

### CHAPTER – III: THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

As the title of my thesis begins with the words ‘*Trans*-lation, Poetics and Politics...’, it is necessary that the partly italicized word ‘*Trans*-lation’ be explicated as well as discussing the matters of what have come to be known as the poetics and politics of translation.

#### ‘*Trans*-lation’

The (Gayatri) Spivak-type hyphenation in the opening word of the title can be acquitted of any charge of abstruseness on the very ground that the word actually points to the etymological meaning of ‘translation’ rather than to any esoteric implication. In Latin ‘trans’ means ‘across’ or ‘beyond’, while ‘latus’ means ‘borne’ or ‘carried’. The Latin form of the English ‘translation’ is, ‘translatio’ meaning, therefore, ‘carried across’, and by extension, ‘to remove from one place to another’. The word ‘lacion’ is still extant in English, meaning ‘transportation’ or ‘conveyance’. The rather obsolete Latin meaning of the word is ‘the motion of a celestial object from one place to another’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) has given the following example in support of the astronomical sense of the word: “Copernicus placed the Sun at the centre of the Universe, exempt from any sort of lacion”. It is interesting to note that Physics, too, makes use of the word ‘translation’ to mean “motion of a body in which all the points in the body follow parallel paths” (*Oxford Dictionary of Physics* 561). Two of the five meanings of the German word ‘Übersetzen’ comply with the etymological meaning of ‘translation’: ‘ferry across’ and ‘cross over’. Put simply, the act of translating an SLT into a TLT is basically a ‘motion’, a ferrying across, a crossing over, a transportation, a removal from one domain of language to that of another. Physics, of course, is rigorous about the ‘motion’: it stipulates ‘parallel paths’; and, as applied to the art of translation, this rigor would imply word-for-word kind of translation which may not be welcome in the domain of literature in general and poetry in particular. Instead, it may be

argued that the very next word to ‘translation’, as given in the *Oxford Dictionary of Physics*, i.e. ‘translucent’ could be more appropriate in the description of the *modus operandi* of literary translation in that it allows for a kind of diffusion of meaning as the text travels from one linguistic medium to another, not very peacefully but rather anxiously.

### ‘Poetics’

There are certain words that undergo semantic changes, and yet continue to retain their kernel or nuclear meanings. One such word is ‘poetics’. Traditionally thought of as a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry, the term is derived from Aristotle’s fragmentary work commonly known as *Poetics* which discusses the principles that – as he saw them – govern the art of writing poetry. The pluralisation of adjectives like ‘poetic’, ‘dynamic’, ‘architectonic’ and their ilk has yielded convenient nouns like ‘poetics’, ‘dynamics’, ‘architectonics’, and so on. When applied to the domain of translation studies, the phrase ‘poetics of translation’ broadly means the architectonics or aesthetics of the activity known as translation. It may, therefore, be useful to embark upon brief reflections on how the ‘poetics’ operate in both prose and verse translations. The reflections that follow are heavily drawn *inter alia* on two books, namely, Umberto Eco’s *Experiences in Translation* (2001) and Susan Bassnett’s *Translation Studies* (1991).

#### (i) Equivalence in meaning:

Eco has rightly pointed out the problematic of equivalence in meaning rather categorically:

Equivalence in meaning cannot be taken as satisfactory criterion for a correct translation, first of all because in order to define the still undefined notion of translation one would have to employ a notion as obscure as equivalence of meaning,

and some people think that meaning is that which remains unchanged in the process of translation. (*Experiences* 9)

Eco argues that it is difficult to believe that equivalence in meaning is granted by synonymy, as no two words in any language are completely synonymous with each other. By way of giving an example, Eco says, “*Father* is not a synonym for *daddy*, *daddy* is not a synonym for *papà*, and *père* is not a synonym for *padre* ...” (*Experiences* 9). One solution to this problem is to postulate that notwithstanding the non-availability of synonymous lexical items the propositional value of a sentence in a particular language can be obtained from even a near-identical sentence in another. Of course, constant propositions can be expressed in metalanguages, but – as Eco asks us to remember – “[such] a metalanguage would meet the requirements of that Perfect or Adamic or Universal Language that so many have dreamt of over the centuries” (*Experiences* 10).

A perfect language can be conceived of in two ways: mystically and logically. Walter Benjamin held the mystical point of view and argued that translation implies a pure language. As a TLT can never reproduce the meaning of its SLT, we are to take it axiomatically that all languages somehow converge, and that all languages have mutually complementary intentions. Benjamin makes the point in the following way:

If there is a language of truth in which the final secrets that draw the effort of all thinking are held in silent repose, then this language of truth is true language. And it is precisely this language – to glimpse or describe it is the only perfection the philosopher can hope for – that is concealed, intensively, in translations. (qtd. in Eco, *Experiences* 10)

But the question remains if this kind of very esoteric feeling can be used as yardstick to judge the degree to which a translation is successful.

