UNIT 4 ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURE

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you to a discussion on English translation of Indian literature in general and will focus on its aims, its present status, the major issues it raises, and the linguistic and cultural problems it presents, with the help of concrete examples.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Translation is as old as creative writing itself. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, named after the legendary king of Sumerian city state of Uruk in Mesopotamia and considered among the oldest known literary works, may well have been read by the early authors of the *Bible* and of the *Iliad in their own languages*. Parts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, have been found in translations into several Asiatic languages of the second millennium BCE. However, translation has not always enjoyed the status that it is coming to enjoy now. In the West the original seems to have been valorized over the translated version. Ramchandra Sharma, the well-known Kannada poet and translator from Kannada into English and vice versa, refers to Dante saying that ‘nothing that the Muses had touched can be carried over to another tongue without losing its savour and harmony’. In more recent times Nabokov called translation ‘a profanation of the dead’.
However, the original is not seen as superior to the translated text any more. Gabriel Garcia Marquez once openly conceded that the English translation of his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was certainly richer than its original in linguistic and semiotic qualities. Eugene Chen Eoyang, in the essay, “Translation as Enhancement” in his book *Borrowed Plumage: Polemical Essays on Translation*, quotes Alastair Reid to establish this point:

“In our time, we do have at least one instance when an author, far from denigrating the attempts to render him into other languages and assuming — like Frost — something must always be lost in translation, maintains the superiority of a translated version over his original. Speaking of Gregory Rabassa’s English translation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, according to Alastair Reid, “insists that he prefers the English translation to the original”....Garzia Marquez was not merely conceding equivalence between his original and Rabassa’s translation: he was insisting that he preferred Rabassa’s version to his own”. (Eoyang, 128)

As for India, traditionally we have always accepted translation, or more accurately *adaptation* or reworkings of the same story as a creative activity. No one would dream of calling great poets like Kamban, Pampa, Kumara Vyasa, Ezhiuttachan, Tulisidas, Chaitanya and Sarala Das as translators because they have told the great epics in their respective regional languages, even developing these languages in the process. These pioneers were seen as great writers who wrote in the regional languages to reach out to the common people. Moreover, the kind of author-centric attention to the book, again something we inherited from the West, was not so much in vogue in ancient times — except perhaps on the occasions when poets and dramatists recited their poems (even composing extempore), or staged plays to get preference in royal patronage, as in the case of Kalidas and others in the court of King Vikramaditya of Ujjain.

Even so, translation in the limited sense in which we use it today has been viewed as a secondary activity in our country and translators have been considered inferior to creative writers. As a result, translated books don’t always carry the name of the translators on the title page.

Attitudes towards translation are, however, changing everywhere. As Susan Bassnett says, ‘interest in the field has never been stronger and the study of translation is taking place alongside an increase in its practice all over the world.’ (Bassnett:1) It has begun to be seen as ‘a fundamental act of human exchange’, and translation, she says, ‘has a crucial role to play in aiding understanding of an increasingly fragmented world’. From the periphery translation has moved to the centre and a whole new discipline of Translation Studies has emerged in universities. These studies now form part of literary and cultural theory. Colonialism, post-coloniality, literary history, semiology and deconstruction are seen linked to translation.

The new academic respectability that translation has achieved in the West has filtered down to the Indian academic world also. The new theoretical interest is evidenced by the publication of important books like Harish Trivedi’s *Cultural and Linguistic Problems in Translation* (1971), Sujit Mukherjee’s *Translation as Discovery and Other Essays on Indian Literature in English Translation* (1981) and Paul St. Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar’s edited volume *In Translation: Reflections, Refractions and Transformations* (2005). As a reviewer of the last mentioned book says, there is ‘a pervasive questioning of
translation’s role and function now. Simultaneously, translations in general and translations into English in particular are coming to be seen as inevitable in a multi-lingual country like ours. They are indeed the life breath of our being — our cultural, social and political life. [Ideally multi-lingualism should be seen not a problem but as part of our strength.] Translations of Indian literature into English are naturally an essential part of it.

Before we discuss the issues and problems arising out of translation further, we need to begin at the beginning and see what translation means etymologically.

4.2 WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Let’s begin with a dictionary definition of translation. According to The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary, translation is an act of turning words, sentences or books from one language into another, or expressing the sense of something in another form of words. Etymologically, “translation” is a “carrying across” or “bringing across”.

The Latin “translatio” derives from the perfect passive participle, “translatum”, of “transferre” (“to transfer” — from “trans,” “across” + “ferre,” “to carry” or “to bring”). This metaphor can be extended to mean carrying or transporting across the borders between one language and another, one country and another, one culture and the other. In a sense the metaphor of ‘carrying over’ holds the key to the efficacy or otherwise of translation. Several questions arise from it.

[Additionally, the Greek term for “translation,” “metaphrasis” (“a speaking across”), has supplied English with “metaphrase” (a “literal translation,” or “word-for-word” translation) — as contrasted with “paraphrase” (“a saying in other words,” from the Greek “ paraphrasis”).]

The all-important question perhaps is:

Does the translation carry the sense and the spirit of the original or the source text over to the new or the target text faithfully?

Other subsidiary questions follow.

1. How faithful is the translator? This raises the question of the aims of the translator? More specifically, it also raises the problem of finding the right equivalents.

2. Has the translator taken liberties with the source text? Has he attempted a free translation or a literal translation?

Related to these are some general questions: G.N. Devy in his essay ‘Translation Theory: An Indian Perspective’ suggests a whole list of them. Here are some of these questions. ‘Is translation possible?’ ‘What is a good translation?’ ‘Should a translator move from his mother tongue to the other language?’ ‘Can poetry be translated without losing its soul?’
Moreover, translation is seen as a cultural activity involving cultural codes. It is not an innocent activity and can be a highly manipulative exercise, particularly if the relationship between the source language culture and the target language culture is asymmetrical.

I shall not attempt full-scale answers to these questions and issues here. Translation Studies is a large field with numerous facets and the limited space available in the unit doesn’t permit me to deal with more than a few of them. But I want you to keep these questions in mind and ponder them. I shall only suggest that most of us who need translations would want to read translations that are faithful and that approximate to the original in letter and spirit as much as possible.

Here we shall glance briefly at the importance of translation of Indian literature in English and then go on to discuss linguistic and cultural problems and other issues related to translation. You will also get to read how some of the translators of texts included in the course have gone about their task of translation and how they have solved the difficulties that they faced.

### 4.3 Issues and Problems Involved in Translation: Some General Considerations

**a.** A major problem is of finding appropriate equivalents. Words and phrases or dialectical variants in the source language may not have any readymade corresponding expressions in the target language. Faithful translation becomes very difficult in such a case. For example, in *Indulekha*, the Malayalam novel by O. Chandu Menon, JWF Dummer the British translator, is at a loss to find the equivalence of the form of address a Shudra makes towards a Nambudiri Brahmin. The term used (on page 81, third paragraph, first line) “Thirumanassu” which literally means “Your Holy Self”, is plainly translated as “you”. However, in the fifth paragraph, it has become “Your reverence”. The variation is to be noted, as the translator becomes confused about the linguistic value of the term. (Chandu Menon, 81) In any case the flavour of a dialect, especially a rural dialect, is well nigh impossible to be translated into another language.

**b.** Strategies to forge alliances with sub-cultures in the culture of the target language may lend relevance to the translation and ensure its contemporaneity. This may aid in saving the text in the target language from being blandly dressed in a characterless, literal idiom. [For example, a Hindi or a Punjabi novel translated into English may retain traces of the original in the TL text which is aimed at the expatriate readers who might have come from Punjabi or the Hindi belt.] Likewise, political-religious subtexts in the SL text would need to be conserved in translation and this may often involve inventing similar subtexts in the translated texts. This is precisely what O.V. Vijayan didn’t do, while translating ‘Rawthers’ and ‘Ezhavas’ in the SL text as ‘Muslims’ and ‘Hindus’ in the TL text.

**c.** Translation is not an innocent activity and can be used to tilt the translated text in favour of the powerful. According to Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi:
"Translation does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems". (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, 1-18.)

In other words, if the translator is 'a creative artist who ensures the survival of writing across time and space', it can also be used as an instrument of domination where there is inequality of power relations between the source culture and the target culture. If translation is taking place between the language of the colonizer and the language of the colonized, there would be the question of hegemony involved. That is, the colonial master will take liberties with the original text to suit the purposes of the readers in the more 'powerful' language — the language of the colonial master. Then, when the colony gains independence and the colonial master physically leaves the country, the language of the colonizer lingers behind. What happens to that language and its literature, and their influence on the life and thinking of the people of the erstwhile colony, along with a myriad of other lingering traces of the colonial rule in various spheres of life, can be described as post-coloniality. Linguistic and cultural problems thrown up by translation of a literary text are to be seen in the context of such a complex situation.

**d)** Literary translation in a post-colonial context poses specific challenges. I have already explained what post-coloniality means. In the first place, literary translation in a post-colonial context poses specific challenges. I have already explained above what post-coloniality means. In the first place, there is the danger of a translated text getting appropriated by the target language culture as its own. An explanation of what appropriation is, becomes relevant here. In the theory of appropriation, it is assumed that if one should benefit from something, someone, somewhere else must suffer a corresponding loss.

"Indeed, the theory of appropriation is a much more attractive proposition than the ageing theory of progress, which tells us that civilization, despite its temporary lapses, tends towards a final goal—an earthly paradise, a New Jerusalem, or a perfect association of free individuals....The theory of appropriation resuscitates a clear vision of reality and a belief in binary oppositions, since it assumes that if there is a gain, there must be a concomitant loss" (Kuhlwczak, 1990: 119).

The ruthlessness inherent in the process is lost sight of by the beneficiary, as in all capitalist/imperialist set-ups. An example is provided below from JWF Dumergue's translation of O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*:

On page 60, paragraph four of the translated text we find, "As soon as the meal was over, Govinda Panikar, taking his son inside the house, embraced him and, kissing his head, said...."

