

### *Whose Space is it anyway? The Politics of Translation on the Printed Page*

Moving beyond the simplistic notions of fidelity to the ‘source text’/ ‘original’ that discourses on translation politics entail, I intend to show how Amit Chaudhuri, through an intersemiotic translation in his novels and short stories, succeeds in creating a ‘third code’ on the printed page that does away with the unilinearity and monologicality of the static predisposition of the ‘pure’ in identity politics. In aligning translation with the politics of identity, I, therefore, refrain from seeing translation as a purely linguistic fact; rather, I shall show how the process of semioticization of Chaudhuri’s texts, bound as they are with the cultural histories of communities, reveal the role of ideology in the diffusion of the translational semiotic at work in the texts.

Chaudhuri creates texts that are *heterographic* in ways more than one: his translation grid is not the simple axes of the ‘indigenous’ tongue and ‘foreign’ language in a situation of ‘diglossia’. Rather his translational ideogeme, in delimiting itself of strict semiotic and semantic transactions, is a novel and inventive polysystem: due to the absence of geographical, historical or sociological variants in the target language, Chaudhuri is often forced to “invent” a ‘language’ because of the ‘non-existence’ of one. In writing for a unilingual reader, Chaudhuri produces a ‘representation’ of the source culture by using more than nativism-loaded linguistic signifiers on the printed page: the *visual* culture of his texts consists of tropes of various origin/ sources- the Bengali alphabet (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 81), a Bangla word (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 118), a religious motif reproduced per se (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 146 ), interlingual reproduction of a manner of speaking (*Freedom Song*, 6), wall graffiti (*Freedom Song*, 11), onomatopoeic reproduction (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 201), the cry of a bird

(*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 128) and so on. It is the identity of this printed page which the act of translation produces that is the subject of my chapter.

Taking recourse to Spivak's arguments which trouble the easy identifications of 'foreign' and 'home' culture, the identity of the Chaudhuri-translating-self is subsumed neither by the host nor the receiving culture; this self has no single 'home' to offer to the translated work. Translations, like the original works of diasporic writers, become caught up in networks of readership that involve audiences, which are *not* defined by one national frame. By providing a preface and a post face to his 'transcreations' – an extension of what lies beyond the 'printed page'- Chaudhuri ensures that the reader has a contextualised and informed understanding of the difficult text she is reading. The prefatory explanatory note in *A Strange and Sublime Address* is not an extraneous appendage to the novel. Salman Rushdie claimed that migrants are 'translated beings'. Writers like Chaudhuri stand on the border between writing and translation, infusing both of these activities with new meanings. The radical bilingualism (I use the word to include sensibilities of languages as well) and polyphony of his postcolonial translations give his texts much of their evocative appeal and subversive power. In a subversive reversal of trend where English provides the source text, Chaudhuri's transcreative acts on the printed page are a successful domestication of English into the Chaudhuri-translating self's own culture.

The process of translation involved in making another culture comprehensible entails varying degrees of violence, especially when the culture being translated is constituted as that of the 'other'. Chaudhuri does this not by yoking two dissimilar tropes by violence as it were, but by effecting an ethnolinguistic model where *assemblages* of different tropes on one page – the visual, the auditory and the literary- create coherence. So if having heteroglossic difference in their various situatedness on the printed page is Chaudhuri's method of de-ossifying the cultural codes of his texts(s), then the two ways in which this is effected are 'renewal' where the code is recoded ('Only one place was referred to as there these days; but at one time it used to be the Admiral's in-law's home'. *A New World*, 92) and 'diffusion' where the code not only gets activated but also spreads beyond

its earlier boundaries ('It was Lord Vishwakarma who looked after this company and the cranes that it made'. *Freedom Song*, 135).