To move from a private feeling to public commandments is to pass from the mystical to the logical. The logical model should be rooted in the universalized human mind and its utterances should be couched in a formalized language. Many machine-translation scholars share this kind of postulate. As Eco puts it:

There must be a *tertium comparationis* that allows the passage of an expression from language A to language B by ensuring that both are equivalent to an expression in metalanguage C. This mental language, made up of pure propositions is [...] called Mentalese. (*Experiences* 11)

A strong objection to this kind of postulate, however, is that it does not hold good for poetic utterances. It may be argued that word-for-word translation, based on the criterion of synonymy, would render Paul Verlaine's famous lines 'il pleure dans mon coeur comme il pleut sur la ville' as 'it weeps in my heart as it rains over the town' (*Experiences* 11), and the two could hardly be deemed equivalent from a poetic viewpoint. Notwithstanding the propositional content the translation here lack the phonic suggestions of the original.

We can conclude this section by quoting Eco's caveat:

It would follow that the notion of propositional content is applicable only to very simple utterances that (unlike rhetorical figures) unambiguously represent states of the world and that are not self-reflective – that is, they do not focus our attention more on the expression than on the content level. (*Experiences* 12)

'To whom it may concern' is not 'যাঁর ব্যাপার, তাঁর' any more than 'through proper channel' is 'যথোপযুক্ত খাল বরাবর!'

## (ii) Incommensurability vs. Comparability:

Faced with a lack of equivalence in meaning, one may tend to fall back on the Humboldtian idea that every language has its own genius. To do so is to rely on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that the structure of a language determines a native speaker's perception and categorization of experience – or, in other words, that languages define our perceptions. Now, if every language has its own concomitant world-view, the search for equivalence in meaning is doomed to failure. There is no exact way to translate the Bengali word অভিমান into English or the word 'coy' in, say, 'to his coy mistress' into Bengali keeping the English playfulness intact. For one thing, 'ব্রীড়া' and 'coyness' are not the same. At the same time, it may be borne in mind that incommensurability does not imply incompatibility. Which is why different linguistic systems can be compared: the English 'wood' / 'timber' / 'woods'; the German 'Helz' / 'Wald'; the Italian 'legno' / 'bosco'. Translation, therefore, does not wholly depend on linguistic competence, but with what Eco calls "intertextual, psychological, and narrative competence" (*Experiences* 13).

To get over the hurdle of incommensurability and to gain comparability the translator has to assume the role of an interpreter. It is from this angle that Eco describes translation as "a special case of interpretation" (*Experiences* 13). A translator can better be described as an interlocutor in that he or she effects a communication between two languages. Eco's words in this regard are worth quoting:

Translations do not concern a shift from a language A to a language B (as happens with phrase books for tourists, which tell us that *home* can be translated as *maison*, *casa*, *Haus*, and so on). Translations are not about linguistic *types* but rather about linguistic *tokens*. Translations do not concern

a comparison between two languages but the interpretation of two texts in two different languages. (*Experiences* 13-14).

This leads us to refer to Willard Van Orman Quine (1960) who holds that the indeterminacy of translation stems from the fact that the same sentence can be translated differently but legitimately by rival systems of analytical hypotheses. To quote Quine:

Just as we meaningfully speak of the truth of a sentence only within the terms of some theory or conceptual scheme [...] so on the whole we may meaningfully speak of interlinguistic synonymy only within the terms of some particular system of analytical hypotheses. (II, 16)

The description of the art of translation would have remained incomplete if Quine had focused only on the comparison between two languages. In fact what are involved in the process of translation are not two languages alone but two cultures, too. Hence, translation warrants interpretation.

(iii) Referential sameness:

Referential sameness, is exactly what Eco terms ‘Sameness in Reference’ (*Experiences* 14). The illocutionary or even perlocutionary effect of an utterance requires a culture-specific interpretation. “Can you pass me the salt?” is not a question but a request. But to interpret the utterance as a request is to presuppose a cultural habit where the rules of etiquette dictate the required/desired sentence-pattern. The illocutionary value of the repetitive use of ‘yes’ (‘হ্যাঁ’) in the Bengali language is not the same as in English. In poetry, the problem becomes all the more apparent: it is difficult to attain sameness while translating Lear’s ‘Never, never, never, never’ into Bengali or, for that matter, Jibanananda Das’s ‘ব্যবহৃত, ব্যবহৃত, ব্যবহৃত - ব্যবহৃত হয়ে’ into English. The translator, therefore, has to “express an

evident ‘deep’ sense of a text by violating both lexical and referential faithfulness” (*Experiences* 14).

In the chapter titled “Translating and Being Translated” of his *Experiences in Translation*, Eco narrates how he advised the translators of his *Foucault’s Pendulum*, even in such a small matter of translating the phrase ‘al di là della siepe’ into ‘beyond the hedge’:

I told my various translators that neither the hedge nor the allusion to Leopardi [who uses the word ‘siepe’ in his poem “L’infinito” to mean ‘hedge’] was important, but I insisted that a literary clue be kept at all costs. I told them that the presence of a castle or a tree instead of a hedge made no difference to me, provided that the castle and the tree evoked a famous passage in their own national literature, in the context of the description of a magical landscape. (*Experiences* 15)

What Eco implies here is that translators are at liberty to change (if required, radically) the literal meaning of the original text as well as its reference, with a view to preserving the psychological sense of the text and rendering it lisible within the structure of the receiving cultures.