This is how it goes in the original: "As soon as lunch was over, Govinda Panikar called his son into the interior of the house, sat him down on his lap
and kissed him on the crown of his head (translation mine)’). In the place of this expression of affection a father has for a son typical in our culture, the purely western ‘embrace’ comes in. While Dumergue seems to be shy to place Madhavan, a grown up young man, in his father’s lap, he doesn’t mind an embrace. Obviously, the translator being an Englishman, a colonial administrator, did a free translation, appropriating the scene from its original description, rendering it suitable for the consumption of the target language readership.

This leaves the translator from a language which is hegemony-wise in a secondary position, with the need to maintain a balance between ensuring communicability on the one hand and resisting cultural appropriation on the other.

c) Questions of free translation versus literal translation also are relevant. A free translation takes place when the translator takes off from the original and creates a free version in the Target Language, without caring much for equivalent expression of the original in the translated text. A literal translation happens when the translator, with a legalistic bend of mind as it were, does something like an audit of the equivalences of expression of the original while rendering them into the target language, without bringing in aesthetic considerations. [The worst case of literal translation is ‘rank-bound’ translation.] For example, Narayana Menon, in his translation of Thakazhi’s Chemmeen, has resorted to this practice. Pareekkutty, Karuthamma’s paramour, in one instance, calls her ‘Ente Ponninkudamee!’ which literally means, ‘O my pot of gold!’ and that is exactly how Narayana Menon’s translation goes! A common-sense translation of the expression could have been, “O my sweet-heart!” or something similar. Literal translation may pose problems of communication to the readers of the target language as seen here. How can a lover call his sweet-heart a pot of gold? Such literalness needs to be guarded against.

There is another practice at work — to retain in an English translation [from Malayalam fiction in this case], kinship terms like Achhan, Amma, Chettan, Chechy, etc., names of food items like dosa, idli, sambar, appam, etc., forms of address like Achhaal, Ammee!, Chettaal, Chechee! and many such expressions. A translated text full of such expressions cannot easily be appropriated. On the other hand, however, however, free translation may facilitate comprehension on the part of the target language readers to understand the work; but this understanding would be possible only in their own terms, as they would like to read and experience things. For example, reading the TL text of Indulekha, the average British reader will imagine a Cupid, an out-dated Greek god, in the place of the ever-present Kamadeva of our own mythology, when a free translation of the latter is done as the former. (Illustrations involving the same terms are provided later in greater detail). Authorial authority could be usurped here. What the original author intends is sabotaged in the process. There is a need to interrogate these processes in relation to certain aspects of cultural politics.

f) We need to use Indian English. The choice of the variety of the target language is an important factor in the post-colonial context. If an Indian writes a novel about India and Indian ethos now, using British English, it would look as if the writer is trying to put the clock back.
The English language that has developed in India, soaked in our culture, is a distinct language. Sahitya Akademi, the National Academy of Letters of India, considers this English an Indian language and has included literature written in it for awards as for all other regional languages. Raja Rao (d. 2006) pleaded for writing in Indian English in his introduction to his novel Kanthapura (1938). Much the same holds good for translation of Indian literature into English.

g) Erratic use of power by the translator. Question of the misuse of power by the translator is another important issue. In the first place, the translator can subvert authorial authority, especially in a free translation. What the original author accomplishes in the text in the source language can be changed into something different in the text in the target language, through the intervention of the target language and culture. The translator also becomes the ultimate authority who decides what the reader of the text in the target language should read. It is possible that the translator may resort to suppression, partial elimination or misinterpretation of elements or aspects of texts in the source language. Attempts on the part of the original author to get to the reader of the text in the target language, as illustrated in Milan Kundera’s Introduction to the translation of his novel The Joke would need to be studied. This would take us to the questions of authenticity and authorial authority over the text in the target language.

These are some of the theoretical and practical issues involved in translation in a post-colonial context in the Indian situation.

4.4 IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURE

The English language has a history of more than three centuries in our country. After the British obtained overall control of India, their language naturally became the language of power and governance, and acquired the status of a ‘must learn’ language. ‘The Bengali Renaissance’ that began in the mid-eighteenth century, the first sign of modernity in this country, was singularly the result of English education of the ‘natives’. One of the earliest Malayalam novels, Indulekha by O. Chandu Menon, has, as one of its objectives, the ‘propagation’ of English education among the common people. to accelerate the forces of modernity in society. There would be many other examples for this in other Indian languages. In a country where we speak hundreds of languages, and where the national academy of letters. Sahitya Akademi, has recognized 24 major language literatures, and several more marginal and tribal language literatures, the need of a link language is obvious. When the British were in power in India, English became the natural choice as a language that was commonly used all over India for higher education and also as a fashionable means of communication among the upper classes. Once again, to fall back upon Malayalam literature for an example, it is interesting to know that great writers and poets of the renaissance period like C.V. Raman Pillai, O. Chandu Menon, Kerala Varma Valiya Koilthampuran, Kumaran Asan and even modern poets like Changampuzha who held their mother tongue close to their heart, conducted their personal
correspondence mostly in English! Even after the British left India, the language has remained in power. Now, with the advent of modernization and liberalization, and the spread of the Internet, English has become the international lingua franca, wielding enormous power.

We are a multilingual country who have grown up with at least three languages, one of them being compulsory English and can easily access the literatures of other regions of the country through translation. Translation of our literatures into English will make available to us a body of literature which is truly Indian. Students in our schools, colleges and universities will be able to study English as a language, while the literature part of it will remain Indian. A majority of universities in the country still keep English literature from the time of Chaucer to the Twentieth Century as a compulsory part of their curriculum for Honours and post-graduate studies. This arrangement makes it obligatory for our students to study British literature at great length, while they get hardly any opportunity to study Indian literature in English translation. If translation of Indian literature takes place on an adequate scale, our students will be able to study English literature of the Indian variety.

No less important is the prospect of taking our literatures out to the rest of the world through translation. Besides facilitating access to Indian literature within the country, English translation will put our regional literature on the world literary map and our authors will get the due that has long been denied to them. With multinational publishing houses opening their offices in India, Indian literature in English translation has a better chance of reaching the West.

From the time Bhagavad-gita, translated by Charles Wilkins, was first published in 1785, Sir William Johns translated Kalidasa’s Shakuntala as Sacontala in 1789, through to the age of JWF Dumergue who translated Indulekha more than a hundred years ago, numerous western translators have translated Indian literature into English. William Radice who translated Tagore’s works, Ronald E. Asher who translated Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s Malayalam fiction into English, Gillian Wright, Rupert Snell, Philip Lutgendorf and others who translate from Hindi — the list lengthens.

There are a large number of Indian translators who are producing work of high standard. While more than a century-old translation of Indulekha and seven decades-old translation of Marthanda Varma will remain part of literary history, the new crop of translators uses the language of the present. This is true among others of this writer’s translation of Paul Zacharia’s short stories The Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories (1998), or of M. Mukundan’s novel Kesavante Vilaapangal (Kesavan’s Lamentations), or to offer another example, Vasanta Surya’s translation of Tamil short stories in the anthology, A Place to Live (2004).

I shall close this sub-section by pointing out that Indian literature in English translation was a major theme of the prestigious International Book Fair held at Frankfurt, Germany in 2006.

Finally, a word about the publishing scene in the country. Fortunately, over the last decade and half, after the introduction of economic liberalization, many multi-national publishers are taking a deep interest in Indian literature, mainly fiction, in English translation. Penguin India had been on the scene longer than the others, and has understandably published a lion’s share of
translation from regional language fiction. But houses like HarperCollins, Picador India, Random House, and others have set up shop and have ventured seriously into this competitive area. Traditional English publishers like Oxford University Press, Macmillan, Orient Longman and others as well as prestigious Indian organizations like Katha, Rupa & Co., India Ink, Roli Books, Permanent Black and so on, are also contributing considerably to the publication of Indian literature in English translation on a big scale.

The Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust, India have detailed book lists of Indian literature in English translation. As you can see, the entire scene is buzzing with translating activity. [Harish Trivedi’s “Introduction” to Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice, will come in handy, I suppose:

“The word for translation in Sanskrit, which persists unchanged in most of the modern Indian languages, is anuvad, which etymologically and primarily means, 'saying after or again...'. The underlying metaphor in the word anuvad is temporal (relating to time) — to say after, to repeat — rather than spatial (relating to space) as in the English/Latin word, 'translation' — (meaning) to carry across. (Thus,) those two source books of Indian culture, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were worked and reworked...with various shifts of emphasis and ideology through which gaps in the original were inevitably filled in, silences were rendered poignantly, accurate, and even some of the great heroes turned into villains and villains into heroes” (Trivedi: 1999). Literary translation, therefore, could be defined as a creative process in which the original is re-invested with life in the receiving language, within a degree of acceptability in the present context of that particular language.

Clarification of two terms becomes necessary at this point: Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL). Source Language is the language from which a text is translated. Target Language is that language into which the text is translated.]

4.5 PROBLEMS AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE TRANSLATION OF INDIAN LITERATURES INTO ENGLISH

There are broadly two types of problems involved in the translation of Indian literature into English — linguistic and cultural. Whereas linguistic problems may vary from case to case, cultural problems in the case of most of the Indian languages are similar.

4.5.1 Linguistic Problems

We shall deal with linguistic problems of translation first. The reason for this is that linguistic uniqueness is non-negotiable, and it leaves very little room for manoeuvre. Specific linguistic features of each language throw up the problem of untranslatability. In such cases, there are only limited options. Either, one must attempt a very free and approximate translation, which may be frowned upon in the surcharged cultural situation in the post-colonial scenario. The other option is to retain such linguistic approximations and provide explanatory notes or glossary. But this practice is being eschewed
nowadays. For example, in English translations of Latin American fiction, most of the culture-specific terms are retained, albeit italicised. However, of late, italicisation is also being done away with. For instance, in the latest English translations of modern Malayalam fiction, Malayalam and Sanskrit words are retained in the target language text without italicisation. This is one way of asserting the independence and power of the original text, without standing in awe of the target language culture by exhibiting modesty with the genuflection of italicisation or footnotes.