Using an intertwined and interstitched language ("The text made unexpected revelations in a deadpan way: 'Muktabayusana: This is good for the digestion. Those who do this daily will not suffer from gas or stomach problems.'" *Freedom Song*, 58) is not just another clichéd way of writing back to the Empire. 'A proper shraddh ceremony' (*Real Time*, 63) is the only proper way to convey an indigenous experience. Certainly not a 'literary by-product', as Ojo calls this brand of literature,<sup>60</sup> the linguistic fluidity Chaudhuri's texts contain effectively effaces the traditional distinction between source and target languages. In doing so, it also effaces another clichéd problematic of identity politics: Who is Chaudhuri, the Indian writer of English fiction writing for? Tired of addressing questions on the locus of their intended readership put to the Indian writer in English, Chaudhuri's act of translation 'becomes' his answer to these critics for the 'new language' of his texts, with its hybridity resulting from the interpenetration of several linguistic varieties, no longer belongs to any one language per se ("Do I have that? You know that next year is your "final" year. The year of the 'final' –it had been waiting for him, it seemed, like a mythical mountain, always there, but coming nearer and nearer; and now it was in sight". *Freedom Song*, 91). Even when the dominant language is English, Benglish (Bengali and English) supplies the subterranean tropes in which the Bengali experience is communicated ('Future 'and 'career' had become Bengali words, incorporated unconsciously but feverishly into daily Bengali parlance. *A Strange and Sublime Address*, 19). This interdialectal experience is one of the many ways in which Chaudhuri's translative process operates (Khuku's personal deity, which she might have created herself, or which had possibly been created by her mother, was one she called Bipad Nashini, or Destroyer of Distress. *Freedom Song*, 55).

Translation can do everything except mark this linguistic difference inscribed in the language, this difference of language systems inscribed in a single tongue. At best, it can

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<sup>60</sup> S. Ade Ojo, 'The Role of the Translator of African Literature in Inter-cultural Consciousness and Relationship', *Meta* Vol. 37, no. 3, 1986, 295.

get everything across except this: the fact that there are, in one linguistic system, perhaps several language or tongues.<sup>61</sup>

One needs to recruit greater attention to Chaudhuri's interdialectal layering.

Then looking at Vikram she smiled, widening her mouth, so that her teeth showed, and said: 'Esho shona', and then, remembering he might want her to speak in English, 'Come to thamma'.  
(*A New World*, 6)

Note the 'Esho shona' followed by 'come to thamma': 'Esho shona' can be literally translated into 'Come here, dear' but Chaudhuri's use of 'Come to thamma' ('Come to grandma', another hybrid utterance, gives evidence of how his translative process operates. Progressively each sentence distinguishes itself more like the other: while 'Esho shona' is very different from 'Come to thamma' linguistically, yet the spirit of the enonces is similar. Chaudhuri sets one version against the other (the Bengali idiom of 'Esho shona' against the English 'Come to thamma') to represent a specific set of social, cultural and situational values.

The nerve center of any utterance, of any expression, is not interior but exterior: it is situated in the social milieu surrounding the individual.<sup>62</sup>

An attempt to translate the literal version of the sentence in the conventional sense ('Come dear', for example) would not reproduce these separate values because they exist by virtue of their place with the continuum, not as independent linguistic varieties. The translational process also works itself out as a form of *transaction*, as an interactive, dialogic, two-way process involving complex negotiation and exchange.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination, Monolingualism of the Other: or the Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>62</sup> See Valentin N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), 173.

<sup>63</sup> See Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1993).

‘Pranam karo, Bonny’, he said. The boy...turned to walk...towards his grandfather, to touch his feet’ (*A New World*, 7).

Like Monika Verma,<sup>64</sup> Chaudhuri uses ‘the idiom understood by the English-speaking person’ ‘to interpret the idiom of Bengali thought’. But information transfer and literalism make strange bedfellows, as in this:

‘Of course, baba’, she said rising. ‘I’ll bring it right now’.