Translators have to find and preserve or recreate the sense of an SLT, and this sense is not transcendental in nature. Hence, the act of interpretation on the part of a translator looks like a kind of bet on the sense of the text. In Eco’s words again, “It is just the outcome of an interpretative inference that can or cannot be shared by other readers” (*Experiences* 16). But the translators bets are not always wild ones: the cultural history around the SLT chosen helps the translator in making relatively safe bets, just as the whole theory of probability may come to assist a gambler.

## (iv) Cultural transference in translation:

The narrowly linguistic approach to translation stresses the transfer of ‘meaning’ harboured in one set of semiosis into another through linguistic supplements like the dictionary and grammar. Most translation theorists, however, do not endorse such a narrow view but hold instead that “[...] the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also” (Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 13) and often assert that “[a] translator must take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic but, broadly speaking, cultural” (Eco, *Experiences* 17). Edward Sapir’s views on the semiotic mechanism of culture are worth quoting in this context:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different label attached. (69)

The Russian semiotician Yu. M. Lotman declares quite categorically that “No language (in the full sense of the word) can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture ...” (212). Similarly, the French theorist Georges Mounin “[...] perceives translation as a series of operations of which the starting point and the end product are *significations* and function within a given culture” (qtd. in Bassnett, *Translation Studies* 15).

Let us imagine, by way of an example, that a translator has been asked to translate “স্যার, এই যে আমার ছুটির দরখাস্ত” (a student speaking to a teacher, or a junior officer to a senior officer, in West Bengal or for that matter in India) into English. A native Bengali / Indian would find it all right if the translation is: “Sir, here’s my application for leave”, which is an immaculate literal translation of the original. But for a British or an American reader the translation is likely to sound as an ironical utterance owing to the retention of the word ‘Sir’

in compliance with the SLT. The use of ‘Sir’ in English (or regional languages) in India is a deep-rooted colonial legacy that chimes well with the ancient Indian practices. A student shall not call his/her teachers by their first names, or by their surnames prefixed with Mr/Mrs/Miss etc, while it is quite normal to do so in the UK or the USA. The over-use of ‘Sir’ by a subordinate officer speaking to his superior is generally perceived as an office etiquette. Similarly, polite French people can, even today, address a taxi driver as ‘Monseur’ which is equivalent to ‘Sir’ in English. The cab passengers in the UK or the USA seldom use this vocative, unless they are irritated by the driver’s service. In India, the commonest vocative for strangers is ‘Brother’ (‘দাদা’/‘ভাই’ = elder brother / younger brother, depending on the age-difference between the conversants) and ‘Uncle’ (if the age-difference is quite bigger).

What the examples given above point to is the fact that “translation is always a shift, not between two languages, but between two cultures [...]” (Eco, *Experiences* 17). The translator, therefore, should be cautious about the semiotic transaction between two cultures – one, of the SL and the other, of the TL. Translations may require formulation of new techniques, new devices to make the culture-specific words acceptable or even intelligible in the TL culture. We may here in passing note that the famous Bengali poet-translator Bishnu Dey keeps an alert eye on the matter of cultural transference when he renders T.S. Eliot’s ‘Ash Wednesday’ as ‘চড়কের গান’, ‘The Journey of the Magi’ as ‘রাজর্ষিদের যাত্রা’ (Rabindranath Tagore chose ‘তীর্থযাত্রী’ as the title of his own translation of the Eliot poem), ‘Virgin’ as ‘দেবকী মাতা’, ‘Exile’ as ‘দ্বারকায় নির্বাসন পালা’. We can easily see that Dey is trying to maintain the religious overtone of Eliot’s poetry.

There are certain words which are not merely lexical items in that they signify the customs of a society. The more elegant the ferrying across the cultures, the more lisible the translation becomes for the target reader. Eco focuses on this issue (*Experiences* 19-20) when

he talks about the possible difficulties that might face a French or a Chinese reader of the first few pages of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* containing a good deal of dialogue in French. Tolstoy deployed such dialogues only to show how the upper-class Russians talked in French for reasons of snobbery although France was Russian's sworn enemy. The retention of those speeches in the French translation of the book, or, for that matter, the translation of them into English (or the Chinese language) for a Chinese reader would do away with the irony Tolstoy intended to bring into play. It must at this point be mentioned that most of the translation theories in vogue have not taken into account the multilingual / multicultural reception of a given translated text. At the moment, it appears that only glosses or footnotes can help the translator to tide over the problems of cultural transference in translation.

There is no gainsaying that certain words transcend their mundane meanings due to cultural shift. The word 'witness' is a convenient case at hand. In order to perceive the connotation of the word as used in *Murder in the Cathedral*, we have to cross the Protestant culture and get into the olden Greek culture where 'witness' meant 'co-sufferer'. Of course, a translator may suddenly find himself or herself in some unknown zones of cultural encodings, which are apparently too fuzzy or amorphous to be translated straightaway. As far as the issue of cultural transference is concerned, a translator's journey is indeed a perilous one as Bassnett puts it metaphorically:

In the same way that the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril. (*Translation Studies* 14).

