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## Translating the Untranslatable: The Politics of Language in the English Translation of *Yajnaseni*

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The recent development in the field of translation studies clearly shows the increasing nature of the role of translation in the discourse formation which is equally important for both the source culture and target culture. These translations sometimes act as a resistance to the dominant culture but sometimes they prove to be subversive for the marginalised culture. It is the use of language which determines the nature of the translation.

This article will investigate not only the role of English in translation, but also the function/impact of English translation of a doubly marginalised text both from the point of view of language and canon to the source culture. It would try to find out whether the English translation of an Oriya Novel *Yajnaseni* written by a woman is successful in foregrounding the marginalised i.e. voicing the woman, or, it is subversive to the very culture which produces the English translation. A comparative method involving the ST and the TT would be used to conduct the research.

### Introduction:

Language is the medium through which a text communicates to the society. Or in other words language expresses reality. However it also acts as a manipulative tool, and instrument of control and power: “any language use is a site for power relations” (Venuti, 1998:9). Power can undoubtedly be expressed through ideologies and ideologies are clearly linked to language because its use is the commonest form of behaviour. And over the period of times these ideologies are unquestionably canonized in the form of discourse. The relationship between these three issues may help people understand better how language contributes to the domination of some people by other.

Like other acts of writing, translation is also a form of communication, which belongs to a world of roles, values and ideas. This is especially true because translation is in itself an intently relational act, one which establishes connections between text and culture, between author and reader. Moreover translations, unlike the original works are always governed by ideological compulsions: “Creative art might owe its origin to purely aesthetic reason (the aesthetic principles may however be indirectly linked to social praxis), but the need of translation is more ideological than aesthetic.” (Dash, 2005: 149). And as it is the translator/translatress who codes, decodes the ST and (re)creates the TT, his/ her assumptions, world view, belief, values or in broader sense ‘ideology’ consciously or unconsciously is reflected in the translation. Ian Mason in his essay “Discourse, Ideology and Translation” (2009) says that the translation at various levels both semantic and lexical reflects the translator’s ideology whether consciously or unconsciously. His choice of word and arrangement (texture) of their texts may “cumulatively project variant discourses and thus point to different underlying ideologies” (2009:141). Thus the aims and impact of the works of translators take shape in interaction with this world.

This paper will investigate not only the role of English in translation, but also the function/impact of English translation of a doubly marginalised text both from the point of view of language and canon on the source culture. It would try to find out whether the English translation of an Oriya Novel *Yajnaseni* written by a woman is successful in foregrounding the marginalised i.e. voicing the woman, or, it is subversive to the very culture which produces the English translation. A comparative method involving the ST and the TT at para textual and textual level would be used to conduct the research.

*Yajnaseni* is an Odia novel written by Pratibha Ray. Though the text on the surface level has epic grandeur with the story of Draupadi of Mahabharata, however, there are other important facets which contribute to make the text a marginalised literature. First of all it is written in a language which is called oriental without any canonical significance. Secondly it is written by a woman and centred on a woman i.e. it is a fine presentation of the woman within Draupadi as she faces the various predicaments in her relationship with Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Krishna Hence the text concerned is doubly marginalised. It has been translated by Pradip Bhattacharya into English.

Since there is an unbridgeable gap between the language of the original and that of the translation it is imperative to discuss the two texts in a comparative framework to investigate whether the English translation has been successful in creating a marginal canon or not. At the same time this paper will also focus on the strategy used by the translator in translating the novel because translation strategy reflects the underlying ideology of the translator. In his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, (1995), Lawrence Venuti introduces the concept of 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating' translation. 'Domesticating translation' means "appropriation of the foreign ST and its adaptations to the TC norms and conventions (i.e. linguistic and or cultural conventions)"; 'Foreignizing translation' consists in "retaining some aspect of the foreignness of the original". Here he emphasizes "foreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethno criticism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism in the interest of democratic geopolitical relation" (1995:16).