When it comes to kinship terms, forms of address, honorifics, or even slang, patois or dialect used in conversation, the hands of the translator are tied even more. So also, when unique idioms, phrases, adages, axioms, proverbs or, even an exclamation, onomatopoeic words or pun are to be translated, we find ourselves at a loss. Ronald E. Asher, the renowned linguist and translator, in his now famous notes on the translation of ‘Me Grandad ’ad an Elephant!: Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India, has dealt with the problem of finding acceptable equivalents. To quote him:

Cultural items, in the realms of dress and food, for example, do not always have a ready English equivalent. In some cases, we have had to make do with an approximate equivalent; in others we have seen no alternative to using a transliterated form (ignoring all diacritics that a pedant might properly require). All such forms are italicized on their first appearance, the only exceptions being words (not necessarily part of most English-speakers’ active vocabulary stock) that are to be found in the Oxford English Dictionary — such as ‘jambu’ and ‘pandal’.

A few remarks on specific items of dress maybe appropriate. One ‘bisexual’ garment is the cloth worn in Kerala to cover the lower half of the body. For this garment as worn by men we have used the reasonably familiar term ‘dhoti’, but, at the risk of seeming inconsistent, have used a romanisation of the Malayalam word, mundu, when it is described as being worn by a woman. (I would like to intervene here and point out that in the original Malayalam, mundu is the word used in both the cases, and ‘dhoti’ does not carry the equivalence, as mundu is a single-fold, smaller piece of cloth worn casually and not elaborately as a ‘dhoti’. Asher seems to have needlessly laboured to bring in the differentiation. I would have used mundu in both the cases and let the context do the differentiation).

...For the long-sleeved, long-waisted blouse worn by Muslim women in Kerala we have kept the Malayalam kuppayam, above all because it is an important feature of an incident in one of the stories (Ntuppakkoramentaarmu or ‘Me’ Grandad ’ad an Elephant!) that, in the view of some people, no self-respecting Muslim lady should wear a ‘blouse’, that is to say one with short sleeves and allowing a view of the wearer’s midriff.

...Part of the special flavour of Basheer’s stories for a Malayali reader lies in his use of bopa as a term of address and reference for ‘father’, and unna for ‘mother’. It has seemed to us best to keep this in almost all cases. We have been rather more sparing in the use of uppappa for ‘grandfather’ and have used English equivalents for all other terms but one, and this only in one story ....
A cultural feature of a different kind, but also in the field of the use of kinship terms, concerns the convention that one does not refer to one’s elders and betters in the family by name, but by the term of family relationship. We have followed this convention, even though it may on occasion seem strained....

One Muslim feature we have sacrificed entirely. The dialect of Malayalam spoken by Muslims (particularly those who have not had the opportunity to advance very far up the educational ladder) is quite distinct from other dialects, as regards pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. In the conversational passages of his stories, Basheer faithfully represents all aspects of this dialect. It would naturally have been possible to choose some ‘non-standard’ dialect of English for these dialogue sections. We decided against this for two reasons. Firstly, and more importantly, there is no specifically and exclusively Muslim dialect of English. The only choice, therefore, would have been some regional variety. Yet there would have been no motivation for choosing one such variety in preference to another, and whatever had been chosen would have had an entirely different flavour and impact from the original. ...It has nevertheless been necessary to make one or two exceptions to this rule in ‘Me Grandad ‘ad an Elephant’, since the better-educated Aisha tries to improve Kunjupattumma’s pronunciation along with teaching her to read and write. Hence we have had to indicate here and there by devices of spelling that certain characters in the story speak with an uneducated accent. We have followed the author in symbolising this in the title too.

One problem, however, we found admitted of no really satisfactory solution. In the last chapter of ‘Me Grandad ‘ad an Elephant’, we find some rude and uninhibited urchins claiming that the famous aama (‘elephant’) of the title was in reality no such thing, but a small insect for which the name in Malayalam is kuzhi-aama. The English equivalent is ‘ant-lion’, which regrettably, does not allow the necessary pun. We have made the best of a bad job by inventing the term ‘elephant-ant’. The reader is warned that, to the best of our knowledge, there is no such insect. One similar, and repeated, allusion to the elephant of the book’s title we have ignored. The name by which the heroine’s grandfather is known is Anamakkar, literally ‘Elephant Makkar’ (for, did he not own an elephant?). The relative clumsiness of this expression as compared with the Malayalam form spoke against its use...

I hope this rather long quote would adequately explain my postulations at the beginning of this section. There is something additional I would like to draw your attention to. Notice how Asher approaches the problem of style inherent in translation, especially from a source language that is from outside the language family to which the target language belongs. More specifically, Basheer’s use of the dialect of the uneducated Muslims, which determines his style in stories dealing with life in the Muslim community (not stories like his “Birthday”, on which you will read in one of the other Blocks on Short Stories. That story is about life in general, and is written in a neutral language), which Asher finds unique and non-negotiable. This is precisely where translation needs to retain the flavour of the original, and Asher manages to do that through strategies he has detailed in his note above.
In the course of the detailed analysis of sample texts, the present writer came across a number of instances of inaccurate translation. Inaccuracy can creep in owing to a variety of reasons ranging from the translator’s poor grasp of the Source Language — as in the case of Ronald E. Asher, in spite of having the services of a co-translator — to finding wrong equivalences. These also come under the heading of linguistic problems. The following instances illustrate this point:

1) On page nine, after Majid says Suhra is his “princess”, she says, “You’re joking”. It is meant to be an equivalent to “Po Cherka”, or “Go, boy”.

Majid replies to this incredulosity by swearing by his mother. “Upon my mother”, he says, and not “On my honour” as seen in the TL Text. “Upon my mother”, is an acceptable enough exclamation now in Indian English, in the context of swearing an oath. A few sentences later the same is repeated, in the scene where Majid pares Suhra’s nails. The following sentences: “On your honour?” and “On my honour”, are questions and answers of Suhra and Majid, respectively. However, “Upon your mother?” and “Upon my mother”, respectively, seems more accurate [translation mine].

2) On page 13, last paragraph, fifth line, there is a word “standing lamp” in the TL Text. It is the literal translation of “nilavilakku” or the traditional wick lamp made of brass. This is an unnecessary translation that looks awkward. The original word should have been retained and glossed. This has been the practice followed in numerous other cases, and has come to be accepted. This is a specific case of linguistic and cultural problem of translation combined together.

3) On page 14, second paragraph, in the fifth and sixth lines, there is the sentence: “A sensation like the tearing of the dried film of an areca-nut leaf”, describing how Majid experienced the act of circumcision. The translation of the Malayalam word, “paala” as “the dried film of areca-nut leaf” is erroneous. It should have been “leaf-spathe of the areca-palm”(translation mine). “Dried paala” is much thicker and harder than a “dried film”. This is a case of incorrect literal translation. Here also, the original word should have been retained and glossed. Again, we come across a linguistic/cultural problem.

4) In the second paragraph on the same page, describing Majid’s circumcision, the TL Text goes like this: “...rather like having a circle of ink at the end of the finger from the mouth of the bottle without actually touching the ink”. In the original it is like this: “Like red ink smeared around the tip of the finger when it is tightly inside the mouth of the ink bottle, without it getting dipped” (translation mine). The translation is incorrect.

5) On page 15, first paragraph, sixth line, we see the use of “bandy-legged”, which is not accurate. The Malayalam is “he walked with his legs wide apart”. “Bandy-legged” implies the curvature of the part of legs from knees down.

6) On page 20, in the big paragraph among the dialogues, we find the sentence, “...with appetites like the demon Vaka”. This is an incorrect
translation. “Bakantha”, the original Malayalam word used, is a corrupt word in the Muslim patois, equivalent to “vasantha” of the Christian patois, which means “pestilence”. “Save us from Panjam, pada, vasantha…. (famine, wars, and pestilence)” was a stock prayer of grannies in the Syrian Christian community.

7) In the story ‘Me Grandad ‘ad an Elephant!’, on page 59, and elsewhere, the Islamic way of naming the Old Testament characters, as “Adam Nabi, Ouvah Bibi, Nooh, Ibrahim, Dawood, Moosa, Eesa”, etc., has been anglicized as “Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus” etc., which makes them appear out of character. Again, on the same page, in the last but one paragraph, the name of the angel “Gabriel” is used in the Biblical way, rather than the Koranic, “Jibrel” used in the SL Text. These names in the original should have been retained, if not for anything else, at least for the “exotic effect” Asher refers to this in the “Introduction”.

8) On page 66, first paragraph, eighth line, “Not a trace of the heavens or the earth will remain,” runs like this in the original: “The solar system and the cosmos...nothing will remain”. Basheer’s is a very specific and modern expression, whereas the translator has fudged it through the mystifying generalisation, “heavens or the earth”.

9) On page 142, the word “banana” is used a couple of times, as equivalent of “njalippoovan pazham” which is essentially “plantain” and not “banana”. In the Kerala context, “banana” solely means the big, “ethappazham”.

10) On page 149, in the paragraph that comes after the conversation part in Chapter Two, there is the expression, “Did you see it piddle! Did you see it piddle!”

This is a gross mistake. The original Malayalam expression is “Mullanathu kandilla” which means, “that with which he pees is not to be found”. What is described is not an enquiry into the act of piddling; it rather refers to the tool with which one pees! The goat had eaten up the front area of Abi’s shorts, because the child had put an appam (rice pancake) in his pocket, and the goat had smelled it and tried to grab at it. Then, the natural outcome will be the disappearance of the male member together with the fabric, imagines the child!

The lesson that could perhaps be drawn from this is that when no acceptable equivalents are available, we resort to the source language expressions and add an explanatory footnote.

4.5.2 Cultural Problems

i. Cultural Appropriation

The term ‘appropriation’ has already been explained above.