(v) The Source-Target interface:

In his widely acclaimed book titled *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (2003), Eco describes the art of translation as "[...] the version from a text A in a verbal language

Alpha into a text B in a verbal language Beta” (1). Eco’s equation should be read with Bassnett’s illucidation:

What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted. (2)

Both the writers’ introductory and rudimentary statements regarding what happens in translation indirectly emphasize the matter of negotiation in translation. The very title of Eco’s book mentioned above of course speaks volumes in this regard. The negotiation takes into account such issues as fidelity, beauty, lisibility, and cultural shifts as an over-all package. To quote Eco at some length:

Negotiation is a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else, and at the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything. In this kind of negotiation [i.e. in negotiation between the source text and the target text] there may be many parties: on one side, there is the original text, with its own rights, sometimes an author who claims right over the whole process, along with the cultural framework in which the original text is born; on the other side, there is the destination text, the cultural milieu in which it is expected to be read, and even the publishing industry, which can recommend different translation criteria [...]. (*Mouse or Rat* 6)

While carrying out negotiations, translators need to bear in mind that their ‘target’ readers are not the people who are closely acquainted with the SLT and have more than

ordinary command of the target language at the same time. For such readers translations are only matters of comparative evaluations of how far the translators have succeeded or failed in their work. And it is never very easy to satisfy such readers, as far as the poetics of the original is concerned. A Nirad C. Chaudhuri can by no means be a target reader of Seely's or Radice's translation of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbadh kabya*. Book reviewers, copy editors and academics, with sufficient knowledge of the Bengali and English languages, can be their formal readers. It is just funny to guess that Bishnu Dey's target readers for his translation of Eliot's poetry include Radice and Seely, notwithstanding their good grasp on the nuances of the Bengali language.

(vi) Translating poetry: the limits of translation:

The phrase 'poetics of translation' assumes more importance in translating poetry than in translating prose or dramatic texts. Even a layman can easily see that it is far more difficult to translate a poem than to translate a prose piece. The reason is not far to seek. Poetry, more than prose or drama, tries to 'By indirections find directions out' (to use Polonius's words) and hopes that the reader will read between the lines. This is how Eco ends the introduction to his *Experiences in Translation* (2001): "[...] translations of poetry [represent] *abnormal cases*. [...] However, I also have taken into account many examples of *abnormal cases*" (x) (emphases added). The 'abnormality' that Eco is speaking about stems from the event of what the Russian formalists described as 'defamiliarisation' embedded in the language of poetry unlike in that of everyday life. Unfamiliarity is summoned only to enhance the perception of the familiar. To compound the problem for poetry translators there are such seductive and perilous verdicts as 'a poem should not *mean* but *be*', 'poetry is best arrangement of best words', and so on. With the denunciation 'traduttore – traditore' ('translator is traitor') almost always in chase, translators may throw in the towel believing that transmigration of 'souls' from an SLT to its TLT in poetry is not possible.

Detractors of translation and worshippers of poetry in the original, therefore, do not hesitate to pass the judgement that poetry defies translation. As the late Professor T.N. Sen observed in his *A Literary Miscellany* (1972):

[...] while it is possible to transfer the logical entity of a poem to another language, it is physically impossible to transfer its sensuous entity; and that is precisely what constitutes the burden, as Shelley would call it, of the curse of Babel. (101)

It is argued that a significant word in a poem has not only a meaning-value but a sound-value too, and that “[...] in poetry the two values, the semantic and the sonic, the logical and the sensuous, are so closely integrated to each other as to be inseparable” (101). Mere semantic equivalence cannot make for the lack of phonetic and rhythmic equivalence in poetic translations. Sen’s comments, again, on a tentative translation of the opening line of *La Divina Commedia* are interesting:

“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita” [can easily be] Englished as “In the middle of the path of our life”. The meaning, the notional content, of the line, i.e. its logical entity, is completely transferred in the English version, not a particle of it being lost in the process. Yet the poetry of the line is as completely lost in the transfer, because the sensuous entity of the line cannot be transferred. (102)

Even so, “Let the dogs bark and cats mew” (Hamlet), translations will have their days: all best poetry the world over will forever be enjoyed through translation. People at large will have the pleasure of reading literature written in languages other than their own only through translation. And, of course, translating poetry has now become a key area in Translation Studies, because the matter of negotiation is all the more complicated here.

During the last fifty years, translation theorists have tried to discuss methodological problems of translating poetry from a non-empirical position. In his *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (1975), André Lefevere catalogues as many as seven types of poetic translation which can be summarized as under:

- (i) *Phonemic translation*, which seeks to preserve the sonic effects of the SLT along with its semantic sides. Lefevere, of course, warns us that too much attention to sound may produce clumsiness or even meaninglessness. An unforgettable example of this kind of clumsiness is William Radice's use of 'ululation' for the Bengali 'উল্লু'! When pointed out that the two are a light year apart, Radice adamantly retained 'ululation' on the ground of its identical sound-value!
- (ii) *Literal translation*, which makes use of word-for-word method of translation so much so that both the sense and the syntax of the original get distorted.
- (iii) *Metrical translation*, which attempts to reproduce the SL metre often, as Lefevere concludes, at the cost of the SL text's wholeness.
- (iv) *Poetry into prose*, which – albeit less than literal or metrical modes of translation – distorts the original. Here we may note in passing that Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which won him the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, was a prose rendering of his original Bengali poems contained in the anthology bearing the same title. W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and others were impressed by the thought-content of the poems and did not care for the poetic value of the original probably because they did not know the Bengali language enough.
- (v) *Rhymed translation*, which may end up as a 'caricature' or 'mimicry' of the original, owing to the translator's double obligation to metre and rhyme.