This made him remember that his father had never called him ‘baba’ as many Bengali fathers do their sons –the age-old, loving, inexplicable practice of fathers calling their sons ‘father’ but always Jayojit, and nothing else. (*A New World*, 25)

The word ‘inexplicable’ perhaps explains Chaudhuri’s problem of translation. If the source and its translation are close, then information transfer becomes easy (‘my nani, my mother’s mother’, *Real Time*, 74) but if the sign cannot function as a raw transfer of data (‘the conversation- the ‘adda’ *Freedom Song*, 13), then the translation’s sign often looks emaciated.

Is the word ‘pichwai’ really untranslatable? Translation theorists argue that if Bronsilaw Zielenski, the prize winning translator of Melville’s *Moby Dick*, could create new words in his translation simply because there was no whaling vocabulary in Polish, then any and every word should have a translated equivalent. Yet Chaudhuri cannot be faulted for leaving many Bengali words untranslated:

“He has been playing with his Jurassic Park rakkhosh”, said the boy’s grandmother. (*A New World*, 25).

The word ‘rakkhosh’ loses its mythic essence of awe that attaches to the Bengali child’s storyhood when translated into a plain English ‘demon’. Jacques Derrida discusses the polysemic word ‘pharmakon’ with its meanings of ‘poison’ and ‘remedy’, to show not only how words are untranslatable between languages but that, as Barbara Johnson points

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<sup>64</sup> See Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1994), 91.

out in her translation of Derrida's critical theology, 'the original text is always an impossible translation...that renders translation impossible'.<sup>65</sup> The translations of 'gopi', 'luchi' (*A New World*, 39; 40), 'the Bengali weakness for "bhraman"' (*A New World*, 10) would only result in entropy of meaning. To translate is to convert difference into similarity.

'Kato?' The Bengali word for 'How much' seemed out of place, too tentative and non-committal. ....'Dui taka' - two rupees. (*A New World*, 56).

But Chaudhuri juxtaposes difference with similarity where the untranslated placed adjacent to the translated have just the opposite meanings:

'Jaldi, jaldi'. Impatience. (*A New World*, 58).

Mistakes, when 'translated' need not always be brutal. There is no 'month of Hemanta' in the Bengali calendar (*A New World*, 89). 'Hemanta' is the Bengali autumn, a season, and not a month. But this transcreation, possibly for poetic effect, like Keats misreading and then writing on the Chapman-translated Homer, does not take away from the beauty of the linguistic structure.

Petty language crimes...cause little semantic and aesthetic damage.<sup>66</sup>

The longish drawl of 'He-man-ta' only adds to the 'pleasantness' mentioned earlier in the sentence.

For Chaudhuri, then, translation becomes a form for postmodernity, implying as it does a logic based on *combination* rather than on *exclusion*: 'both-and' ('wife' and 'grihini' in 'the wife, affectionately referred to as the 'grihini' *Real Time*, 105) rather than 'either-or',

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<sup>65</sup> Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 42).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

allowing different strands to become interwoven ('Whenever I thought of a Supreme deity, which was not often but not altogether infrequently, either it was God I thought of, rather than 'parameshwar' or 'ishwar' *Real Time*, 72) – Supreme Deity, God, 'parameshwar'. 'ishear') without the obligation of deciding for one and against another. This othering of the same (God-parameshwar), a deferring of identity through difference ('whose last film, Jaadu- "Magic" *Real Time*, 53) is Chaudhuri's method of handling cultural transference.