First of all, cultural appropriation by the hegemonic language and culture, happening uninterruptedly in the field of Indian fiction in English translation,
alongside the recent boom in Indian English fiction-writing, has to be interrogated. For example, O. Chandu Menon’s Malayalam novel *Indulekha*, (1890) almost the first novel in Malayalam, (the chronologically first novel is Appu Nedungadi’s *Kundaliata*, published in 1887 which is considered by leading critics as a non-starter, really), was translated by JWF Dumergue, who was Chandu Menon’s boss in the colonial government service, and published in 1890 with the primary intention of recording the rituals, customs and relationship patterns of educated Imperial subjects of Malabar, as also to provide entertainment for readers back home and to highlight the spreading of the message of English education. It may be noted that modern Malayalam fiction at its very inception was appropriated by the hegemonic power. Here, a bare summary of the story would be appropriate. Indulekha is a young aristocratic Nair lady, whose uncle took the initiative to give her English education, while the lucky ones among her peers would have become the wives of Nambudiris and the rest, the vast majority, would have become the wives of Nair men and borne them children. The English education gives her self-confidence, and she practices free-thinking and adopts an individualistic and rational kind of lifestyle. Hers is the first voice of women’s liberation in Malayalam fiction, and perhaps in the whole of modern Indian fiction as well. She falls in love with her cousin, Madhavan, also an English educated, modernized youth, who, though, retains elements of male chauvinism. Madhavan leaves for Madras (present-day Chennai) for higher studies. The separation proves to be vexing for the young couple. But to add fuel to the fire, the simple-minded uncle of Indulekha develops a misunderstanding about Madhavan and is hell-bent on marrying Indulekha off to a middle-aged, much-married, wealthy Nambudiri aristocrat. The scenes provided by the Nambudiri’s encounters with Indulekha, trying to woo her in his boorish way, and her rebuff of him, provide comic relief. Finally, the lovers are reunited, and all ends well. The virtues of English education, modernity, progress and so on are discussed at length in this novel.

When Dumergue translated the novel, the attractive narrative was retained, whereas the culture-specific and linguistic peculiarities were smoothened out, and defaced without even giving adequate explanatory notes or providing a glossary, with the express purpose of providing reading pleasure for the target language readership that had no idea about the culture of Kerala. Apart from the few examples already given elsewhere in this lesson, a few more are given below, to illustrate this point:

1) On page two, line one, the translation runs, “I will now tell my readers something of his character and person”. But in the original, the same line, literally is, [“Now, I’ll describe him briefly”. (translation mine.)]. The addition made by Dumergue is to be specially noted, as it is meant expressly for the target audience back home.

2) At the bottom of the same page, a sentence begins on the last but one line that reads, “His flowing locks, when loosened from the knot in which they were usually tied according to the Malayalee custom, hung down to his knees”. Literally the same sentence should read, [“If Madhavan’s body is to be measured, one can do so till his knees, with his extremely attractive long hair reaching down to that part of the body”. (translation mine)]. Addition and paraphrasing by the translator are to be taken note of as evidence of the imperial tone that characterizes the colonial times. Much more, Dumergue’s statement in his “Translator’s Preface” that he translated this novel out of
ethnographic concerns — to get to know more about the customs and behaviour patterns of the imperial subjects of Malabar, a district of the Madras Presidency — has to be taken into account. What he does here can be viewed also as a kind of report, when he mentions, "...according to Malayalae custom...". (p. 2).

3) On page 48, the first line begins: "My darling, my true, my only love..." However, in the original it is, "O my husband, the lord of my life...". It is obvious that when Chandu Menon says that the lovers had already performed antakkaravanaivivaham (marriage of their conscience) what he means is that for all practical purposes they had married each other spiritually, and thus, it was normal for Indulekha to call Madhavan her husband. But for Dumergue, whose legalistic understanding of the status of the relationship between the couple — that they are not legally married — must have inhibited him from using the word, "husband" when, in actual fact, the Malayalam word, "bharthavu" has only one meaning, that is, "husband". Later in the novel, on page 357 in the last paragraph, ninth line, the same word is properly translated as "husband," in the place where Indulekha shouts the word in terror, in the aftermath of a nightmare. Again, the fact that Indulekha had called out "my husband", is reiterated by her mother on page 359, line ten, and the same is confirmed, explained and defended by Indulekha, elaborately in the paragraph that follows, on the lines of the argument the present writer has already put forward. [The translator has ignored all these "husbands".] This is again a case of the administrator taking over from the translator explaining the technicality of the relationship to the TL readership. It also shows the level of insensitivity of the translator to the cultural mores of a society [he had quite successfully merged into] as a colonial administrator.

The arbitrariness involved in the whole exercise is so symptomatic of the colonial times that Anitha Devasia and Susie Tharu made the following formulations about it:

"The result is a fluent and eminently readable translation, one that does not seem like a translation at all. But it is also a translation that rewrites its original into the dominant (and therefore also transparent) discourse of the target-language, providing the target language reader with the pleasure of recognizing his or her own culture in the foreign text and feeling at home in another history and another culture. Such translations obviously domesticate the foreign text, obscuring differences of history, politics, intertextuality, context etc...In fact Dumergue's 'cultured and broadminded' (we are citing T.C. Shankara Menon from his Preface to the 1965 reissue of Dumergue's translation) judgment of Indulekha as a 'well-told, pleasing love-story' that was also 'a faithful, fascinating picture of life in Malabar...not only interesting but also useful to administrators and historians' become both the basis of his translation practice and of the canonisation of the original. The translation displaces the original as it establishes the reading in which Indulekha is rendered intelligible and of value, and circulated canonically in Malayalam — and world — literature (Devasia and Tharu, 1997: 74-75)". If the above is not a plain description of appropriation, what is?

The post-colonial experience urges to assert the nation's identity, as we have seen ever since we became aware of our nationhood. Beginning with the
"pride" the people of each language-based state of the Indian Union take in their own language and literature, and ending at language chauvinism, at times even virulent and violent, and crowning it all with the obsession of creating a "national language and literature", the Indian post-coloniality vis-à-vis language and literature is a very touchy subject. Yet, we have opened ourselves to the opportunities offered in the lands of the erstwhile colonisers, and the neo-colonisers (as the so-called masters of globalisation can be described) and are dazzled by their success and material riches. This has given birth to an ambivalent attitude towards the English language — at once one of hatred, being the language of the ex-colonial masters and of admiration, as the language of power that ensures success. The dutifully patriotic middle-class young man religiously speaks and writes Hindi, or the regional language, at the same time watching with envy and longing the lifestyle of the successful city-boy who has empowered himself with the English language. English, for Indians, had long ceased to be the language of the ex-colonisers, though; it was a language that went far beyond the pale of Anglo-Saxon ascendancy and ushered in the age of the unipolar world. If the Brown Sahib (or the Indian gentleman, bred in the English tradition and leading the intellectual and cultural life of an Englishman within India) was the earlier paradox, the MNC 'smart-guy' who mouths American English and dominates the play in all spheres is the latest phenomenon. The advent of the Internet brought with it, its own hegemony; English was re-consecrated as the international lingua franca, which empowers the individual. The 'tyranny of English' is already there on the scene; the number of people taking crash-courses in the language is increasing day by day. Globalisation practically became a game in which the masters and bookmakers controlled the play to their advantage. Free market became a free-play of market forces among unequal partners, the most powerful among them having all the say.

To look at it from a radical point of view, reflecting on the problems of translation of regional language literatures into English in this context resembles the meticulous cleaning, airtight packing and exporting of super-quality cashew or prawn. The hegemonic culture will get hold of all the best things from all parts of the world as Americans proudly tell any visitor to the United States. Our colonial past has provided us with a ready processing and packaging centre; we certainly have a way with our English and are quality conscious enough. Exporting our cultural items as commodities, or finished cultural products, has been happening before our very eyes; most of us have taken it as a mark of the level of success we have achieved. This longing for success and recognition abroad is seen all the more in the field of literature, especially fiction. Chemmeen is the most glaring example of this trend. The systematic omission in the TL Text, of whole sections and passages found in the original tempts one to question Narayana Menon's intentions in doing so. For, these omissions do not appear to be the result of oversight. There seems to be some design behind it, a definite pattern behind these deletions. About one third of the original text matter has thus been deleted, as ascertained by the present writer. Was it selective editing by some foreign editor? One is led to suspect that Narayana Menon has consciously made the omissions, or acquiesced with an editor's intervention, with an eye on target language sensibilities. The portions that are left out are, none of them, insignificant or superfluous. They certainly contribute substantially to creating Thakazhi's lyrical narrative style in the original. One is led to surmise that editing out the exuberantly romantic and lyrical elements from the narrative language of the original is clearly with a view to conform to the sensibilities of a western readership that appreciates a terse, subdued, narrative style. When one
analyzes the text in depth and in detail, comparing it with the original, one finds that the TL text of Chemmeen made available to the world is a highly manipulated, edited, doctored one, shorn of the local cultural specifics. Making the translation eminently readable and racy — at the cost of the narrative marvel of the original — through deletions, suppressions, and mutilations, Narayana Menon has played a major pioneering role in ‘packaging’ the novel for consumption by the Western reader. Some illustrations of this have already been given elsewhere in this lesson. To cite a few more:

1) After the last paragraph on page 14 that ends with the line, “He must not sing in her vicinity”, an entire paragraph has been omitted in the TL text. This paragraph is translated below: “Till two days ago, she flitted about animatedly like a butterfly. The changes that have come over her within these two days! She got things to sit down and think about. She began to understand herself more and more. Isn’t it something that adds gravity to life? She is being careful about herself. She must put each step forward cautiously. How can she then dash about as before? A man looked at her breast. That moment she became a woman (translation mine).

2) On page 87, towards the end of the page, a paragraph is missing in the translation. It is translated thus:

Karuthamma has spoken out all that was there to say. There is nothing more left in that history. But Chakki isn’t aware of it. If she did, what all a mother would have had to ask further? Or, has Chakki understood everything? A woman, even though she is a mother, may understand the course of her daughter’s love. And remain silent about it.

“My child, Mother will pay off that debt”.

“I know that Father won’t pay it”, (translation mine).