- (vi) *Blank verse translation*, which apparently imposes restrictions on the translator, but fits well with the SLT that itself is written in the blank verse as in *Meghnadbadh kabya*.
- (vii) *Interpretative translation*, which is actually an amalgamation of what Lefevere terms as ‘versions’ and ‘imitations’ where the substance of the source text is retained but the form undergoes such a change as to make the translation appear a new poem.

Eco, as a translator and a translated author, has some important points to make about such aspects of poetic translations as metre, rhyme, rhythm, and interpretation. He argues that the metric values, rhyme and the rhyme scheme “[...] are perceptible only as phenomena of the substance of the expression [...]” (*Experiences* 89) even if they exploit elements already provided by the lexical system. Like writing a poem, the translation of a poem, too, should allow a kind of shuttling between expression and content. Eco repeatedly reminds us of the role of interpretation in translation. Even while critiquing Roman Jakobson’s essay on the linguistic aspects of translation, he does not forget to point out that Jakobson himself uses the word ‘interpretation’ three times while categorizing translation into three types: intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic. Eco then concludes: “[...] translation is a species of the *genus* interpretation, governed by certain principles proper to translation (*Experiences* 80). The interpretative modes in a translation begin to surface as the translator starts violating both lexical and referential faithfulness in his or her quest for the deep sense underlying the SLT.

Poetry indeed more often than not posits insuperable hurdles and limits for a translator. No translators of Jibanananda Das’s poetry can be able to reproduce the *sadhucalit* mix in pronouns and verbs as in the lines like “হাজার বছর ধরে আমি পথ হাঁটিতেছি” and “আবার তাহারে কেন ডেকে আনো” only because the English grammatical systems have nothing to support

them with in this respect. Even a simple rural incident can defy translation, as may be evident in the following translations of “হয়তো খইয়ের ধান ছড়াইতেছে শিশু এক উঠানের ঘাসে ...” (Gupta 157-58):

- (a) Perhaps a child is strewing puffed rice on the grass of some home’s inner courtyard. (Seely, *The Scent of Sunlight* 95)
- (b) A little child toss rice-grains on the courtyard grass. (Chaudhuri 3)
- (c) Perhaps, a baby is sprinkling paddy of parched rice. (Ahmad 23)

In a section titled “When the text has us see things” of his *Experiences in Translation*, Eco points out that “[...] verbal texts often bring into play processes of hypotyposis; in other words, they lead the language to ‘stage’ something that the reader is virtually led to *see*” (50-51). By definition, hypotyposis is the rhetorical effect by which words succeed in rendering a visual scene. Any scrutiny of the translated versions of the Bengali poet’s line, as collated above, will conclude that they lack the hypotyposis of the original.

Word play or puns, too, may stand beyond the reach of a translator. When Hamlet says that his uncle-father is “A little more than kin, and less than kind”, he is actually making an effective use of the pun on the words ‘kin’ and ‘kind’. Translators shall have to work very hard to find a matching pun in the target language. Similarly, an out and out word play like the following simply resists translation:

হরির উপরে হরি,  
হরি বসে তাই;  
হরিকে দেখিয়া হরি  
হরিতে লুকায়।

Equally untranslatable are much of what is known as ‘concrete poetry’ or ‘figure poems’, although they should be deemed only extreme cases like the nonsense verses of Lewis Carroll or Sukumar Ray. Eco has proposed a solution in this regard:

Instead of speaking of equivalence of meaning [and structure] we can speak of *functional equivalence*: a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original [...]. Obviously this means that translators have to make an interpretative hypothesis about the effect programmed by the original text.” (*Experiences* 44-45)

It may therefore be concluded that the activity known as ‘translation’, in spite of its great importance in the dissemination of world literature in a multilingual world, cannot follow any hard and fast ‘poetics’ (i.e. aesthetic rules like say, Aristotle’s commandments given in *Poetics* and Horace’s in *Ars Poetica*). A translator has to be eclectic, as everything of the SLT cannot be retained in fact in the TLT. To quote Eco again:

In translating we must isolate various substantial levels. An insensitive, inattentive or superficial reader may miss or disregard many of them: one can read a fairy tale to enjoy the story without paying attention to its moral meaning, one can read *Hamlet* purely in order to see if Hamlet will succeed in avenging his father [...]. Translators are in theory bound to identify each of the relevant textual levels, but they may be obliged to choose which ones to preserve, since it is impossible to save all. (*Mouse or Rat* 30)

The basic dilemma that dogs a translator, the basic modes of translation, and the existence of good translation have been lucidly discussed by Laha (2017):

A piece of the lovers’ quarrel between Hamlet and Ophelia probably adumbrates the dilemma that dogs a translator:

Hamlet. Ha, ha! Are you honest?

Ophelia. My lord?

Hamlet. Are you fair?

Ophelia. What means your lordship?