Moving beyond formalist approaches to translation, Chaudhuri often takes a middle stance between the notion of dynamic/ functional equivalence ("At first, she'd called him "Masterji"...as she had all her former teachers. There was no formal, ceremonial seal on the relationship as there is between guru and shishya; he was there to do his job, to be a teacher, and she to learn" *Real Time*, 127) or the interpretative definition of meaning (the word 'saala' interpreted in the glossary in *Real Time*). The invocation of 'David Davidar' ('Whom does one write for? At least one of the answers will have to be – "David Davidar" *Real Time*, 73) becomes an effort at 'horizontal interpenetrative' translation where the coded cultural register of Davidar (as editor of Penguin Books India) mixes with the personal English register of the aspiring autobiographer in such a way that the lines demarcating them as separate entities are blurred. "A glass of thanda paani" (*Real Time*, 125) is also Chaudhuri's politics of dissolving hierarchies of language. And if Chaudhuri ever lapses into 'vertical interpenetrative' translation, he makes sure that in the coexistence of different varieties in a hierarchy ("Saala!" said Yusuf...."Don't abuse your brother-in-law", said Khatau. *Real Time*, 56), it is always the source culture that is privileged- the composite poly-connotative 'saala' over the flat-Englished 'brother-in-law' *Real Time*, 56); 'Baishnab Padabali', 'Chandidas and bidyapati' *Real Time*, 8) over not only the English 'Eliot' (*Real Time*, 6) and the Englishised 'Tagore' (rather than 'Thakur'. *Real Time*, 8) but more importantly, over the literary English register which fails to provide an equivalent for 'biraha' (*Real time*, 8). These varieties –horizontal and vertical interpenetration- which individually (Boycott's "Eendiuns", "doostorm", *Real Time*, 55, 56) or in combination ("That's Hanuman, the monkey god", said Jayojit, ..."You mean, like, he's the god of the monkeys?" "Well, yes, but let's say that he's a

god who also happens to be a monkey”, said Jayojit. *A New World*, 188), fulfil different social or cultural usages and coexist and operate as a single system to convey ‘Bengaliness’. Chaudhuri’s translation of Bengaliness therefore proves that the oft-questioned case of ‘originality’ is in no way dependent on anteriority when one is dealing with cultural transference.

Translation is a cognitive ‘operator’, a mechanism which provides access to the social worldview in a double sense:

‘Kitna din lagega khatam hone ko?’ As if he was planning to buy a flat here. ‘Saal lag jayega, saab’, the watchman, a whole year for completion. (*A New World*, 150)

Not only has Chaudhuri to ‘interpret’ the ‘original’ text of life reasonably, he also ‘has to restructure his interpretation in *another language* while striving to approximate the original structure’.<sup>67</sup> Chaudhuri also resorts to paraphrasing in order to communicate a cultural essence for ‘translation is the sign of an intellectual heritage, the basis for commentary and continuation’.<sup>68</sup>

Some of the pictures she had bought –prints; pichwais with serene trains of elephants, the cowherd-god, dallying with the gopis, identified by the peacock-plume above the forehead –were still on the walls (*A New World*, 39).

The emphasis here is not on translating in a language appropriate for a target audience but on translating an amorphous code of cultural differentials while retaining a supposedly ‘unifying’ language of communication.

At a very different end of the spectrum of translation, we find Chaudhuri performing a linguistic act that defies categorization

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<sup>67</sup> Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as Discovery* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1994), 139.

<sup>68</sup> See Sherry Simon, ‘A Single Brushstroke Writing Through Translation: Anne Carson’ *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 15 (Summer 2002), 49.

'Ddash oh do yoo ayi goo', she said.

'What?' said Bhaskar....

Returning, she repeated:

'That won't do you any good' (*Freedom Song*, 6)

By performing a literary irony on interlingual writing, Chaudhuri translates a verbal act by going back to the classic dictum of 'faithfulness' to the 'source text', in the process revealing a tongue-in-cheek (almost literally) humour.

Chaudhuri's sensibility is translational, and his work is an illustration of the way in which translation can nourish the writing process, infusing the present with the sensitivities of another time (*Afternoon Raag*, 89). His aim as a translator is neither ethnographic nor philological: yet,

Speaking an English that is hardly spoken in any other part of the world anymore, with queer proverbs and turns, dropped consonants and vowels, turning the language like meat inside their mouths, (*Afternoon Raag*, 93)

becomes an example of how he uses both for the 'social' translative act.

