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## TOWARDS GLOBAL INCLUSIVITY: USING TRANSLATION AS METHOD AND MEANS



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7393645>

**Dr. Supriya Banerjee**  
Amity University, India  
Fone: +998971008630  
Email: sbanerjee@amity.edu

### ABSTRACT

*The paper deconstructs the idea of literary masterpieces and finds translation as a free space that engenders academic knowledge and scholarly stimulation. Therefore, it discusses some of India’s literary masterpieces and shows its present-day relevance. The paper posits translation as political and finds that the process is fraught by the politics of selection and choice. This process furthermore causes erasure in the battle between the canon and the periphery.*

*Furthermore, the paper discusses the veracity of translated masterpieces or texts on grounds of exactness, truthfulness, and authorial liberties. It also argues how the fluid space of a text turns into a political ground where war of the words give way to an overt war over of language, identity politics and representation. Finally, it touches about the reality of market politics and consumerism and translation has transformed under the global scenario. To end with, the paper tries to find ways and means to overcome this lacuna and transform into an active member of the world literature or Visva-Sahitya.*

**Key Words** – Canon and Periphery, Transcreation, Transformation, Text and context, Thematology, Politics of identity and representation, Global market, World Literature.

The paper proposes an active interface between the dynamic space of Indian literature and translation activity, exploring the possibility to draw out multiple meanings drawn from contextual understanding and shifting cultural spaces. The paper does not in any means limit itself to a particular geographical space or genre-medial specificity, as it presupposes that this process only limits academic growth and argumentation. However, an understanding that posits about one Indian literature which is written in various Indian languages: and an intra-lingual translation of

“masterpieces” questions the idea of the oneness of Indian literature, opening it up for academic scrutiny and debate.

To begin with, a thematic understanding of one Indian literature in the process of translation is both a matter of choice and argumentation engendered in the idea that there is oneness of Indian literatures. According to the assertions of distinguished scholars like V.K. Gokak and Nagendra that one could find unity or uniformity in philosophical themes, motifs and leitmotifs like fate or *Karma* governing human lives, *punya* and cycle of life, irony of joy and grief co-existing, concept of transient-intransient or *jiva-ajiva*, impermanence of life as manifested in “one Indian literature” and this is to be accepted as a layer of permanence at any given time while translating a text from the masterpieces of Indian literature. However, it can be argued that this assertion is based on the discourse of nationalism as one and presupposes the nation as a monolith that needs a homogenous culture as against multifaceted India with its diversity of existing cultural practices. This regimentation of centrality restricts the diversity of Indian literature and erases the departures under the pretext of the unity of experience.

Furthermore, the idea of the canon and periphery in Indian literature in translation projects English language as the central and focal point of understanding texts and provides it as naturalized, bypassing regional and communal aspirations and new elements of contemporary Western civilization. In a multi-lingual and diverse socio-cultural space, a skewed understanding through the western eye which is linear, and binary might engender spaces that are biased and lopsided. A case in point is the classical text *Ramayana* which has been translated into various languages and multiple genres in various multiple mediums. There is an ongoing debate in the academia about the exact number of *Ramayana*'s that are in existence and the authorship of the master narrative, if ever there was one single master narrative, or is it a collection of many stories. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay has argued how ‘difference in identity’ and ‘identity in difference’ has altered understanding and hence the translation of the canonical literature which cannot be based on thematic unity alone. He provides an example of the heroic theme of the *Ramayana*, where Rama in *Valmiki Ramayana* and Rama in *Meghnadvadkavya* although share similar attributes are extremely different in their representations. He attributes the ‘difference-in-identity’ to time and social contexts when he writes that one was composed in the medieval period, influenced by Bhakti movement, and the later was composed during the high noon of Bengal modernity.

