen as an intricate lace folded in two. Imagine that it is possible to detect an underlying pattern through part of the same cloth folded over itself. The translator is a lacemaker who translates not only a mental design into a pattern of threads but by folding the cloth, joins one network of semantic complexity with another. The space between the threads and patterns constitute loss. (Minissale n.p.)

As one's eye travels over the lacework, the underlying pattern may appear faded and pale, or vivid and accentuated, depending upon the angle from which it is viewed. Similarly, a translation may evoke the original text boldly or merely allow wispy strands to glint through it; or even, sever its ties to the source text in all but birth. As there are various translation strategies used depending upon the aim and objective of the translation, there can be multiple translations of the same text; they are valuable in adding depth to the understanding of the source text. As Hasan Altaf says in his review of Mehrotra's *Songs of Kabir*, "Precise, foot-noted and annotated word-for-word translations" (Altaf n.p.) may be as valuable as fluent, seamless ones. One provides the meaning of what is actually said, the other shows "the power, the heart behind the words" (Ibid.). Each translator will exercise a degree of autonomy to make different choices when faced with the same text. The translator may remain creatively faithful to the text in varying degrees and the magnanimity of the field allows space to all translations.

In the firm belief that emotions are communicable across linguistic and cultural boundaries, the translator straddles the abyss between the two languages and cultures, and the translated text is like a voice that resounds across the gap; with the translator adding strokes and flourishes to the echo to create a second (not secondary) speech – satisfying in its fullness in the target language. As we stretch the possibilities of the latter to accommodate the new 'Englishes' that have blossomed across the globe, translation does not need to be seen as an insipid or inferior representation of the original text, but a satisfying blend of two languages and cultures. Navigating through the mutual interactions between Indian writing in English and bhasha literatures in English translation, we are able to value literary translations as separate, independent entities that enrich our literary and linguistic heritage.

Notes

- 1 An anecdote reveals how an advertisement for a soft drink company used a set of three pictures to show the energizing power of their beverage in the Middle East. The first picture showed an exhausted man running in a desert, the second showed him guzzling the advertised drink and in the third, the man was running with renewed strength. However, the consequence was disastrous as the company failed to keep in mind that Arabic language readers read from right to left. This reversed the message, and needless to say, did not achieve its target to boost sales.
- 2 Elleke Boehmer adds the example of a young school girl, Alofa in Sia Figiel's *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) who imagines the mythic flowers as dancers living in the sky in her book, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Boehmer 180).
- 3 Lawrence Venuti, an influential scholar in translator studies, develops the distinction between what he terms "domesticating" and "foreignizing" (terms translated from Schleiermacher) to describe the two strategies a translator may employ. These strategies concern both the choice of text to be translated and the translation method. The former entails translating in a transparent, fluent, 'invisible' style in order to minimize the foreignness of the TT. In Schleiermacher's words, this method leaves the reader in peace and moves the author towards him. It uses language in a style and register expected by the target audience, and is easier for them to digest. In foreignization, the translator leaves the writer alone, and moves the reader towards the writer. Also termed 'resistancy' it is a non-fluent or estranging translation style designed to make the translator visible by preserving the accent of the source culture. Venuti favours the latter as an ethical choice and as a mode of resistance.
- 4A short English story, 'Montreal 1962' by Shauna Singh Baldwin is about the incomprehensibility of the Western about Sikh culture as the narrator rues the lack of opportunity for educated and qualified young Sikh men in Canada unless they shear their hair. As she washes the turban cloth lengths in the bathtub, she says, "I leaned close and reached in, working each one in a rhythm bone-deep, as my mother and hers must have done before me, that their men might face the world proud" (*English Lessons and Other Stories*, 5).
- 5 The word 'bhasha' literally means language. The term Bhasha literature refers to the literature written in any one of the diverse regional languages of India. One of the outcomes of the project of colonization and decolonization was the development of an unequal power hierarchy between the languages. The easy transference of meaning into multiple languages, facilitated by multi-lingual people in precolonial India was stilted as a result of the imposition of English and led to the gradual devaluation of the regional languages in the colonial period. This resulted in the severance of their organic links to each other. Post-independence, attempts have been made to recover the rich literary inheritance in Indian regional languages. The postcolonial period saw the rise of the bhasha literatures and the term 'vernacular' came to be seen as pejorative. In recent times, though, the distinction drawn between Indian English literature and Bhasha literature has also been questioned as English is now accepted as one of the languages of India.
- 6 Domestication strategy, in which the mandate is to present a fluent, easily readable text in the target language, leads to the 'invisibility' of the translator. For Venuti, this is problematic as it presents the translation as the original without the shadow of the source text. This marginalizes the translator, and he would prefer the translator to be visible to the reader so that they are able to engage critically with the text that is being read in translation.
- 7 While translating the Bible for Eskimoes, Eugene Nida chose to use 'seal of God' rather than a 'lamb of God' as the latter could not be expected to resonate with the Eskimoes.
- 8 *dohā* is a rhyming couplet consisting of two lines, each of 24 instants or *mātrās*. Each line has 13 instants in first part and 11 instants in the second.
- 9 Mulk Raj Anand is regarded as one of the pioneers of Indo-Anglian fiction. His novels and short stories have acquired the status of being classic works of modern Indian English literature, and have attained substantial international readership. Anand's fiction is noted for its perceptive insights into the lives of the oppressed and the exploited. With an excellent grasp over English, he began his literary career by writing short stories.
- 10 In an article "Hindi-Punjabi Code-Switching in Delhi," John J. Gumperz says: "An Indian may speak English with near-native control; he may read it, write it and lecture in it with great success. But when

he uses English in India his speech will share many of the features of the other Indian codes with which English alternates in the daily round of activities. Indian English will thus deviate considerably from the norms current among native speakers of English in the American Midwest. This kind of deviation represents not a failure to control English, but a natural consequence of the social conditions in the immediate environment in which Indian English is spoken” (qtd. in Ramakrishna 70).

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