Hamlet. That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty. [Act 3, Scene1]

People who have thought that poetry is untranslatable would juxtapose “*Quam multa silvis autumni frigore lapsa cadunt folia*” (Virgil) with “Thick as autumnal leaves that stow the brooks” (Milton) and argue that “Leaves, it seems, must fall differently in Italian and English” (Tarak Nath Sen).

But it is often forgotten that Keats’s sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” is not only a tribute to Homer but to the art of translation, too. It was, again, not for nothing that Pound translated Chinese poetry. Nor is it true that ‘honesty’ and ‘beauty’ can never exist in harmony. When Tagore is translating Donne’s line “[f] or God’s sake hold your tongue and let me love” into “দোহাই তোদের একটুকু চুপ কর / ভালোবাসিবারে দে মোরে অবসর” the English knowing Bengali readers have an exemplary coexistence of the faithful and the beautiful. I think a whole array of sound, sense, rhyme and rhythm go to create a true image of the SLT.

But it is all easier said than done. In the ultimate analysis there are two modes of translation: the reflective mode and the refractive mode. If Tagore’s own translation of Gitanjali poems is likely to belong to the former, William Radice’s (for example) dose belong to the latter. (*Karna-Kunti Dialogue* 71-72)

### *‘Politics’*

The phrase ‘the politics of translation’ constitutes the title of the ninth chapter of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s book *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, and it has become one

of the fond jargons in critiques of postcolonial translation in particular and Translation Studies in general, since the publication of the book in 1993. Hence, this section will draw heavily on what Spivak means by the phrase as well as looking at the use of the word ‘politics’ by Derrida in his *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) and by Toril Moi in her *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985); Derrida’s 2001 essay entitled “What is a ‘Relevant Translation’” will also be referred to as and when required.

Spivak’s essay has three parts following a brief introduction. The subtitles of the three parts are enough to indicate what she is up to: ‘Translation as Reading’, ‘Translation in General’, and ‘Reading as Translation’. By collating feminist, postcolonialist and poststructuralist approaches, this seminal essay basically hovers around an apparently contradictory set of questions: ‘why is translation necessary?’ and ‘why is translation impossible’? Spivak welds the two with her perceptive point that is the error of reading lying at the core of translation which makes translation both necessary and impossible.

Globalisation is helplessly dependent on language as a communicative thread which cannot be dispensed with. Translation, thus, becomes the grammar of globalization by connecting tongues, minds, cultures, and worlds. Yet, why is translation impossible? It is so because of what she calls ‘translatese’, that is, the quirkiness of translation due to overly literal translation of ideas and syntax. In other words, unthinking translations will always be flawed as they have to rest on flawed ground.

Taking a cue from “[...] the British sociologist Michèle Barrett’s feeling that the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching* 179) if language can be seen as the process of meaning-construction, Spivak admits that making sense of things through language is “one of the seductions of translating” (*Outside in the Teaching* 179). The SLT is the self and the TLT is the ‘other’. The ‘othering’ involves

‘politics’ because “Politics involves the resolution of conflict” (Hoffman 143). The ‘politics’ of translation can be perceived if we ponder “[...] the role played by language for the *agent*, the person who acts [i.e. the translator], even though intention is not fully present to itself” (*Outside in the Teaching* 179).

How does a translator respond to the ‘specificity of the language’ (*Outside in the Teaching* 180) he or she is translating, given that “[...] the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity” (180). The translator may like to remain safe by not taking the risk of doing violence to the translating medium. And ‘safety’ belongs to the domain of ‘politics’. As a practising translator, Spivak was taking those risks while translating some eighteenth-century Bengali poetry:

I must resist both the solemnity of chaste Victorian poetic prose and the forced simplicity of “plain English”, that have imposed themselves as the norm [...] *Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate.* [...] The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other [...] in the closest places of the self. (*Outside in the Teaching* 180) (emphases added)

According to Spivak, rhetoric or figuration disrupts logic and thereby generates the possibility of random contingency beyond the control of the translator. Yet, although there is the risky fraying of the language – textile the translator’s “[...] stake in agency keeps the fraying down to a minimum [...]” (*Outside in the Teaching* 180). Spivak further adds:

The task of the translator is to facilitate the love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. The politics of translation [...] too often suppresses this possibility because the translator

cannot engage with, or cares insufficiently for, the rhetoricity of the original.

(*Outside in the Teaching* 181)

The difference between logic and rhetoric in the act of translation has been pithily pointed out by her:

Logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated connections. Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much. (*Outside in the Teaching* 181)

The weedy relationship between rhetoric and logic is a relationship warranted by the politics of translation. Translation as a negotiation must be founded on an agreeable model for the agent to follow. Which is why Spivak categorically says: “Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation” (*Outside in the Teaching* 181). And she is rather unhappy to see that many a construction of the non-Western scene is afoot, without a proper sense of the rhetoricity of language beyond the matters of synonym, syntax, and local colour. We may, however, stop and think about the efficacy of Spivak’s poststructuralist approach to the postulated submission of the translator (to the SLT he or she is translating) with a view to having a good command of the rhetoricity of language for building a ‘model’. The moot question is: how to ‘surrender’ to a text when all reading is misreading (Derrida’s famous/notorious phrase)?