Taking a detour, if one skims through an understanding of the classical masterpiece *Ramayana* through a modern day transcreation, in a multi modal cross mediated genre like a graphic novel or comic book, one will assume that that this medium has interfaced history and mythology to create an indigenization of the masterpiece to provide children an alternative method of looking and learning about Indian History. Similarly, if one reads the *Devi Bhagwat Purana*, the heroic theme of Devi encounters transformation throughout the ages until now. Devi has been represented by associations related to fertility, prosperity, motherly love, fear, protection, nationhood etc. The ‘differences-in-identity’ of Devi is found, perhaps, because of the diverse discursive practices which emanate through her various representations and transforms with time and context. These variables in her representation produces new forms of generic reconfigurations too, be it a short story, fiction, calendar art, graphic novel or cinema and each time her representation is manipulated to suit the contexts of its time. Therefore, the idea of centrality of Indian literary masterpieces in translations are sometimes reduced to binary oppositions, and all integrative solutions become redundant.

The Indian mind believes in holistic view of life and hence Indian literature creates a vital relationship between local, regional, and pan-Indian expressions or between the notion of centrality and acknowledgement of diversity. Therefore, the argument of Sibaji Bandyopadhyay where he writes that “content wise the re-creations may be quite distinct from the first book, et a hero allows for a (tenuous) link between it and the new offerings as well as a link between members of the latter group” (*Thematology* 13) holds ground.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji has suggested that polyglotism in ancient India was responsible for the development of ‘translating consciousness’. Vatsyayana’s term *lokopichanuvada* or ‘translatibility’ suggests that far back in history one can trace India’s theorizing on translation. *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are based on a translation substratum from the literatures of Indo-Aryan languages which include the languages of Aryans, miscegenated Aryans, non-Aryans, and foreign speakers, in particular settled groups who spoke Greek and old Persian.

Therefore, a text which is significant in this context is the *Therigatha* as it has a remarkable history of modern translations as its multiple translations trace a trajectory of asocio-cultural impacts through the third century BCE to the modern day. It is India’s one of the most important texts in translation. It was translated in the West from Dhammapala’s *Paramadittapani* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by R. Pischel and H. Oldenberg in English, in German by Karl Eugenn Neumann, Sinhala by Martin

Wickremesinghe, and in many other modern Indian languages. *Therigatha*, is dated in the third century BCE, and it is an anthology of poems written by the first Buddhist ordained nuns in India. This text was received to us in translation and therefore one finds a definitive imprint of linguistic, socio cultural and economic factors in the multiple translations. To begin with, the text has been received to us in translation as it was composed in various Indian vernaculars or *Prakrit* and reworked into *Pali* by the Buddhist monk *Dhammapala*. This text is central to the Buddhist *Theravada* cannon, and John Ross and Palihawadna calls it ‘a religious work, meant to inculcate a set of religious and ethical values and a certain manner of perception of life and its problems and solutions’. It is contained in a section of the of the book *Khuddaka Nikkaya* of the *Suttapitakas*. The latest translation was by Charles Hallisey, a professor of Harvard, published by Murthy Classics in 2015.

The trajectory of translation from the “original” to the “modern” versions, linguistic significations gradually transition with the change of socio-political currency. For instance, one translation to the other shows the shifting trends of beauty as translators change color of the eyes of the nuns from blue to black, conch shells to mother of pearls to elephant tusks and fallen hair to a neater transcreation of hair tied with a bunch of pins. Among her three translations, Catherine Rhys Davis in 1909 omitted Buddha completely in her first translated version of the *Therigatha* and replaced him with the word rune; and then in the next two subsequent translations added Buddha to her works dated in 1913. Rune is the letter of an ancient Germanic alphabet of mysterious or magical origin, it is also a divinatory symbol. This shift is pertinent in her next two translations because the meaning and significance of the Buddha to a rune and back to Buddha shifts with an understanding of political power. The later day translation coincided with the idea of identity and agency in Europe as it was undergoing the suffragette movement and being an European woman made her aware of the weight of the epithet ‘Buddha’. She also reversed the order of translation as she preferred to translate the songs of the nuns before the translated the *Theragatha*, the anthology of the monks. She overturned the aspersions caused on female authorship of the *Therigatha* by the German translator KE Neumann. The translation thereof became a political ground where she showcased her comprehension of representation, identity and agency of the words used and its signification.