By 'translating' Lawrence's poem ("Ship of Death") through the filter of the narrator's psyche to produce the *metaphors* of food ('fried pithhas' , *Afternoon Raag*, 132-33), Chaudhuri creates breaks on the surface of the 'original' Lawrence text, gaps that are filled up by the 'transferred' metaphors of the narrator's cultural text. 'Metaphorein', we must remember, is one of the Greek words for translation. Chaudhuri, in the process, is also entering into a 'dialogue' with an 'influencing text', thereby going back to the tradition of Anandavardhana who refers to 'sambada' or 'dialogue' as the concept of translation in his *Dhvanyaloka*.

Among the two approaches to translation, 'the conservative and the additive...may also be called the mediatory and the creative',<sup>69</sup> Chaudhuri here chooses to use the latter in his unique way .

Like most Bengalis, she pronounces 'hurt' as 'heart', and 'ship' as 'sheep', for she belongs to a culture with a more spacious concept of time, which deliberately allows one to naively and clearly expand the vowels; and yet her speech is dotted with English proverbs, and delicate, unIndian constructions like, 'It's a nice day, isn't it?' where most Indians would say, straightforwardly, 'It's a nice day, no?' Many of her sentences are plain translations from Bengali, and have a lovable homely melody, while a few retain their English inflections, and are sweet and foreign as the sound of whistling. (*Afternoon Raag*, 58)

By 'translating' the mother's verbal 'translation' with an 'explanatory note' (by commenting on the 'spacious concept of time' of the period), Chaudhuri is overwriting the source-text of his mother and disavowing in a way, the unilaterality of its controlling presence. At other places on the page, he does quite the opposite: instead of reproducing the overlapped impure language of Elizabeth mami (Elizabeth mami, that splendid and good-hearted lady, spoke to her neighbour, whoever it happened to be, in a strange, staccato version of Bengali...Whenever she tried to speak the Bengali language, her Yorkshire tongue rebelled and made a crazy attempt at liberation; to say her pronunciations were wrong would be to miss the point; they were innocent, confused, and beyond the parlance of human society, like the song of a bird. *A Strange and Sublime Address*, 198) and making another clichéd postcolonial statement, Chaudhuri translates an 'absent' language (the Bengali language in Yorkshire tongue) to portray a cultural collage that is, in many ways, the reverse of the overdone colonized-in-coloniser's-tongue cliché. By comparing her language with the 'song of a bird', Chaudhuri, beautifully, yet craftily, shows the impossibility of translating certain tropes.

In translating the dhobi or cleaners as 'istriwalla, or The Man Who Owns An Iron' (*A Strange and Sublime address*, 142), Chaudhuri resorts to Derridean syllepsis, 'the trope

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<sup>69</sup> Sukanta Chaudhuri, 'Translation and Displacement: The Life and Works of Pierre Menard', *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 15 (Summer 2002), 43.

that consists in understanding the same word in two different ways at the same time, one meaning being literal or primary, the other figurative'.<sup>70</sup> After having made a choice from different possible contextual meanings, he realizes that the syntactic structure of his translated sentence which is almost equivalent to a dictionary entry, has resulted in a cultural ambiguity where the 'walla' as possessor in the Hindi language translated into 'who owns' or 'owner' fails to communicate the irony of the name of his profession. This resultant humour, created by the gap between 'walla' and 'who owns', that only a polylingual reader can relish, is the most important and delightful by-product of the translator's enterprise.

In Chaudhuri's translated world, the untranslatability of the Indian 'ma' leads to an intertextual structure where the signifier 'ma' is critiqued through the process of deconstruction.

'Ma', she said, for she called my mother 'ma' as I did, 'what happened here?' (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 138).