These illustrations depict the ethos of a rural community, which may not be of any interest to a ‘global’ reader. The style of the original was specific to the culture of the milieu in which the action takes place. Replacing it with an alien style (an imitation western style), is what Narayana Menon has attempted, through his omissions and deletions, to make it readily acceptable to the West. More explanations are provided in the section, “Questions of Power”, below.

The desire of the regional writers of fiction to get their works competently translated and published in English is understandable. This ‘urge for simple self-assertion’, as Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi call it, largely accounts for the translation boom in the country. But such publishing activities under the guise of the good old ideal of ‘universalism’, and solely with an eye on the market, will kill the soul of the creative works, unless translation is done in a bonafide manner.

Looking at the scene of literary translation into English after Independence that is heavily biased in favour of the hegemonic language, one gets the feeling that one has to necessarily strike a balance somewhere. There is nothing wrong with aspiring to get one’s works translated into English. But
when a writer begins to write with an eye on translatability, the originality is in danger of being lost. Appropriation of our literature as an exotic cultural product by the hegemonic western culture is placed in perspective in this backdrop. Cultural appropriation on the literary front becomes easy when we accept the idea of free translations shorn of all cultural contents, or at least, watered down to suit international taste-buds. Finding unequal equivalences in the target language (e.g. translating “Kamadeva” as “Cupid” as already referred to above) is a relevant illustration here.

This programme of appropriation had begun in this country very early in the colonial times, alongside the plundering of the riches. The foreign translators had translated the important texts found in the colony for a number of reasons that were mostly extra-literary, like ethnographical, anthropological or other interests. Almost all the translators believed in the superiority of their own language, and most of them thought the literatures they translated from were crude. What is happening now is a continuation of this process in many ways; whatever exotic fare is in demand abroad has to be processed to suit their taste; and whatever is thorny by way of linguistic and cultural specificities found in the SL Text, has to be removed!

Thus, we need to oppose cultural appropriation by the hegemonic language, English most vehemently. Although the process of translation was kept up during the colonial times through “the ideology of selective appropriation and cautious canonisation” as K. Satchidanandan puts it, (Satchidanandan, 1999: 172) we need no longer recognize the aforesaid process as a legitimate activity. In an era of commodification of culture, import and export of cultural products, homogenisation of all sources of human expression and a unipolar world presided over by a single superpower, identification of power relations in the realms of literature and culture on a realistic basis would help us put up stiff resistance to all that is dehumanising and anti-human in such projects.

Illustrations

1) In the first paragraph of Chapter One of the JWF Dumergue’s translation of O. Chandu Menon’s Malayalam novel Indulekha, the character Chathara Menon uses the word “Karanavan”, (meaning, “the head of the house”). However, in the third paragraph, for the same word, Kummini Amma, another character uses the expression “the head of the house”. Again, on page four, first line, Sankara Menon refers to the “aged head of the family” (as a translation of the expression). Further into the text, many similar expressions are used as equivalents for this particular term. Use of the word “Karanavan” should have been consistent throughout, since the word has already been explained in detail in a note at end of the book. A combination of linguistic and cultural problems is presented here; linguistic, because it is impossible to find the equivalent of the word “Karanavan” in English, as it is a unique expression in the Malayalam language; cultural, in the sense that “Karanavan” is particular to the matrilineal system of family, particular to the culture of Kerala’s Nairs.

2) On page 103, line fourteen, appears the question “Ullattil Panchu Menon, is it”? from Suri Nambudripad. Nothing could be more inaccurate or inappropriate in the place of the original, “Ullattil Panchuvo” which literally means, “Aren’t you Ullaattil Panchu?” When the caste appellation was not there in the original, the translator
did not have to bring that in. The reason is that a Nambudiri never calls a member of a lesser caste, by his caste name. A Nambudiri, in such cases, uses only the maiden name. Therefore, we encounter here a serious cultural problem of translation. This is also a clear case of appropriating the cultural code of the original, for the benefit of the target readership.

ii. Free Translation Leading to Appropriation

Free translation can also lead to appropriation of the text by the dominant language culture. The above example readily serves as an illustration for this too. The Malayalam novel *Marthanda Varma* (1891) of C.V. Raman Pillai translated into English by B.K. Menon, (1936) is the biggest extant example of free translation in the history of modern Malayalam fiction in English translation. In the case of novels, disturbing the architectonics of the original lays a great responsibility on the translator: that of supporting the roofstructure with his bare back, if he so much as dares to touch any one of the stone pillars. And that is exactly what B.K. Menon does in the case of the translation of *Marthanda Varma*. B.K. Menon drops entire sections of certain chapters from the original and adds fresh matter, to prove the political points of his own time. Moreover, he trashes the grand narrative style of C.V., replacing it with a style resembling that of a racy, contemporary thriller.

Illustrations

The translation of Sanskrit verses from *Shakuntala* that appear in the novel *Indulekha* is not provided in the original text. What is given is a transliteration in Malayalam. The original text follows the convention of quoting from Sanskrit as a matter of course, as is wont even now. (Something similar takes place in the “Translator’s Preface” of the novel in which two French words are quoted taking it for granted that the meaning of those words are ordinarily understood by the TL readers.) However, in the translated text, the Sanskrit stanzas are also given in translation, for arranging which the translator has had to take a lot of trouble. Although the verses read smoothly in English, it is a liberally free translation. For example, “Madana” is translated as “Cupid,” and the word is repeated throughout the TL text as an equivalent wherever words like “Madana” “Manmatha” “Maana” or “Kamadeva” are used. The later translators of classical or modern poetry into English have followed this example, and until recently, this abject subservience of English literature to Greek and Roman mythology used to be shamelessly aped by our translators (Some even now persist in this habit. This point will become clearer, too, when you read detailed illustrations provided in other sections below.) Free translation rubbing off the rough edges of the original for the benefit of the privileged target language reader who is in no position to understand the nuances of the original is evident here. [Certainly, true translation is possible only between unequal languages!]

One of the main points of contention among practitioners of literary translation is whether translation should be “free” or “literal”. Those who advocate “free translation” go to the extent of demanding “transcreation” of the SL text, completely abrogating authorial authority. Luckily, most of such texts which are subjected to mindless “transcreation” happen to be in the public domain, (where no author or his executor will come and bother the translator).
On the other hand, literal translation kills the soul of a poem or a story, because in any kind of imaginative writing, connotative meanings, echoes, innuendoes, dhwanis and so on are more relevant than the denotative meaning of words. What is called for is a creative translation. By far the sanest voice is that of the doyen of Indian translators, A.K. Ramanujan who while putting his thoughts beautifully, also expresses the dilemma of a translator:

"...a translator is an 'artist on oath'. He has a double allegiance, indeed several double allegiances. All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and making another, caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another, moving between two halves of one brain, he has to use both to get close to the 'originals'..... (Poems of Love and War, 296-7)"

On the other hand, literal translation is a virtue only in translating scientific treatises and factual prose.

The ideal approach to good translation is neither free, nor literal. It has to be a sensible mixture of the two, being faithful to the essence of the work of art at hand, and keeping closely in line with the artistic devices the original author has used, but never stooping to the legalistic, mechanical mode of literal equivalence.

4.5.3 Translators Can Be Arbitrary Too

The translator could also be erratic and assume more authority over the text than is due. He may arbitrarily suppress details in the original text; likewise, he may adapt, dilute or manipulate the structure of the original. The anxiety of the author over the fate of his work takes the form of authorial intervention, accusing the target language text of lack of authenticity. The author attempts to re-establish authorial authority over the target language text.

In such cases translation could be described as an act of subversion. The translator decides to unsettle the supremacy of the original text and literally dismantles it to create the target language text. What s/he has decided to retain in the target language text will remain and what s/he decides to drop will be dropped. Captivated by the autonomy enjoyed by the original author, the translator may be tempted to be present in the translated text, to lay claim to the text to the extent possible. As a practising literary translator over the last three decades, I have had occasion to notice this tendency among translators. This happens mostly in the cases of translations from regional languages, in which an original writer may not be in a position to compare the original with the TL text. Of course, some may rail at the translator for dropping certain portions from the source language text, or suppression of details, from the texts of their favourite writers. But, what of it? The original author has to grant her/his permission for the publication of the target language text provided s/he is still alive. Won't s/he safeguard her/his own interests? These are the common assumptions. But the reality is that most of the translators get away with what they do.

There are many translators engaged in free translation, subverting authorial authority. The translator places himself in a position of authority who decides what the target language reader should read. The possibility remains that the translator may suppress, eliminate partially or misrepresent the source
language text in a number of ways. The poor regional language author, who is not able to authoritatively pronounce a judgment on the quality of the translation may acquiesce, satisfied with the fact that the work is getting at last translated into English!

Narayana Menon's translation of Chemmeen comes in handy here as well, as an illustration. Thakazhi's voice was eliminated through the alteration brought about in the narrative pattern, by systematic deletion of typical passages of the author's exuberant style — repetitive and explicatory narration. — as opposed to the implied, subdued narrative style of the West, attempted at by Narayana Menon in his translation. If it was poetry that was translated thus, no one would let off the translator. Since Chemmeen was fiction, it was looked upon as a 'cultural product', a means of entertainment, to be packaged in the most attractive way; the omissions and commissions by the translator have escaped largely unnoticed and have not been commented upon. Here, the translator was clearly acting arbitrarily, or exercising his power to suit his own designs, of conforming to a style that suited the palate of the West. The end result is the affirmation of the cultural hegemony of the West, where the cultural product from the poor East, is processed and submitted for the former's consumption. Free translation, homogenization, cultural appropriation, questions of power and so on are intrinsically inter-related. The portions given below from Chemmeen amply illustrate this point:

1) After two paragraphs on page 15 there appears the sentence, "Why don't you go and stare at the women working at your curing yard?" In the original, it is, [Why don't you go and stare at the breasts and behinds of the women...". (translation mine) (p.17)] The deletion seems to be in deference of TL sensibility. Suppression of original material is to be noted here.