Hence, translating masterpieces of Indian literature comes with its own challenges, as translation is a political weapon to be utilized in terms of knowledge dissemination. Translation interface between source language and target language,

and it is not a politically innocent activity. The very choice of books from source language for translation and the selection of target language in which translation will take place are always a politically motivated space. Translation opens new possibilities of negotiations between content, art forms and existing methods of storytelling because of the diverse discursive practices emanate through transformations with time and context. The perception of “truth” or “exactness” creates distinct normative structures which gives way to politics of hegemony and is eventually used to discriminate texts and culture.

As soon as we look at the term masterpieces, we not only politicize the text, but also the language and the subsequent translation therein. A prime example of this process can be seen in a legend that is usually associated with Gunadhya’s *Brihatkatha*. *Gunadhya*, who was an ancient poet of high merit. He was the author of a text in *Paishachi* language, a dialect once spoken in North-Western India in Kashmir. When *Gunadhya*’s *Brihatkatha* in *Paishachi* language was written in 7–8 century A.D., Sanskrit was still the language of power, scholarship and arrogance in India. When *Gunadhya* presented the manuscript to scholars, they rejected it outright since it was not written in Sanskrit. In response to this humiliating insult, *Gunadhya* took the extreme step of burning the manuscript.

However, *Somadeva*, a distinguished scholar of Sanskrit, was able to rescue one-seventh of the manuscript by persuading *Gunadhya* not to burn the complete work. This portion (2400 *slokas*) of the recovered manuscript was translated into Sanskrit by *Somadeva* as the *Kathasaritsagara*. Later, *Kshemendra*, another very distinguished scholar of Sanskrit also translated the extant manuscript (in 7500 Sanskrit verses: *slokas*) as the *Brihatkathamajari*. In fact, *Somadeva*’s work was the first book translated into Sanskrit from any other Indian languages.

In the light of the above argument, the present paper questions the hegemony and veracity of both preferring one text over another and one language over the next as the preferred language of translation. As language defines what it is thought to be an Indian, an Uzbek or a Russian, therefore it can be assumed that language is fluid and can be used as a means for both knowledge dissemination and debate, therefore an exclusive attitude about language, the canon, and the periphery, and furthermore the privilege of the speakers and their master narrative may prove to be reductive. It also runs the risk of erasure as much is lost and gained in the translation process. Texts are fluid and free spaces and to categorise them for translation process may tend to erase lesser-known language and literature. For instance, although Uzbekistan was known for its art and culture, and many important texts that have originated here

have changed the face of the world history. However, much of it has remained dark and limited to except themasterpieces of Alisher Navoi outside Uzbekistan. For instance, although, *Khojji Nassiruddin* is a well-loved heroic motif, hehas remained relegated to comic books. The world has not et heard of the oral histories of war, love, and life of Uzbekistan as a part of global archives where the debate is et to initiate about a life before and after Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.

The continuous and innovative strategies of translationenable its relevance, and the inclusion of various writers all over the world to create a plethora of texts and a delicious smorgasbord to its readers. Translations establishes a global dimension to works that are ungeard of and are relegated to the periphery. The process and focus of translation as transcreationremakes texts a part of the world community at large and part of world literature. Tagore’s concept of *Visva Sahitya* and Goethe’s conceptualisation of *Weltliteratur* was based on the mutual literary exchange between nations and cultures. Therefore, the comprehension of texts embedded in multiple experiences and histories make an interesting engendering ground for knowledge and culture.

This argument also brings one to ponder over the role and functionof intermediaries in advancing a transformational process whereby new spaces maybe discovered using technology. Masterpieces of literature fare in markets better due to their greater means and outreach. Translations in English of well-known masterpieces serve as collectibles as they transform as attractive coffee table decorative piecesmarketing them with comparatively higher prices and making them accessible. Therefore, as scholars and academicians, as avid practitioners of translation and translation studies, it is upon us to look ahead and actively engage with transgression of cultural borders as well as connectivity with one’s own literary and cultural heritage. The process can initiate with treatment of translation studies as a method and progresses as an entanglement with history and popular culture to remain diverse and inclusive in our purposes. To sum up, this paper works its way to bring translation studies and translations on the same page with its counterparts and draw it away from the Eurocentric cannon-ism. Through this process of mutual exchange, the world literature may flourish and mutually renew and grow to innovative interpretations and continuations.

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