Moreover if a text written by woman is translated by a man, then the translator's ideology intervenes the translating process doing ideological shifts in various level and making the final product a gendered translation back grounding the ideology of the woman author: "While translators by definition deal with a foreign text on levels of language, culture, and time, the male translator of a woman's text may well encounter a foreignness comprised of sexual difference that he ends up compounding. The language of the male translator is superimposed on the woman's narrative, creating inevitable gender-bending distortions." (1999:475) Such translations sometimes act as a subversive discourse rather than as resistance to the dominant culture. As Lotbinière-Harwood sees it, in such translation, "woman-centered meaning becomes a casualty of the translator's gendered linguistic conditioning," and there are "fascinating examples of damage done to women's bodies and meaning(s) by 'androcentric posture' translations" (1991: 107-108). Harwood implies that "men's translations of women's writing often betray an ignorance of the bio-physiological reality of female bodies" (1991: 108). Similarly Luise von Flotow has also pointed out that some male translators "simply do not see or do not understand certain slight differences that are important to the women writers they translate, or for the women characters." (2000: 33) Similarly Margaret A. Simons in "The Silencing of Simone De Beauvoir, Guess what is missing" (1983) shows how Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* is unfairly treated in Howard M. Parshley's English translation, where there are frequent and unindicted deletions. She says that the "cutting and editing" performed during the translation clearly carried

“marks of sexist authoring”. Parshley who "must have found women's history boring," for example, "deleted fully one-half of one chapter on [women's] history, one-fourth of another, and eliminated the names of 78 women," thus "distorting an important point in Beauvoir's analysis of women's historical oppression" and "obscuring Beauvoir's point that never in history have women been allowed the combination of independence and concrete opportunity that defines real freedom" (2007: 58-60). On the other hand, Parshley "was quite content to allow Beauvoir to go on at length about the superior advantages of man's situation and achievements" (2007: 62). Parshley's sexism is again proved when he "eliminated most of Beauvoir's quotations from the journals of Sophie Tolstoy, which provide her primary source of illustration for the 'annihilation' of woman in marriage" but "chose to include the entire quotation from an Edith Wharton novel about a young man's misgivings on the eve of his marriage" (2007: 62). The frequent deletions and mistranslations, as Simon sees it, "seriously undermine the integrity of de Beauvoir's analysis of such important topics as the American and European nineteenth century suffragette movements, and the development of socialist feminism in France" (2007: 57). Similarly the central concern of the feminist translation theories over the past few decades is to develop a model strategy that would address the problems of gender in translation. With the assumption that female and male translator translate differently the feminist translation used various techniques like supplementation, hijacking, prefacing and footnoting to make the feminine visible in the translation.

Thus based on these two theoretical premises foreignization/ domestication and male/female translation strategy this paper will try to analyse the strategy used by the translator of *Yajnaseni* to examine the hypothesis that 'foreignization' and 'Feminist translation strategy' are not restrictive categories and can be instrumental in further marginalizing a foreign discourse of a marginalized canon.

### **Paratextual Analysis:(Coverpage, Title and Preface)**

The first thing which draws attention of any attentive reader doing the comparative study between the two texts is the cover page of both the texts. The original text bear the picture of a woman on the cover page with the name *Yajnaseni*. The English translation however doesn't have any such picture on its cover page. Since the book is about a woman, written by another woman, it has relevance with the text. Thus the omission of the picture of the woman has serious implication, which the translator/ publisher has ignored and deleted from the translation consciously or unconsciously. Thus it clearly indicates the differential intention and ideology of the translator / publisher.

Secondly the supplementation of the phrase 'the story of Draupadi' to the original title of the novel is an act of active penetration by the translator. Supplementation refers to the "voluntarist action on the text" and "It compensates for the differences between languages". (Von Flotow, 1991:75). *Yajnaseni* in Odia is a gender neutral noun which means somebody who is born out of *yajna* or sacrificial fire. The adding of the phrase 'the story of Draupadi' clearly indicates that the novel is not just about anybody but about Draupadi which alludes to the grand text 'Mahabharata'. Thus though on the surface level it tries to highlight the protagonist of the text but the intertextuality involves here is a complex one. In other words it is the celebration of that aspect of the text which is considered as classical or grand in the language of postmodernism. There are also other instances in the translation which refers to the grand text rather than the marginal. For example the translator has certainly used the 'foreignization' strategy by retaining the culture specific Odia words i.e. *dharma*, *sakha*, *sakhi*. However the significance associated with these words cannot be understood without

reference to Indian scriptures and also the *Mahabharata*. Thus ‘foreignizing’ translation does not serve the purpose of a resistance but subversive to the marginal.

Moreover the original text has the preface written by the author herself that not only introduces the protagonist to the reader, but which can also be considered as a prelude to the life of every woman in our society. In the preface, the novelist has not only given a vivid account of the suffering of Draupadi, who is an epic character, but she also has shared her own experience by discussing the story of modern Krishnaa and thus bridging the gap between the epic and the ordinary. The English translation has omitted the preface.