2) On page 49, towards the middle, a sizeable portion of the original has been deleted, which is given below in my translation:

"Whatever Chakki said was right. And she was right about saying what she said, in a cut and dried manner. But those words seemed to rip through Karuthamma's heart.

Walking some distance, Karuthamma looked back. Not wittingly; she cannot help looking back like that. As they reached home, that heart-piercing song began from the seashore.

Said Chakki: "Isn't that boy going to sleep today?"

Again, Chakki spoke, aiming at Karuthamma. "Somehow, you will have to be sent away from this seaside now".

There is an accusation implied in her mother's words. Her presence has brought trouble there; everyone has lost peace of mind. Unable to bear her sorrow and anger, Karuthamma said:

"What did I do?"

"Chakki didn't say a word. (p. 49)"
As I mentioned earlier, following a specific pattern of deletion, leading to the loss of about one-third of the original text, the translator has done away with culture-specific items from this ethnic novel which would be hard for the TL readers to understand. In other words, the translator has arbitrarily usurped the original author’s version of the novel, exercising inordinate power over it in the process of translation.

As more instances of the arbitrariness of the translator in his exercise of power over the original text, I am quoting the following from Marthanda Varma:

1) C.V. Raman Pillai opens the narrative in his novel Marthanda Varma, withholding the identity of the region. This is how the original opens, when literally translated: “The incidents described at the beginning of this story happened in a jungle tract”. (translation mine) C.V. has his own reasons for doing so. In fact, C.V’s narrative technique employed in this novel hinges on keeping the suspense on as long as possible. However, the translator, opens with the sentence: “The story opens in South India, in the heart of the vast jungle tract known as Panchavankadu, that stretched before Nagercoil...”. It would seem the translator is doing so with the express purpose of presenting the novel before a world readership, taking into account the kind of hegemonic role English has. The paragraph ends thus in the original, “The Nairs, who are keenly interested in hunting, have not even planned to attack this jungle stretch, owing to their concern for their own feet” (translation mine). But the translated text goes like this; “...secure from the molestations of shikaris, who, for more reasons than one, never dared to venture into the depths of that particular jungle spot...” The poor ‘Nairs’ have been needlessly replaced with the anonymous ‘shikaris’. It is an instance of free translation wreaking havoc.

2) The next paragraph opens with the statement of a universal truth in the original. However, the translation begins only after deleting the two sentences in which the above statement is couched. This is a needless deletion. The description of the moon in the translation is totally different from the original that reads: “Although the aforesaid jungle had been glowing with the touch of moonbeams in the first quarter of the night, ‘the full moon that rose with the colour of red sandstone,’ upon reaching the zenith, had turned pale, losing its complexion” (translation mine). The translated text reads, “A pale ghost moon rose above the bank of clouds and streaked the darkness below with silver”. This “infidelity” also has been committed needlessly, as the grandeur of C.V’s description is totally lost because of the free translation. The paragraph ends with C.V’s statement, “Let us find out what is that incident that has shattered the slumber of the birds and beasts of this jungle which people believed was the abode of Yakshis, ghosts and others evil spirits”. (translation mine) However, in the translated text, the paragraph ends thus: “Panchavankadu, which had witnessed thousands of cold-blooded crimes, seemed to be the abode of Evil Spirits that wander about in the silent watches of the night in a dismembered state thirsting for human blood”. Certainly, this is a case of the translator trying to improve upon the original author’s techniques, in an unwarranted manner, floating a plea of free translation. In spite of the translator’s protestations, we fail to see the necessity for such distortions, effacing C.V’s narrative techniques in
the process, except that the translator is exercising unnecessary power over the text of the defenceless author who is dead and departed.

3) There is yet another illustration, this time from drama. Omcherry’s Malayalam play *Prakalvam* is a well-known drama text that has bagged Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. Written more than four decades ago, the play deals with the nuclear arms race and the impending doom of the human race in an atomic holocaust, and remains prophetic even today. This play was subjected to a free translation by Paul Jacob, entitled *The Flood*, thirty-three years ago, in July 1973. However, the present writer translated the play in 2004 under the title, *The Deluge*. It is interesting to note the wide variations that appear in *The Flood*. The latter translation shows that there was no necessity to resort to free translation and that translators sometimes use their power arbitrarily. “The Lord’s Prayer” is a standard Christian prayer that appears in the New Testament of the Bible, as taught by Jesus to his disciples. Omcherry told me he used that prayer in the original, as it appears in the old Malayalam Bible of the Syro-Malabar Catholics, edited by K. Ni. Mu. Sa. Manikathanar. I have translated the same faithfully, as below:

“Our Father who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name;
Thy Kingdom come;
Thy will
Be done on earth as in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;
For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory: Amen”.

The only special effects I gave were by adding the archaic forms, “Thy” “Thine” etc., in keeping with the solemnity of the Bible prose.

However, Paul Jacob’s free translation runs thus:

Our Father that is in Heaven
May your name be renowned
Your government established
Your laws carried out
Here as elsewhere.
Give us what we need
And forgive us our greed
As we forgive those who feed upon us.
Don’t let us be misled
But save us from the irrevocable.
For, yours is the government.
The strength, and the greatness, always.

As you can see, both the versions vary violently; but the reason why Paul Jacob resorted to this kind of mutilation in the name of free translation, cannot be easily comprehended. There are many such instances in *The Flood*.

This shows the arbitrariness with which the translator sometimes use power over the original text.
4.5.4 Authors as Translators

What happens when an author comes out to translate his own text? We begin with the example of Milan Kundera’s The Joke. It will be useful to give a brief summary of the publication of the book.

When the first version of The Joke translated by David Hamblyn and Oliver Stallybrass was published in London in 1969, Kundera was amazed to find that he could not recognize the book at all. It was so different from the original and was full of deletions and omissions, even surpassing the handiwork of the communist censors in Kundera’s country, Czechoslovakia. As he was unable to reach the translators and demand full rectification of the damage done, owing to the restrictions of the dictatorship imposed on him, he had to be content with publishing a letter of protest in the Times Literary Supplement, which resulted in a revised, complete version of the book being published by Penguin Books in 1970. This text too was full of free translation, especially in the matter of punctuations, breaking up one long, “infinite” sentence in the original, into several small sentences.

Before the Penguin version appeared, however, another version had been published in America a year earlier, by Coward-McCann in New York, based on the Hamblyn-Stallybrass translation. In this translation, the chapter-sequence was retained, but the entire matter was curtailed in a planned manner. All the protest telegrams Kundera sent to the American publisher went unanswered. In 1982, the fourth version of the novel appeared from Harper & Row. Kundera himself had selected the translator, Michael Henry Heim, a young American professor of Slavic Studies, who had faithfully translated and published two chapters which the translators had omitted from the first version. However, when Heim did the full translation, he too took so much of freedom that Kundera called it “translation-adaptation”. Having been fed up by four abortive attempts, Kundera sat down together with Aaron Asher of Harper & Row and the fifth and final version was on its way! This process is described below:

“On enlarged photocopies of the fourth version, I entered word-for-word translations of my original, either in English or in French, wherever I thought it necessary. The changes grew more numerous, and soon I realized that, based on that fourth version, a new, fifth version was taking shape. In Heim’s translation there are, of course, a great many faithful renderings and good formulations; these naturally were retained, along with many fine solutions from the Hamblyn-Stallybrass translation. I sent my work in regular installments to Aaron, who created an English-language version from these disparate elements and sent it to me for final correction and approval. (Kundera, 1992: x)”

It has to be remarked here that this edition of the novel does not carry any credit line indicating the translator’s name. It appears as if Kundera had appropriated back his novel from all the four previous “unfaithful” translations!

Although not as disillusioned with his translators as Milan Kundera was, Paul Zacharia is known to the present researcher as intervening in the texts of his stories in English translation. Says Paul Zacharia in the “Author’s Note” of his The Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories, translated by the
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present writer and the author. "My interventions in these translations have been limited to using the latitude available to a writer to cut, chop and trim his work to make them more presentable to another audience. My mother tongue so dear to me, can be boringly self-adoring and pompously verbose in hands like mine. Whatever problems that remain in these stories are neither hers nor the translator's but mine. (Zacharia, 1999: xi)"

Obviously, the author/translator is conscious of his different constituencies in Malayalam and English. What goes well with the Malayalam cultural ethos, the author/translator is editing out or modifying if they are not relevant to the target language readership. One may well ask whether what is good enough for Malayalee readers is not presentable to the English readers. However, when the author exercises his prerogative to check the translation against the original and grants his approval for the translated text only on condition of his full satisfaction, he ensures that authorial authority is maintained. Using this very same authorial authority, he decides that such and such portions of the story are no longer valid in the changed circumstances, and edits them away. Who is going to ask him? But the fact remains that the translated text has become different from the original text to that extent. This is certainly an act which would be deplored if it were done by a mere translator.

Another example of the same thing happening relates to O.V. Vijayan's *Legends of the Khasak* (1991). One of the most important happenings in the world of modern Malayalam fiction in English translation is the writer's translation of his own works. Take the case of *Legends of Khasak* that came out from Penguin India, in 1991, which went for a reprint in 1994. Vijayan's magnum opus that ushered in a new era in high modern Malayalam literature, had to wait for publication in English translation, for a number reasons; but the most important among them was the virtual untranslatability of the original. The local patois used in almost all the conversations in the novel, is beyond any translation. What comes out of an attempt at translation of these is a mere explanation of their meaning. Why did Vijayan translate this work, then? He does not answer this question anywhere, but does reveal the problems he encountered in the translation. He says in the "Author's Note" in the beginning of the book:

"It has been difficult translating this book. It is full of dense images of nature, old folk customs, evocations of caste differences, the rich play of dialects, all of which are difficult to render into English. So much has been lost, there was no way it could have been salvaged. I have tried to make the narrative depend on its own energy as-much as possible, and preserved the pace and rhythm of the original (Vijayan 1998, p.3)"

I have to intervene here and say that the narrative is not even a ghost of its original, not to speak of the rhythm. One has to view this claim as the fervent wish of the author.