Anyway, it is interesting to see what Spivak says about the two translations of the title of Mahasweta Devi’s story “স্বন্দ্যদায়িনী”: one by Spivak herself, and the other by another translator. Spivak translates the title as “Breast-Giver”, and Devi has approved of the aptness of the translated title. The alternative translation is “The Wet-Nurse”. And here is Spivak’s comment on the two possible translations of the same Bengali title:

[The phrase “The Wet-Nurse”] neutralizes the author’s irony in constructing an uncanny word; enough like “wet-nurse” to make that sense, and enough unlike to shock. It is as if the translator should decide to translate Dylan Thomas’s famous title and opening line as “Do not go gently into that good night”. The theme of treating the breast as organ of labor-power-as-commodity and the breast as metonymic part-object standing in for other-as-object [...] is lost even before you enter the story. (*Outside in the Teaching* 182-83)

What Spivak says is important if we juxtapose Seely’s and Radice’s translations of the title of Dutt’s epic মেঘনাদবধ কাব্য: Seely titles his book “The Slaying of Meghanada”, and Radice “The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād”. The rhetorical difference between the two translated titles, with special reference to the two verbal nouns – ‘Slaying’ and ‘Killing’ – will be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter.

Spivak’s idea of ‘translation as reading’ hinges on her belief that

[...] the translator must surrender to the text. [...] translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text. (*Outside in the Teaching* 183)

Spivak is, of course, simpler here than elsewhere in the essay. But she gives a sudden twist – as is her wonted – to her argument as she characterizes the nature of surrendering in translation as “more erotic than ethical”. But her contention/intention/implication becomes clear once we understand that eros, in the Freudian sense of the term, pertains to the rhetoric of the body and ‘ethics’ acts as a containment against the invasion of the rhetorical virus. Surrender to sexual desire transgresses the limits of language: it enacts the gravitational pull

‘to love before being loved’ (Derrida’s fine phrase used in *The Politics of Friendship*), so much so that the ‘otherness’ tends to submerge in the ‘self’. A translator should begin by loving the SLT “not wisely but too well” (just as Othello loved Desdemona).

Now the question is: how to make the surrendering (to the text) total and effective so as to draw out of it not only plaisir but jouissance. It appears that Spivak insinuates that the arousal and fulfilment of the desire to surrender oneself to the text largely depends on one’s relationship with the language being translated. Spivak herself has given an apt example of ‘lack of intimacy with the medium’ (*Outside in the Teaching* 183). Here is she speaking out against her rival translator of Mahasweta Devi’s story:

In the text Mahasweta uses proverbs that are startling even in the Bengali. The translator of “The Wet-Nurse” leaves them out. She decides not to try to translate these hard bits of earthy wisdom, contrasting with class-specific access to modernity, also represented in the story. In fact, if the two translations are read side by side, the loss of the rhetorical silences of the original can be felt from one to the other. (*Outside in the Teaching* 183)

For safety’s sake, Spivak’s rival translator ignored certain things and thereby left marks of a lip-deep relationship with the SLT – with the language of the original. Radice taught Bengali at the SOAS, UK, and Seely at the University of Chicago. Their intimacy with the Bengali language will obviously surface in the comparative study of their translations of Dutt’s epic which will form the bulk of the next chapter of the present study. Spivak’s categorical caveat is: “[...] she [a translator] does not have a real advantage as a translator if she is not strictly bilingual, if she merely speaks her native language” (*Outside in the Teaching* 187).

Spivak does not lose sight of the fact the politics of translation is more often than not related to the economics and politics of publication. As she perceptively comments: “Good and bad is a flexible standard, like all standards. [...] these decisions of standards are made anyway” (*Outside in the Teaching* 188). What controls here is the attempt to justify the decisions adequately. “Publishing houses routinely engage in materialist confusion of those standards” (188). Hence, “The translator must be able to fight that metropolitan materialism with a special kind of specialist’s knowledge, not mere philosophical convictions” (188). In the case of third world writing, the translator must be wary about “the fact that there is so much of the old colonial attitude, slightly displaced at work in the translation racket” (*Outside in the Teaching* 189). It may be argued that the politics of publication was responsible for Seely’s addition of the subtitle “A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal” to the main title of his translation of Dutt’s epic. ‘Ramayana’, ‘Colonial Bengal’, etc. still sale well! (Why not “A Postcolonial *Ramayana*”, one might wonder.)

A translator’s desire to remain ‘safe’, a desire which is part and parcel of the politics of translation, may become inordinate if he or she has no fear of being accurately judged by his or her target readership. And this intrepidity or audacity makes the task of a translator more dangerous and more risky. Spivak very aptly remarks:

The status of a language in the world is what one must consider when teasing out the politics of translation. [...] If you want to make the translated text accessible, try doing it for the person who wrote it. [...] If you are making anything else accessible, through a language quickly learned with an idea that you transfer content, then you are betraying the text and showing rather dubious politics. (*Outside in the Teaching* 191)

In the penultimate section of her essay – the section titled “Translation in General” – Spivak dwells “on the politics of translation in a general sense” (*Outside in the Teaching* 194) and refers to a couple of ‘cultural translations’ in English. With the help of the examples she cites, Spivak focuses on the need for the renaissance “of the native imagination as not merely trans-lation but the trans-substantiation of the species” (*Outside in the Teaching* 196). The rather facile accessibility of translation as transfer of substance generates from the politics of translation with the result that the hegemonic language makes translation impossible.