Through the amphibious act of (un)translating 'ma', Chaudhuri draws out from within the word something other than itself, other than its recognized being (the 'ma' for the servant is the 'ma' as the lady of the house); yet something also within itself, something that it indeed *is* (the 'ma' as mother for the son). This 'repetition without identity' (the two 'mas' being dissimilar)<sup>71</sup> which Derrida sees as a 'structure of the double mark' is in, many ways, Chaudhuri's tool to bring out the irony through his translative process by deconstructing 'saala' with 'brother-in-law' (*Real Time*, 56) and then commenting on the slippage of meaning in the glossary – an extension beyond the printed page- Chaudhuri only confirms the Derridean 'one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructive system'.<sup>72</sup> The mark inside is the brother-in-law *in* the story /text (*Real time* p. 56); the mark outside is the intended abuse in the glossary: the Derridean 'double reading and a double writing' (*ibid*).

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 629.

<sup>71</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Positions* trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

The act of translation does not just bridge a gap between two different cultures, but becomes a strategy of intervention through which newness comes into the world, where cultures are remixed. This newness results from the fact that what is being 'othered' in the process of translation is a shifting paradigm. Chaudhuri writes this of Saraswati with the wrinkled clothes in her arms- 'she looked like Mother Teresa carrying the light, wispy bodies of dying children' (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 72). It is not just the subaltern servant Saraswati (Saraswati, significantly, is the Hindu goddess of learning) being 'translated' for a 'supposed' Western reader out there somewhere; it is also the cult figure of Mother Teresa being translated in 'both' directions.

One trope that Chaudhuri employs to talk of translation is the mirror: Sandeep 'wished he could live in the mirror...the jokes and rhymes in his mother tongue upon his lips' (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 87). The mirror, with its image of alterity, acts as a medium of translation, and Chaudhuri beautifully welds the desire to live in the mirror with the desire for the mother tongue, both acts of translation. This *ambiguous* desire to be 'translated' (a desire for the mother tongue in spite of aspiring to be a writer in English) comes across in the translated untranslatability of Chhordimoni's expletives.

The air rang out with expletives, intense names as untranslatable as poetry: 'Duffer! Crowface! Retarded child! She-goat! Cow-eyed imbecile!'....'O genius! O wonderworker! O helpless child!' (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 88).

Chaudhuri, in 'translating' what he terms as 'untranslatable as poetry', constructs a deconstructive binary by highlighting the *trace* of the invisible original Bengali expletives in the text. By thus showing up the 'need' for the 'original' through its translated existence, the decontextualised expletives – for like jokes expletives too are culture specific - expose an unfulfilled promise, and Chaudhuri's mastery lies in ripping open this space that rejects a formalism for a more inclusive cultural paradigm. Similarly, Panna, by 'translating' a 'swimming pool' into a 'lake' (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 141), is accommodating fracture and slippage in the trajectory of his dissemination.

Korporashen water is not good, Saab (*A Strange and sublime Address*, 141).

Panna's translation of 'corporation' into 'korporashen' involves not only a radical shift of lingual context, but more importantly a concomitant shift of social and epistemic mores. The same is true of English in the Bangla accent.

When the English lessons began, the voice became stentorian and English sentences and words exploded like little bombs in the air.

Whut ees thee name of thee boy?

- Thee name of the boy ees John.
- Whut deed John habhfor deenar?
- John had meelk and bredfor deenar.
- Why deed John habh meelk and bredfor deenar? (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 101)

This translation is a commentary and criticism, an indictment not only against the heavily accented English, but, more importantly, about the lack of translation of basic English textbooks. An school going Bengali boy studying in a Bangla-medium school is most unlikely to have bread or acquaintance by the name of John or have milk and bread for dinner. This also gives evidence of Chaudhuri's uniquely conditioned response as reader and then recorder in translating a text. Then, by literally translating Saraswati's exclamations on her illness ('Hai hai! O misery!' she exclaimed. *A Strange and Sublime Address*, 83), Chaudhuri explores the amphibious, cross-modal life of texts where the words 'O misery' after 'Hai hai!' give the flavour not only of an overlapping language discourse but also of two varies topoi. This flavour is also present in an apparently innocent sentence like

A little before sunset, a woman called Chhaya came to clean the house a second time... (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 9).