However, critics have looked at the author/translator's efforts differently. There has been a persistent clamour bewailing the fact that Vijayan has been sanskritising his language to such a degree that in successive novels the language he uses becomes opaque and obtuse, with tonalities alien to Malayalam and more in the domain of the devbhasha. In other words, Vijayan has been obviously improving upon his own creative language and style.
silent acquiescence of obscure cultural diktats. If he could be doing this to his own Malayalam, what would he not do in sprucing up his works in English translation? Observes P.P. Raveendran:

"...the motive behind Vijayan's choice (to be truer to the translator in him) cannot be far from the sentiments attributed to Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63), the legendary translator of Rubaiyat. Writing about Persian poetry in 1851 Fitzgerald stated: "It is an amusement for me to take what liberties I like with these Persians who, I think, are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really want a little Art to shapes them" (qtd. in Bassnett 1988, p.3). Vijayan has taken a great deal of liberties in translating Khasak, more indeed than what is generally allowed for by international copyright regulations. And it is possible to imagine that his reasons for taking those liberties were not greatly different from Fitzgerald's. The Malayalam original of Khasak after all needed "a little Art to shape it". For, by the time of Gurusagaram (1987) Vijayan had radically revised his concept of art embodied in Khasak in favour of a new poetics centred apparently on a monological imagination and a centrally controlled fictional landscape. The predominantly sanskritised diction of Gurusagaram is an index of this new and emerging landscape which Vijayan perfects in his translation in Legends.

"But in doing this, Vijayan was also taking the sensibility of the Malayalam novel back by several decades...He seems...to have retraced several steps backwards to scan the world from the expressive realist perspective of a Thakazhi or to go further back, from that of Chandu Menon....(Raveendran, IL 191-May-June 99: 184-185)"

Vijayan is considered as a fiction-writer who was so rooted in the rural culture of the environs of Palakkad that a village Thasaraak, which he turned into 'Khasak' in the novel, has retained its fictional identity, even at the cost of its original one. There are regular literary pilgrims visiting this village, going in search of particular spots and characters. Vijayan is still the presiding deity of that village, even more than a year after his death. The Vijayan who lived in Delhi was known as a cartoonist and political analyst who wrote incisively on international affairs as well as domestic policies. But he wrote his fiction only in Malayalam. So, when he himself translated his own works, it was rather the political analyst that took over the creative writer. One example will prove this. In the Malayalam original of Khasaakkinte Itthaasam there is a mention of Ezhavas (Hindus belonging to the palm-toddy-tapping community) and Rawthers (Muslims of Tamil origin, who were not regarded on par with the 'high-born' Muslims). In the English translation they became "Hindus" and "Muslims" respectively, letting them loose in the supercharged mainstream communal politics of India that got aggravated in the post-Babri Masjid era. He could very well have retained the original terms and glossed them. He didn't do it, for reasons best known to him. But the point is that, this violence done to the text resulted in violence perpetrated on sensibilities as became evident by criticisms like P.P. Raveendran's quoted above.

4.5.5 The Question is: Which English?

The story of the English translations of Indian creative texts begins with the Bhagavad-gita, by Charles Wilkins, first published in 1785, (the first-ever Indian great literature to be published in English translation) followed by Sàcontala, or the Fatal Ring: An Indian Drama, the translation of Abhijnanasakuntalam by William Jones in 1789. And the best of classical
Indian literature began to be translated and archived in the Asiatic Society set up by William Jones, establishing a new branch of learning, namely 'Indology'.

However, one cannot fail to observe that these translations were heavily anglicized, aimed at facilitating the reception of the translated text by the readers back in Britain. As observed earlier, even Indian translators of classical works followed the footsteps of the colonial masters. Here is a sample from M.C. Dutt’s translation of Kalidasas’ *Kumarasambhava*, translated as *The Birth of Kumara*.

‘Uma with red palms Shiva a wreath, of lotus flowers’ nice seeds made, Was about to give, he to take, loth to spurn favours displayed Cupid when fired fatal shaft, trace of love came, as well it might, Over hermit’s breast as the sea swells at rise of moon at night...’

This is the famous scene in which Kamadeva is about to be burned to ashes by the fire that darted forth from Shiva’s third eye. Let us analyze the lines from the beginning. Uma is shown as making a red palm-wreath, in keeping with western imagery of adorning the head of heroes with wreaths; but soon we find that it is with lotus seeds that the wreath is made, creating unnecessary confusion in the readers — all for keeping conformity with western tastes. Next, ‘loth to spurn favours displayed’ is an outright reproduction of classical English versification, using ‘the language of the centre’. Finally comes the word ‘Cupid’ instead of ‘Kamadeva,’ as cited more than once earlier in the lesson. ‘Cupid’ or Eros of Graeco-Roman mythology is not equivalent for ‘Kamadeva’, except that both are designated gods of love. The burning of Kamadeva represents Shiva’s victory over the senses, making him the ultimate ascetic. Cupid has no similar roles in mythology.

Now, consider the scene below, depicted in the celebrated Malayalam poet ONV Kurup’s *kaavya* titled *Ujjayini* which I translated into English, and compare it with the above passage:

“..................the god of love,
Shooting flower-darts at Shiva from hiding,
Hara whose mind deflects momentarily; and
Rati who weeps like a *kurari* bird, thinking of Mara
Burned to ashes in the shower of embers
From Shiva’s third eye in the middle of his brow”.
(Kurup, 2002. p.48)

You would find no attempt to dilute the very Indian ethos in these lines, and that they are perfectly intelligible to any discerning reader, as Sanskrit words like ‘Mara’ are retained in the original since such words are familiar now, especially through the Internet and Google search engine.

Now, in the context of the post-colonial experience, the question as to which English you are translating into becomes relevant. Is it the Queen’s English, of the erstwhile colonial establishment, the language of the centre, or Indian English, the language developed in the erstwhile colony, the language of the periphery, “english” (which is recognized by the National Academy of Letters, Sahitya Akademi, as one of the Indian languages, having at least a fledgling
literature to be nurtured and sustained?) As soon as this question is asked, one can readily answer it with another question: why should one go after an English spoken and written in far away England that is far removed now from the controlling power in this country? Why should one see English as the language spoken and written only in U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Australia, South Africa or elsewhere, and not in India? The language that remained in India after the colonizers left, has by now evolved into a medium that can easily accommodate Indian ethos; even the metaphors of the remotest rustic corners of this vast country, find their way into Indian English poetry, as is evidenced in poems by Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar or Jayanta Mahapatra. All the Vedas, Upanishads, almost all the Puranas, Itihasas, Sastras and Agamas, Kavyas and Nataks had already been translated into English, thanks to the indological explorations of the colonisers. So are most of the early, mediaeval, renaissance, and classical literatures of the regional languages. Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust, India, the two premier State-funded publishing establishments of the country have, between themselves, shared the bulk of such translations from regional literatures. Harish Trivedi and Susasn Bassnett have this to say on the subject:

"...translations from the various Indian languages into English, whether done by foreigners or by Indians themselves, have attained a hegemonic ascendency. The widely shared post-colonial wisdom on the subject is that the empire can translate back only into English, or into that lower or at least lower-case variety of it (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 8). To any counter-claims that literature especially with a post-colonial thrust is being written equally or even more abundantly in languages other than English, especially in countries such as India where only a small elite (variously estimated to constitute between 2 and 6 per cent of the population) knows any English, the usual sceptical western retort is: But show us — in English translation (Trivedi and Mukherjee (eds) 1996:239)...". "Meanwhile, however, the old business of translation as traffic between languages still goes on in the once-and-still colonised world, reflecting more acutely than ever before the asymmetrical power relationship between the local 'vernaculars' (i.e. the language of the slaves, etymologically speaking) and the one master-language of our post-colonial world, English (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999:10-13)".

There shouldn’t be any doubt whatsoever about the variety of English in which we have to translate our regional literatures. If we want to retain our cultural identity in the translations, we must translate in an English language that developed here. Learning the latest idiomatic English of Britain or America to translate into is as unwise as taking a crash-course in western culture of the present. In any case, translations so done in a foreign idiom will only qualify as export quality merchandise and will not pass for genuine cultural expression.

It must be noted here that all the problems described above, are not separate and confined to watertight compartments. They are, in fact, inter-related. Appropriation, free-translation, suppression of the original, deletion of inconvenient portions, authorial intervention, selection of the type of English to be used in translation and so on appear to be ultimately questions of power, and in the final analysis coalesce into the politics of translation, forming the bulk of cultural problems. Because, identity lies at the root of culture; every human being finds himself or herself either on this side or that side of a cultural fence. Questions of nationality develop from this stage. One of the primary aims of translation is, to provide passages of negotiation across such
fences. But who will pass first through such a passage, and in which direction, is a matter of precedence. The powerful will naturally pass through first, holding on to their preferences. The ideal situation would be where both parties can cross over peacefully, without jostling each other. But this remains just an ideal, in the real world of the present, a so-called ‘unipolar’ world.

If a neutral translation is the answer to this problem, then one can think of pure academics bringing about such a result. Ronald E. Asher’s translation of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s stories is the only case I have come across as a classic example of such a neutral translation.

4.6 TRANSLATIONS OF SOURCE TEXTS AS VIEWED FROM THE TRANSLATORS’ DESK

So far we have discussed issues related to English translation. We now give you first hand account of what some of the translators of the source texts have to say about their experiences of translation.

In an interview with Tutun Mukherjee, Girish Karnad shared his experiences of translating his plays into English. He said that he wrote his plays in Kannada and then translated them into English. His translations must be seen as approximation to the original. He said that he translated Taghlaq at the suggestion of Alyque Padamsee who wanted to stage it. When asked if he transformed/recreated his plays when he translated them into English, he conceded that translating from Kannada into English ‘required a lot of rewriting — yes, like transcreation’. The basic problem lay in his search for ‘appropriate cultural equivalents’. One aspect that he said he found problematic was rhetoric. ‘Every speech pattern resonates with connotative richness. In India, a man has only to open his mouth and his speech will give away his caste, his geographical origins, his background and economical status. I’ll take the example of Tale-danda. The original Kannada version presents a play of languages which reveals social inequalities. Naturally this aspect could not be conveyed in the English version’, (Tutun Mukherjee: 219)

He also agreed that dialects were quite impossible to be rendered intact through translation.