The final section of “The Politics of Translation” reverses her stance taken in the first: in the first she looks into translation as ‘reading’, and in the last into reading as ‘translation’. What she obviously wants to imply that the two matters are the obverse and subverse of the same coin. Translation entails reading into the text to be translated, and that in-depth reading facilitates translation which is always already there in the act of reading. Reading as translation, however, can be counter-productive, as Spivak observes:

[The reader as translator] finds a kind of comfort in Mahasweta Devi’s livid figuration of the woman’s body as body rather than attend to [the] history of the English body “as a dis-figurative device in order to return to [it] [*sic*] its lost literality. Reading as translation has misfired here. (*Outside in the Teaching* 199)

We would here refer in passing to Toril Moi’s *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) and Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) to see how the two writers have used the term ‘politics’ for their respective purposes. We turn to these books because like sexuality and friendship, translation, too, is a kind of representation/re-presentation. Moi points out the limitations in the Anglo-American representation of sexuality in texts dealing with women. There is, therefore, a constant slippage between the self and the other, which the self refuses

to acknowledge. If the translator misrepresents the SLT, the same kind of slippage may take place, making the translation forever elusive. Derrida locates the politics of friendship in the dynamics of the Aristotelian “O my friends, there is no friend” and the Nietzschean “O enemies, there is no enemy”. Derrida postulates that the only way to resolve the conflict between the two propositions is to “love before being loved” and to extend hospitality to the ‘other’. The resolution of the two verdicts, namely, that *there is no thing as translation* and *there is nothing but translation* (i.e. everything is translation) is very much like the Derridian attempt to resolve the two opposite axiomatic claims: that there is no friend and that there is no enemy. This leads us to take a glance at Derrida’s essay “What Is a “Relevant” Translation?” (2001).

The essay in question is actually Lawrence Venuti’s translation of a lecture delivered by Derrida in French in 1998. The essay was subsequently published in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.27, No.2 (Winter, 2001). Derrida begins by saying that he is not eligible enough to talk about translation because he lacks experience in translation and has always shunned

[...] the translator’s *métier*, his beautiful and terrifying responsibility, his insolvent duty and debt, without ceasing to tell himself “never ever again” : “no, precisely, I would *never* dare, I should *never*, could *never*, would *never* manage to pull it off”? [...]. (Derrida and Venuti 174)

At the same time he acknowledges the fascination that translation has for him:

[...] this declaration of insolvency before translation was always, in me, the other face of a jealous and admiring love, a passion for what summons, loves, provokes and defies translation [...] an admiration for those men and women who, to my mind, are the only ones who know how to read and write – translators”. (Derrida and Venuti 174-75)

The concept of a ‘relevant’ translation is not novel: various formulations of it have been discussed by translation theorists over the last three centuries. “For Schleiermacher, relevance was questionable because it meant assimilation or domestication [...]” (Venuti, Introduction 170). This domestication was for him nothing but “[...] an erasure of the foreignness of the foreign text by rewriting it in the terms of the receiving language and culture” (170-71). In the twentieth century, the idea of relevance became predominant in translation theory and practice. Eugene Nida, for example, supported the concept of ‘dynamic equivalence’ “[...] in which the translator [...] tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” (Venuti, Introduction 171).

It can easily be seen that Derrida’s view is based on his critique of the sign. In his opinion, the relevant translation “[...] present itself as the transfer of an intact signified through the inconsequential vehicle of any signifier whatsoever” (Venuti, Introduction 171). On the one hand Derrida, like Schleiermacher, questions relevant translation, and on the other,

Unlike Schleiermacher, Derrida sees this practice as inevitable insofar as every translation participates in an “economy of in-betweenness,” positioned somewhere between “absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency, and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance.” (Venuti, Introduction 171)

Derrida, in fact, is addressing here one of the recurrent themes in the history of translation: the antithesis between ‘word-for-word’ and ‘sense-for-sense’ translations.

Derrida is famous for his propensity for infusing double or even multiple meanings into a word which he often coins to make his point. The most well-known one is of course ‘Différance’ which is an amalgam of ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’ (of meaning). The French

word for 'relevance', as used by Derrida, is 'relevante' into which he infuses three meanings drawn out from the root word 'relever' : 'relever' as a French culinary term meaning supplementation of taste and flavor [the translator retains as well as adds to the taste of the original text]; 'relever', as an architectural term meaning 'elevation' or transcendence [a translation has to transcend itself "by rising and thus lifting itself above itself" (Derrida and Venuti 196)]; and finally, 'relever' as a verb meaning justification or appropriateness which, in Derridian verbal jugglery, is 'more appropriate than appropriate' (196).

In the chapter that follows this, we will try and assess how successfully Seely and Radice have, in their respective translations of Dutt's epic, attempted "[...] at appropriation that aims to transport home [...] in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text [...]" (Derrida and Venuti 179).