### Textual Analysis:

Odia is a gender neutral language and English on the other hand is comparatively gendered language so the gender perspective to the interpretation would be crucial in highlighting the manipulation of language at various levels. Odia words like *jatri*, *se*, are gender neutral. Though the English equivalent of *jatri* that is pilgrim used by the translator in the first paragraph of the novel is also gender neutral, however, separate pronouns are used in English, i.e. ‘he’ for male and ‘she’ for female as the equivalent of the gender neutral pronoun *se* in Odia. Thus, the preference of ‘he’ against ‘she’ as the pronoun for ‘pilgrim’ is inappropriate because of the context in which it is used since *Yajnaseni* is the story of Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, narrated by herself in the first person.

Similarly many times the English translation has used common nouns not to neutralise the gender difference between the two sexes but it is a strategy used by the translator categorically and contextually to neutralise the sin of the male dominated society. For example the uses of the word “people” in the sentence “to remove the regret of people of the whole world I would display myself before them” (p.234). The context here is Draupadi’s *svastraharan* in the assembly hall of Hastinapur. While the original work has emphatically stated that it is before the “*purush*” or “men” she has to display her body; the English translation has used the word “people”. People means everyone both men and women. However it is mentioned that during Draupadi’s *vastraharan* the doors of all the queens were shut and none of the women was present. This shift from ‘men’ to ‘people’ is problematic in two senses. It not only portrays an anonymous picture of the culprit by neutralising his gender but also equally accusing the women as silent spectator of the play without any sense of revolt.

Power, or authority, is a central feature of sexual differentiation. As John Ruskin in his famous essay *Sesame and Lilies* has mentioned “the man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention” (paragraph 32) and the English translation is concerned to represent the central male characters in a way which complies with the masculine model of activity, power and rationality by means of various strategies like reframing, systematic addition and deletion. In the Odia source text there are several instances where the male characters are shown as responsible for various disastrous decisions. The English translation has either removed or reframed those statements. For example the Odia text makes it clear that Arjun has no objection in Draupadi taking five husbands. “*krishnaa panchapati baranakaribare jadi Arjunankara apati nahi mora Madhya kichhi apatti nahi.*”(73). In contrast, the English translation choices of words in this passage is putting emphasis on Arjun’s objection: “what if Arjun objects to Krishnaa marrying five husbands?”



Here the translator has used the technique of reframing. Reframing refers to “the personal voice of the translator. Additions and rewordings bring the text in line with the translator’s own narrative position, i.e. her own personal narrative which shapes how she responds to the values expressed in the (source) text” and refer to “any narrative device, such as labelling, repositioning or refocusing”. The reframing here is syntactical and lexical. Because the sentence establishes a causal connection between the Arjun’s no objection as well as that of her father and Krishna’s taking five husband, Arjun, as well as the king as agent of this sentence is unambiguously identified as the person responsible for Draupadi’s marriage with five Pandavas in the Odia text. The English translation, in contrast, put question on Arjun’s decision with the assumption that he will have problem if Draupadi takes five husbands denying his share of guilt in Draupadi’s marriage with his four brothers. Moreover the deletion of the sentence when her father also agreed for her marriage in the English translation signals a contrast between the original and translation.

The mythic character of Draupadi does not fully conform to the dominant ideal of submissiveness and passivity. In contrast, the English translation supports and enhances the stereotypical attributes replacing unconventional features in both male and female behaviour with gendered conduct in non conformity with the source text. It indicates the translator’s acceptance of contemporary notions of dominance of one sex over other as mentioned by Ruskin in the same essay “the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision”.(paragraph 32). He accentuates aspects of female victimhood by adding to descriptions of the suffering of Druapadi. For example the use of sentence “but I had lost faith in myself” in chapter 16 when Draupadi being ill is introspecting on her life with her five husbands. While the source text confirms that despite severe assault by the Kaurav, Draupadi did not lose faith in herself. The adding of the sentence here clearly indicates that Draupadi is rather a submissive persona without any courage and confidence to revolt against the injustice operated by the forces of patriarchy.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus it is evident from the above analysis that the translator exploited ‘foreignizing’ strategy as well as feminist translation techniques of supplementation and reframing in the translation. However these strategies are not restrictive and can be used as a manipulative tool by the translator having differential ideology. ‘Foreignizing’ strategy can be used only to highlight the classical in the foreign culture by backgrounding the marginal canon i.e women’s writing as subtext. Similarly feminist translation strategies are not essentially feminist but can be instrumental in power display in translation as Vanessa Leonardi says “feminist translation strategies are not specifically ‘feminist’ as they resemble ordinary translation strategies. Male translators might also be motivated by ideological factors in their strategies and, as a result, they may be more or less visible in their translation”. (2007:379). However the analysis is based on a pilot study and no generalization should be drawn on this basis.

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