Ananth Murthy’s own novel Samskara was most ably translated by A.K. Ramanujan in 1976, some 11 years after its publication in Kannada in 1965. In his foreword, Ramanujan writes: ‘A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but also to translate a non-native reader into a native one’. (Samskara: A Critical Reader: 227). The novel has a very long glossary of local terms consisting of nearly 90 items used in the novel, which explain the numerous references to characters in Puranas and other old classics. This glossary is meant for the non-Kannada, Indian reader as well as for the non-Indian reader. Ramanujan calls this glossary ‘a confession of failures’. As Vanmala Vishwanatha says, “the English translation recreates the ambience of the Kannada text maintaining its defining quality of “an allegory rich in realistic detail”. (227). Harish Trivedi’s translation of Amrit Rai’s biography of his father Munshi Premchand is of an abridged version of the book. The proposal to translate it into English came from the publishers who gave the translator liberty to delete passage from it or to restore others to the original. Trivedi
calls it ‘a necessary privilege’ which he has used rarely and then chiefly to include brief descriptions of some of Premchand’s short stories. He has also rearranged some of the chapter divisions in the ‘interest of coherence and proportion within the present version’. A more important change relates to the choice of the title of the biography. Instead of the original title Munshi Premchand: Qalam ka Sipahi, he and Amrit Rai both chose Premchand: His Life and Times. The title ‘The Pen as the Sword’ was rejected as being ‘a little corny’. But if this is corny, the title finally chosen is cornier still. I wonder if they ever thought of ‘Soldier with a Pen’. Like A.K. Ramanujan’s glossary of 90-odd items to Sanskara, Trivedi has made a few additions to his translations: a Chronology, detailed entry on Premchand in the General Index, and the annotated Works of Premchand: A List and Index. All these are very welcome additions for they can only add to the reference value of the biography.

The question of title is important but at times a translator may be tempted to change the title. This is what happened with Afsar Ahmad’s story now titled ‘Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur’. The Bengali title was ‘Arthaheen Katha Balar Nirbharata’. It seems the writer isn’t particularly happy with the changed title. But its translator Chandana Dutta has had reasons of her own, though she doesn’t explain them in her Translator’s note. What she does in that piece instead is to focus on the theme of meaninglessness of life as a part of human life. This is what she says: ‘The title of the story, “Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachoor” uses three words which are very familiar and close to the Bengali heart. Individually, they convey sense; together they become ‘nonsense’. Their continuous chorus through the story forces us to look for their ‘purpose’. We are unable to dismiss them or their relevance. The narrator himself vacillates periods of no-sense and phases of lucidity. After all, he does not have the complete luxury of slipping into ‘meaninglessness’; the world awaits him — in the form of his wife, his daughter, the policeman, the friend’. From this one can guess that she chose the present title for its suggestiveness.

According to Chandana Dutta translation is a complex activity that works at several levels. Each translation, she says, involves a range of details which may not ultimately be seen on paper but which nevertheless contribute to the process. The process, she continues, becomes more complex when it involves the translation of a piece of fiction. She also rates translation as a creative work. She asserts that a translated short story is ‘something that is independent of its original’: ‘The same source story and the translated story must ultimately stand as two separate pieces of work. This is not to say that the translation should not ever reflect back to its original, or that the translator should erase every trace of that first piece, but it is a work on its own and this sense must be conveyed to all readers’.

‘As for notes or glossary, the English versions of the Bengali story ‘Salt’ by Mahashweta Devi and Oriya story ‘Tadpa’ by Gopinath Mohanty carry some notes or rather footnotes. There is no indication whether these additions have been made by the original authors or by the translators. The same holds good for Ismat Chughtai’s Urdu story ‘Tiny’s Granny’ in English translation.

It needs to be said that not all notes or explanations are given for the benefit of non-Indians. Indian readers unfamiliar with the cultural milieu would also welcome help on one occasion or the other. And we shouldn’t forget that even Shakespeare’s plays need glossary.
J.S. Rahi and Rita Chaudhri's translation of Haribhajan Singh's long poem *Tree and the Sage* has as many as 130 items of annotations provided at the end of the book. And a large number of these annotations are fairly full. Lakshmi Holmstrom's translation of Bama's autobiography *Karukku* too includes a page and half long glossary. But more important than that is Bama's extraordinary use of language. As the translator Lakshmi Holmstrom says, "Bama is doing something completely new in using demotic and the colloquial regularly, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words, and joins them differently, demanding a new and different pattern of reading". (Karukku: xi) Holmstrom adds: "Bama's work is not only breaking a mainstream aesthetic, but also proposing a new one which is integral to her politics". What is demanded of the translator and reader, is, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, a "surrender to the special call of the text". (xi) If a proof of the power of Bama's language was needed, it came from a novelist and translator Raji Narasimhan who said that the powerful language of the narrative was the one in common use among the Parayas, the lowest among the dalits. Unfortunately much of that power gets lost in the English translation.

The excerpt from *Manimahesh* was translated by Sanjukta Dasgupta. Though we don't have any comments by her, we have some very useful comments on the translation by the course unit writer, Nivedita Sen. The writer concedes that a translation can never be 'an exact replica of the text in the source language, particularly if it is translation from an Indian language to English'. It is, she says, 'vain to expect that the translation should convey without distortion all the colloquial expressions, ethnic words, use of proverbs and descriptions of customs and traditions that are there in the source language'. But of course the translation should 'read smoothly and convey the sense of what has been written in the source language'. Nivedita Sen then goes on to list the omissions and inaccuracies that have crept in the translated version.

This is how some of the translators of important texts in your course have viewed translations. What conclusion do we draw from the foregoing account? The only golden rule is that there is no golden rule, with one exception. We must always remember what A.K. Ramanujan has said — that a translation owes a double loyalty, to the target language as well as to the source language.

### 4.7 LET US SUM UP

Translation of our literature into English makes it accessible nationally and internationally. But this needs to be done on a non-hegemonic, equal basis, by way of cultural transference. K. Satchidanandan sums it up beautifully: "When a work in an Indian language is translated into English, it entails the representation of a regional culture for a more powerful national/Indian culture; when made available outside India, it involves representing a national culture for a still more powerful international culture. There is here an interplay of cross-cultural pride and prejudice when one world is represented for the other in translation. The practice of translation in post-colonial contexts has given form not only to discourses of domination, but also of resistance."
Translation theories so far have mostly been dominated by translations involving western culture. It is necessary to relocate the theory and practice of translation within the hitherto unexplored, Eastern cultural contexts. Translation activity needs to be examined as policy prioritisation, empowerment, enrichment, and culture learning within post-colonial contexts since cross-cultural relations are reconstituted not on an abstract transcultural universal of beauty, but on immediate encounters with other cultural systems. Translation is also a celebration of difference and a re-inventing of cultural identities. The choice of language signifies one’s position in the social reality, and the conflict of codes functions as a representation of linguistic diversity. Translation activity constructs cultural identity by reframing the boundaries of the sayable and changing the terms of affiliation” (Satchidanandan, 2003: 124-125).

Translation properly so called builds bridges between cultures and languages and a translator is ‘an intercultural mediator and interpreter”, as Susan Bassnett calls him. But translation has also come to be seen as a highly suspicious activity, particularly when the translation takes place between languages having an asymmetrical power relationship. That is why we have made a case for opposing cultural appropriation most vehemently. Although the process of translation was kept up during the colonial times through selective appropriation, we need no longer recognize this as a legitimate activity. In an era of commodification of culture, import and export of cultural products, homogenization of all sources of expression and a unipolar world presided over by a single superpower, identification of power relations in the realm of literature and culture on a realistic basis would help us put up stiff resistance to all that is dehumanizing and anti-human in such projects.

Those of you who have read English translations of Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, George Amado and Mario Vargas Llosa have probably noticed that Spanish, Portuguese and native Indian terms have been retained in the text, without even italicizing them Most of them do not use a glossary. And yet people all over the world read them and understand them. Such is the power of great literature. The necessity to retain the identity of the source language and culture cannot be illustrated in a better way.

### 4.8 ACTIVITIES

1. Identify a novel, or poem in your own mother tongue, which has an existing English translation. Pick out sample passages from the original and compare them with the corresponding English translation. Mark out differences, inconsistencies, if any, as shown above in the illustrations, and write a detailed note, describing your findings.

2. Select short stories, passages from novels, poetry or drama that appeal to you and translate them into English yourself.

### 4.9 GLOSSARY

**Semiology:** the study of signs and symbols, especially the relations between written or spoken signs and their references in the physical world or the world of ideas.
Deconstruction: a method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression.

Cultural codes: a set of conventions governing behaviour or activity in the sphere of culture.

Hegemony: leadership or dominance, especially by one state or social group over others.

Commodification: the process of turning something into a commodity, especially in the area of culture, like in the case of literature, music, dance, the fine arts etc.

Unipolar: the world order in which there is only one superpower, which serves as the sole pole around which all others operate, consenting implicitly to its hegemony.

Homogenization: making everything same or similar.

Indology: the academic study of the history, languages, and cultures of India of classical times, and now, the entire South Asia.

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. Define translation.
2. How is literary translation different from the translation of a factual text?
3. Based on the above lesson, what are the main problems faced by a present-day translator of a literary work in an Indian language into English?
4. What is appropriation?
5. How would you describe problems related to power in translation?
6. "Authors are not necessarily the best translators of their own works". Do you agree? Substantiate your view.
7. "While translating a creative work from an Indian Language into English, one must necessarily use Indian English". Do you agree? If so, why?
8. Outline the linguistic problems one may encounter while translating an Indian Language work into English.

4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS


Raman Pillai, C.V. Marthanda Varma. Trans. B.K. Menon. 1936. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, rpt. 1998 (relevant page numbers are enumerated in the body of the lesson)