By positing the word 'chhaya' (meaning 'shadow') after sunset, Chaudhuri achieves a poetic grace in a mutative inter-lingual transfer of information that borders between the denotative and connotative meanings.

Faced with the problem of untranslatibility in cultural transference, Chaudhuri creates a heterographic text, a text that goes beyond the printed black alphabets on the white space. Chaudhuri's translational semiotic is, therefore, in many ways, the *optic*, and it is in the opticalisation of the printed page that Chaudhuri's unique contribution to the Indian novel lies.

The significance of the optic, the untranslated 'sandesh' (reproduced in Bangla; *A Strange and Sublime Address*, 94) needs special review. The neo-neoclassical 'imitated-as-translated' 'sandesh' releases an unknown and unrecognized linguistic cognate in a spatial and temporal limbo. This liberation of the subverted Bengali language in the 'English' hybrid text (an oxymoron by itself) leaves it ('sandesh' as Bangla) free to acquire new value through new sites and associations. The 'sandesh' becomes an adaptive verbal strategy.

Despite the existence of interpenetrative linguistic systems (*Freedom Song*, 174) and the fact that there is no single homogeneous language, translation theorists continue to involve themselves in arguments over faithfulness and meaning which themselves depend on conceptions of target and source languages as clearly demarcated systems. Chaudhuri does away with this concept of a language as a closed homogeneous system by introducing codes into his language system which belong to both languages and yet to neither.

DUNKEL, IMF (*Freedom Song*, 163).

Through this sleight of the pen, Chaudhuri does away with the politics of opposing dynamics involved in the act of translating – *change* on the one hand, and *constancy* on the other. By 'reproducing' DUNKEL and IMF and Gatt *ad verbatim*, Chaudhuri is doing

neither- nor *changing* these terms for the 'othered' reader's comprehension nor forcing himself to adhere to any form of *constancy* or 'faithfulness', for these codes, by remaining 'untranslated' in his language system, convey succinctly the effects of liberalization on the Marxist(ised) Bengali's psyche.

Chaudhuri in translating the 'kaw' and 'khaw' (*Freedom Song*, 98) in terms of the English alphabet succumbs to the typical retribalization versus globalization debate that translation politics inevitably brings in its wake, the one re-creating ancient sub national and ethnic borders from within, the other making national borders porous from without. This process of translating the units of a regional language in terms of the global(ised) language is at one and the same time erasing, and valorizing the local and regional. It is also the Youngian 'vocabulary of one language superimposed on the grammar of another'.<sup>73</sup>

Transcoding strategies ensure that the literary is translated into the visual –

Oranges, white batasha, cucumbers (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 37)

translates into the visual semiotic of saffron, white, green, the Indian flag. A similar visual coding is also evident in

He'd also bought a sari for his mother. It was a pretty sari, an off-white tangail with orange embroidery upon it, and a green border (*A New World*, 166).

The symbolic capital that this translative utterance produces is thus a correlate of a set of socio-historical values, here a nationalistic narrative. On some occasions, Chaudhuri does something exactly the opposite on the printed page: he semanticises the optic as in the description of the Laxman cartoon (*Afternoon Raag*, 56-57) or the wedding card in *Freedom Song* (31-32) or the photographs in *Freedom Song* (77) or the wall graffiti (*Freedom Song*, 98).

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<sup>73</sup> See Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Culture, Theory and Race* (London: New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

The word 'translation' etymologically means 'carried from one place to another', transported across the borders between one language and another, one culture and another.

...the voice of the Australian commentator would come through, loud and urgent one moment, weak and distant the other, as if a few words were being carried off, on their passage towards India, by a cormorant crossing the ocean (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 73-74).

The voice of the Australian commentator is 'translated' across the ocean through the mechanism of the outdated radio- the 'original' voice of the commentator, his words, are translated, with elisions and omissions and transmutations, and 'on their passage towards India', the originating spirit' of the words get lost. The dissemination of the text is an endless series of trans-lationes, carryings across- transpositions in more senses than one: an overall change of site or context, but also a reconstitution of the elements. Hence the text a reader reads is not the text that the author wrote, nor that read by any other reader.

Larson refers to translation as a 'mutual undoing of each language into the other....you can't capture, you can't bring things equally...'.<sup>74</sup> Chaudhuri escapes in some way from this trap of untranslatibility by means of onomatopoeic reproduction:

The kokil's cry – "ku-wu

Ku-wu

Ku-wu" (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 128)

"the cheap pink glass bangles around her wrist said softly: chuk-a-chuk-a-chuk-a-chuk" (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 138);

"sometimes there was that repetitive engaged signal – poo, poo, poo, poo, like a horn blowing in a traffic jam" (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 201);

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<sup>74</sup> See Mildred L. Larson, *Meaning-Based Translation* (Dallas: Ethnologue, 1998), 15.

“a tapping noise began, tap, tap, tap, tick, tick, tap” (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 201).

Like emotions, these sounds are untranslatable into words.

Culture specific myths are re-cast in a new language of the eye. By emplotting the Lakshmi footprint on the English worded page, Chaudhuri breaks the aporia of verbal usage and the restricted lines of transmission of the black Roman alphabet on the white page (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 106). Reading this as a juxtaposed text with Saraswati’s wet footprints (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 75) only reveals to us Chaudhuri’s masterstroke in effecting this readerly juxtaposition between two untranslatable idioms in this ‘footprint’ language game. The use of the trope of the ‘footprint’ is not a simplistic tool to shock the reader’s eye: its function is more double-edged. The savage’s footprint in Defoe and the servant’s in Chaudhuri, though ‘rich with possibility’, are ‘wet’, and therefore, ephemeral. These are the footprints of the subaltern who are disallowed from leaving behind their footprints on the text of history, not even as a footnote. So Chaudhuri makes no effort to trace the patterns of their footprints on the printed page. Unlike this, the Lakshmi footprint is ‘painted on the floor’. Chaudhuri’s method of dealing with the politics of this *difference* is to encode the subaltern’s footprint in terms of words on the printed page while ‘painting’ the Lakshmi footprint on the white page that becomes almost analogous to the floor, and in an ironic reversal of the optic, instead of the white rice paste on a dark floor, the Lakshmi footprint on the printed page is encrypted between lines. Chaudhuri’s creation of such polysemic texts becomes an interesting tool in translating culture for an (alien) reader.

Kapil Kapoor locates a shift in translation paradigms from ‘transferring the concept’ to ‘transferring the term with the concept’.<sup>75</sup> Chaudhuri does exactly this when *opticalising* billboards or signboards (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 49, 65; *Afternoon Raag*, 27; *Freedom Song*, 11). In talking about the politics of representation of the printed page in the fictional works of Amit Chaudhuri, I shall also talk about the use of the Bengali alphabet (*A Strange and Sublime Address*, 81), the use of capital letters, lack of chapter

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<sup>75</sup> See Shantha Ramakrishna, ed. *Translation and Multilingualism* (Delhi: Pencraft, 1997), 146-56.

names and numbers, and the covers of his books to show how his acts of *rupantar* ('change in form') and *anuvad* ('speaking after' or 'following') acknowledge difference, and celebrate it. In doing so, he leaves the blank space of the page *optically* 'different' from what it was, richer than what it was, and more powerful than what the printed page ever has been; to put it more simply, the printed page of his texts is *a new world* in the tradition of the *pages* of the Indian English novel.